

STUDY 6 - LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA (REV 3:1-6)

The situation of the church in Philadelphia is the opposite to the situation of the church in Sardis. They are small and struggling, yet Jesus praises them, calls them to keep going and tells them that they have a bright future ahead of them.

Unlike the other letters we have seen, Jesus' description of himself to this church in verse 7 is not an exact repeat of something in chapter 1. However it does pick up on some of the themes you see in 1:9-20. He is "holy and true", perfect and faithful, so his words can be relied on. He holds "the key of David". The second half of this verse is a quote from Isaiah 22:22, where a man called Eliakim is given the power to rule Jerusalem - this figure is fulfilled in Christ. This is significant for the Philadelphian church as they were living in a place where there are many Jews (verse 9) who were trying to make the church believe they were shut out of God's kingdom because they had shut them out of the synagogue.

In verse 9 we see that this church were weak, yet it is an encouragement to them that Jesus says "I know your deeds". They may have felt like they did little, but they "kept Jesus' word" - believed it and obeyed it faithfully, and did not deny Jesus' name despite the great pressure to do so. All of this is evidence that they are in front of an open door - which probably has a double meaning, referring to the salvation which is theirs in the future, but also the fact that they are to be used by the Lord now, though they may feel as if they are useless.

Verse 9 shows that second interpretation of verse 8 to be accurate. Jesus is going to make their Jewish enemies, who are at present doing Satan's will by opposing the church, recognise that Jesus loves the church. This may be a reference to Christ's return, but it could also be a promise of conversions of Jews now in Philadelphia. For those Jews to "acknowledge I have loved you" would be for them to recognise that they are truly God's people.

In verse 10 Jesus promises to keep them from the "hour of trial". This is not a promise that they will not suffer, rather it is a promise that they will not suffer loss of their faith even though things are going to get worse on the earth. We have already seen in Revelation that there is worse suffering to come for the church, and the rest of Revelation shows that suffering and evil will continue to be a reality in the world and will affect believers and unbelievers. G. Beale in his commentary writes –

"Possibly, the allusion is to the final downfall and judgement of the ungodly world system at Christ's last advent [his return] which is also referred to as occurring in an

'hour'. Or, the period may just as well refer to a trial to come imminently on all in Asia Minor or in the limited known world of that time."

Such suffering is used by God to prove who are truly his. His church will not be defeated.

Jesus promises that he will return soon (verse 11). This gives the church incentive to keep going, holding on to what they have, although at times Jesus may seem very distant. They are encouraged to remember they are in a position of riches and strength – they have a crown which is theirs already.

If they keep going they are promised that they will be in Jesus' presence forever. Like a pillar in the temple, they will reside in God's presence forever. They will also have God's name written on them along with the name of God's city and God's King. They belong to God! This is a great incentive and basis for persevering in the here and now, especially against enemies who are trying to claim they are not God's people.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Why should we trust what Jesus says? What power does he have? (Verse 7, also look up Isaiah 22:22). Why is that an encouragement if you feel like a weak and oppressed minority?

How do you think the church in Philadelphia viewed themselves and their situation? What is Jesus' perspective on them and their future? (Verse 8)

Compare this letter with the letter to the church in Sardis. How do they compare

- In how the churches view themselves (and possibly how others view them) at present
- In how Jesus views them and their future

What can we learn from this?

What does Jesus promise will happen to their Jewish persecutors? What might that refer to? (Verse 9)

Will Jesus leave this church when things get harder (verse 10)?

How does Jesus encourage this church to keep going? (Verse 11) Why is important they don't give in?

What is Jesus saying by what he promises in verse 12? How is that a motivation to keep going when you are faced with those who are saying “you do not belong to God”?