

A Tale of Seven Churches: Philadelphia Revelation 3:7-13

Slide 1

There are a couple of things that set Philadelphia apart from the other cities on the list. First, it was the youngest of the seven cities, having been settled only 150 years before the birth of Christ.

Slide 2

The second thing that made it unique was... it was the only city of the seven to have an NHL team, The Philadelphia Flyers. As well as a professional baseball team, the Phillies, and football team, the Philadelphia Eagles.

In fact, this is a picture of what remains of the stadium they played in. Now, I sense a little skepticism. Don't you believe me? Good. You should always be aware of what your told, regardless if it's the pastor or a politician.

Now for the real story. The city was founded by Attalus II who ruled the city of Pergamum between 159-138 BC.

We're told that Attalus cared so much for his brother Eu-men-es that he was known as Phil-a-del-phos, which literally means "*One who loves his brother.*"

And so, the city was named Philadelphia, or the "*City of Brotherly Love.*"

Slide 3

On the map we see that Philadelphia was located about 50 miles southeast of Sardis. It was built where the borders of Mysia, Lydia, and Pyrgia met. It was originally established to be a center for Greek culture.

The earthquake that destroyed Smyrna in 17AD also wreaked havoc on Philadelphia but with a difference. The aftershocks of the quake continued to rock Philadelphia for years.

Strabo, an ancient geographer, referred to Philadelphia as “*A city full of earthquakes.*” Whenever a tremor was felt, the people would rush out of the city, away from the dangers of falling buildings, and into the open plains. That can get old fast.

When the city was rebuilt after the original quake, the Emperor Tiberius renamed it *Neo Caesarea*, or the New City of Caesar.

Later, when the Emperor Ves-pa-sian was kind to the citizens of the city for some reason, it was renamed Flavia, after Vespasian’s family name Falvius.

At some point, someone must have said “This is silly.” And so, the name was changed back to Philadelphia.

Out of all the cities, Philadelphia receives the greatest praise and no condemnation from the risen Christ.

The church had such an impact in Philadelphia that long after the rest of Asia had fallen to the Muslims, Philadelphia remained a Free Christian City amidst a sea of pagan people.

Slide 4

Philadelphia was the last bastion of Asian Christianity. It is one of only two cities that still remain today. In this picture, we see relatively modern buildings alongside some ruins that date back to when this letter was written.

Slide 5

Again, Jesus begins by telling the church in Revelation 3:8, “*I know your deeds.*”

As I mentioned before, the church will be judged on the spiritual condition of its members, besides the things it did and the things it didn't do.

We need to remember that the church isn't a social club for the Saints. We're not here to provide a refuge from a hostile world. The mission of the church is to change the world.

This is done by speaking out against social injustice which is accomplished by standing up and saying, "*This is the truth,*" and then demonstrating that truth by walking in it.

That may mean taking a public stand against pornography or against abortion or drunk driving. There'll always be issues in this world that are opposed to the Word of God.

Whether it's child labor that John Wesley preached against, slavery that Orange Scott preached against, or the death of tens of thousands of innocent children through abortion today, the church must take a stand.

We need to speak out against all immorality. We need to say, "this is right" and "that is wrong." And those judgements aren't to be based on what the world says is right or wrong, or what everyone is doing.

Our stand is not to reflect social standards, but to be based on the Word of God which is timeless and unchanging. If we let everyone decide for themselves what's right and what's wrong, we'll end up with anarchy!

Christ then goes on to say in Revelation 3:8a, "*See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut.*" What is this door that was opened to the church in Philadelphia?

That question has been asked for 2000 years and there have been all kinds of answers. One of the most logical answers would be that it represents the open door of evangelism.

If that's the case, then a secondary mission of the church is to change people. Paul tells the church 1 Corinthians 16:9, *"Because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me."*

And again in Colossians 4:3, *"And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message"*

Because Philadelphia was located on a major trade route, which included the road of the Imperial Postal Service, a great deal of traffic flowed through this city.

It was to these people that the Philadelphian believers ministered. By touching travelers from distant places, they sent the gospel far and wide while they remained at home.

That's why, prophetically, the Philadelphian church represents "the age of revival" which occurred between 1700 and 1850.

During this time, revival broke out in England through Wesley, Whitfield, and Booth, while North America experienced the fire of the Holy Spirit through people like Asbury, Edwards, and Scott.

World missions, national evangelism, and the Sunday School also had their birth. Evangelical Christianity sprang up during this period, changing the face of the world.

So, if the "door" Jesus talks about is indeed the open door of evangelism, it didn't open accidentally or by itself.

Slide 6

Revelation 3:8b, *“I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.”*

The door of evangelism may have been opened by what the believers in the church said, but it was propped open by the way they lived. Oliver Goldsmith stated, *“You can preach a better sermon with your life than your lips.”*

Although the Gospel has tremendous power in the lives of the unredeemed, that power is unleashed primarily through the illustration of our life.

Yes, I’ve heard the story about the man who found a bible, read it, and became a Christian, never having met another believer, but that’s not the way it normally happens.

Francis Bacon said it best, *“He that gives good advice, builds with one hand; he that gives good counsel and example, builds with both; but he that gives good admonition and bad example, builds with one hand and pulls down with the other.”*

Could it be that we build up the gospel with our lips and tear it down with our lives? The most effective form of evangelism isn’t rattling off the four spiritual laws, then demanding a spiritual response to the proposition we’ve made.

Yet, even if a response is given, too often it’s an attempt to ease the pressure under which we’ve put our prospect.

I wonder, are we really concerned with that person’s salvation or are we just concerned about collecting spiritual scalps?

If we’re going to see people won to Jesus, we’re going to have to win our friends and they won’t be won by words alone.

When our friends and family see the power of Jesus exhibited in our lives, along with the gospel that we share with them out of love and concern for their souls, then we'll see people come to the Lord.

After Andrew met Jesus the first time, the first person he went to was his brother, not a stranger.

And yet, it seems that with the ones we claim to love the most, we're afraid that we might offend them if we talk to them about Jesus, so what do we do? We just stand quietly by and watch them go to hell.

When William Booth signed the guest book for King Edward VII, he summed up his life's work in just a few words. "*Your Majesty*" he wrote "*Some men's ambition is art. Some men's ambition is fame. Some men's ambition is gold. My ambition is the souls of men.*"

Is your ambition the souls of men? Do you weep at the thought of your friends and family being lost for an eternity in a godless hell?

In 1912, 39-year-old Rev. John Harper, a Scottish Baptist pastor, was making a transatlantic trip to preach at the Moody Church in Chicago. As fate would have it, the vessel he chose was the Titanic.

Harper, like many others, ended up in the water, and as people desperately tried to survive in the chilled waters, Harper swam to them and asked if they knew Jesus.

Eventually, Harper approached a passenger clinging to a jagged piece of wood, and pleaded for the man to trust Christ.

Completely exhausted at this point, he succumbed to the conditions and went under the water to his death.

A few years later, at a meeting of survivors of the Titanic, that man who encountered John Harper told the group that he had been saved twice that night.

First, when he accepted Christ as his personal Savior because of Harper's efforts. He said, *"Alone in the night with two miles of water under me I believed. I am John Harpers' last convert."*

We need more men and women who put the salvation of others ahead of everything else in their lives, including life itself.

And yet, if we're going to have that door of evangelism open to us, we need to live a life in which people see Christ.

I love the story of the pious old church member who asked the children in her Sunday School class, *"Why do you think people call me a Christian?"*

There was an embarrassing silence and then a small voice in the back piped up and said, *"Because they don't know you."*

People may doubt what you say but they'll always believe what you do. If you claim to be a new creation, people won't believe you until they see that you are a new creation.

Slide 7

But there's more than simply living the life; there must also be an invitation to experience what you have experienced.

The value of a good example can never be over emphasized, but people need to know why and how we live the way we do.

The power of the influence of the Philadelphian church is revealed in verse 9.

Revelation 3:9, *“I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.”*

Because the men and women of the Philadelphian church not only preached their faith but lived it as well, the nominal Jews in the community came to know Christ.

When the example of our faith shines throughout our communities we'll see those, who say they are Christians, but aren't, come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

How? By my sermons? No. Most people will never hear me preach. They'll only come to know the living Christ through the sermons preached by our lives.

Because, when our lives become an example of what a Christian ought to be, they'll see what they really are and seek the truth.

People will only believe what Christ can do in their lives when they can actually see what Christ has done in our lives.

If you claim that Jesus gives you power, but you remain powerless, what are people going to believe, your words or your life?

If you talk about the joy that Christ gives, but you walk around looking like your puppy just died, what are people going to believe, your words or your life?

It's no accident that the Philadelphian church, which Christ praises the most, had the greatest concern for reaching people with the Good News.

Slide 8

Conclusion

Throughout the New Testament, Jesus spoke with praise of those things which were productive while scorning those that were unproductive.

Listen to His words in John 15:1-2, *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."*

I heard someone say that evangelism was like the weather -- everyone talks about it, but nobody does anything about it. But we must.

In seventy years, there's a good chance that everyone who's here in this sanctuary today will be dead. That's a sobering thought!

Jesus has entrusted us with the future of the church, and that future will only be realized if we pass it on.

The closing remarks to the Christians in Philadelphia echo the other six letters. Revelation 3:11, *"I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown."*

They're told to hold fast, persevere, and overcome. Because it's not just how you start the race that counts, but how you finish.

So where are you at today? Where are we at as a church?