



World Ministries International

5PL1/03

I AM GRIEVED

~ *Philadelphia* ~

Part 6 of a 7 part series



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Revelation 3.7-13 states:

Verse 7, “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens:”

Verse 8, “I know your works. Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.”

Verse 9, “I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but are lying – I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you.”

Verse 10, “Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.”

Verse 11, “I am coming soon; hold fast to what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.”

Verse 12, “If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God; you will never go out of it. I will write

on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem that comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.”

Verse 13, “Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”

Along with Smyrna, Philadelphia is the only church addressed by Christ, which receives only commendation (praise) and no condemnation.

Philadelphia was founded during the reign of King Attalus II (159-138 B.C.), who was given the nickname “Philadelphus,” meaning brotherly love, for his loyalty to his brother, Eumenes II, King of Pergamus (197-159 B.C.).

There is an important historical characteristic of Philadelphia, which will figure into our discussion on Christ’s message to this church. In A.D. 17, a tremendous earthquake destroyed the city, and was subsequently followed by several years of intermittent tremors, which left many of the homes unfit and dangerous to live in. Many people chose to live on the outskirts of town in makeshift huts, hoping that a prolonged time of calm would ensue, enabling them to rebuild. Those who daringly chose to stay within the city often met the fate

of death from the collapsing structures during the many aftershocks. Even today, this area (W. Turkey) is subject to frequent earthquakes.

Jesus introduces himself to the church as the “holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens” (3.7). This statement must be understood from its Old Testament context. In Isaiah 22.20-22, Eliakim, the functional Prime Minister within Hezekiah’s kingdom, was given a position of great authority. It is said that on his shoulders was placed “the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.” That is to say, Eliakim stood as the access point between man and the king. If any man wanted to approach the king, they must go through the one who held the key. Furthermore, to hold the “Key to the house of David” speaks prophetically of the entrance to the messianic Kingdom. Thus, Christ is here saying to the church, “I am the access point to the Father and to the Kingdom of God. I hold the key to everlasting life; I am the Way and the Truth and the Life (Jn. 14.6); I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved” (Jn. 10.9). Within this reality is the promise to the Philadelphians that “Set before [them] is an open door, which no one is able to shut” (3.8). This

door of admission granted them not only spiritual intimacy with Christ, but also an open avenue of authoritative commissioning to share the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ.

The saints of Philadelphia are worthy of admiration for they have adhered to the words of Christ and have not denied his name before man. Verse 9 alludes to the influence of those who call themselves “Jews” by name, but are in reality “the synagogue of Satan.” Throughout the churches, the heresy and persecution by the Judaizers was fierce (see Rev. 2.9-10, Galatians 1-4, Acts 15.1f). Ignatius, writing approximately 15-20 years after the writing of Revelation, says this: “Now, if anyone preaches Judaism to you, pay no attention to him. For it is better to hear about Christianity from one of the circumcision than Judaism from a Gentile. If both, moreover, fail to talk about Jesus Christ, they are to me tombstones and graves of the dead...” (Ignatius: Phil. 6.1).

Persecution was so severe in Philadelphia that martyrdom was commonplace: “Some of the members of the church of this city were martyred A.D. 155 along with Polycarp” (Anchor Bible Dictionary, vol.5, p.305.) In much of the world today, persecution and martyrdom are a rarity. Why is this? Is it because people are less oppressive to the body of Christ? Have people over the centuries become accustomed to the gospel message and tolerate its existence? This could only be possible if our battle was against mankind. However, the Word tells us that we fight “not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph.6.12). Evil spirits do not change! If this is true, then it necessitates that what has changed, has been the living out of the Gospel.

In America, where there is very little persecution for following Christ, we like to point to the supposed “religious freedoms” as the rationale behind our safety. Could it be that the very freedoms we have are a result of perpetual compromise in the living and propagation of the Word of God? Do we suppose that these freedoms would exist alongside Christianity, which boldly stood on the Word of God in matters of abortion, homosexuality, humanism, and the like? In America today and throughout much of the world, the masses have adopted the cross, but have failed to pick it up. Christ personally promised that true disciples would experience suffering from the persecution of those controlled by the anti-Christ spirit: “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...” (2 Tim.3.12).

What is it that distinguishes between the saints of Philadelphia (and many throughout the world today), who stand faithfully on the Word and Name of Christ amidst persecution and the majority, who compromise at the slightest hint of worldly resistance? It is the principle of the Crucified Life. Paul states, “I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2.19-20). This was a reality for Paul - is it a reality for you? Who is on the throne of your life... yourself, or the Lord Jesus Christ? Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, “Christ bids a man to come and to die.” Die to what? Die to self; die to self-preservation, self-protection, and self-justification. Die to your own desires, opinions and agendas. A dead man has none of these; rather, his only life is the resurrected life of Christ.

Many today aspire to obtain the power of God, the anointing of God, and the glory of God; but how many

long to partake in the sufferings of God? Brethren, we must realize that the above can only be obtained through suffering. This is why Jesus mandates that we see suffering and persecution, not as something inherently bad, but rather a means to achieving the likeness of Christ: “Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope” (Romans 5.3-4). Dr. Sam Drye, in his book entitled, “Crucified Life,” says this about suffering: “What is the purpose of suffering? It won’t kill you, but it’s to bring you to a point where you are not what you were. The end result of the crucified life is to be transformed to the point where you reflect the very image of the Lord Jesus Christ, and you come into spiritual maturity” (p41).

The Crucified Life always exemplifies itself in outward manifestation. That is, when one is truly dead unto self, it is characterized by observable traits. In the New Testament, this is understood by the metaphor, The Fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal.5.22). However, in the book of Numbers, there is a foreshadowing event, which prophetically personifies the Crucified-Resurrected Life.

In the midst of the desert, Moses was leading the children of Israel. However, an insurrection was forming by those who challenged the position and authority of Moses and Aaron: “Korah, Dathan and Abiram... became insolent and rose up against Moses. With them were 250 Israelite men...” (Num.16.1-2). God would eventually deal with these men (and their families) by death, and would next establish and sanction community leadership.

God told Moses to have each of the leaders of the 12 tribes of Israel bring to Him a staff engraved with the tribal

name (the staff of Levi was to be engraved with the name of Aaron). These 12 staffs were to be placed before the Lord in the Tent of Testimony, and from there the Lord would choose His priestly leader. Each of these staffs were nothing more than dead pieces of wood. Each was identical: Wood, which once had life when connected to the tree, but now were dismembered, stripped of their bark, and allowed to dry. The next morning, 11 of the 12 staffs were still in the same state – dead; but the staff of Aaron had transformed. “Moses entered the Tent of Testimony and saw that Aaron’s staff, which represented the house of Levi, had not only sprouted but had budded, blossomed and produced almonds” (17.8).

Can you see the principal of the crucified and resurrected life? Can you see what can happen to you, if you allow yourself to be in the presence of the Lord? As the priesthood of believers, Christ has chosen us, but we must submit ourselves to His presence, pick up our cross and follow, so that out of our death, He can breathe forth spiritual life. Dr. Drye says this about the application of the cross: “God will not give up on us. God will apply that cross as long as we give consent. We can be like clay in the potter’s hand. He’ll keep on working with us until sin has lost its mastery over our lives. Is that such an ideal that we cannot attain it in this life? To millions of theological mindsets, this is the message they would preach: ‘It’s just too much. It’s unattainable.’ Remember that those thoughts come from the self. If Jesus said it was possible, then it’s possible to happen in our lives”(p116).

The sacrificial system in the Old Testament has now taken on a new and more profound identity in the New Testament. Today there is the sacrifice

of obedience and praise: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship” (Rom 12.1). We cannot crucify ourselves, for this is the work of the Holy Spirit. But we can offer ourselves to Him; we can lay our lives upon the altar, and ask Him to come and consume our lives, so that we might have life. “For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with...Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him” (Rom.6.6, 8).

The Crucified Life burned within the hearts of the Philadelphians! They reckoned themselves dead to self and through the life-giving Spirit stood at the face of suffering and death boldly and unwavering. Because of their faithfulness, Christ promised them “protection (not exemption, as many translations state) from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth” (3.10). The Lord then warns them to “hold fast to what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.” The Greek word interpreted ‘hold fast’ means to ‘grasp,’ to ‘attain,’ to ‘retain.’ We are to diligently grasp hold of the Crucified Life, for many men and demons would love to steal it from us.

What is the reward for those who faithfully run the race to the end and cling to the Crucified Life? “If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God” (3.12). This brings us back to the historical context in which this letter was written. In the midst of a land that was subject to earthquakes, shocks, and tremors, Christ would establish the believer as a pillar (an element of functional stability) in a structure (the temple of God), which cannot be shaken or destroyed.

Many Christians are being shaken and uprooted by the principalities of this world that are feeding upon the uncrucified self-life, which is so prevalent in the church today. However, in the midst of sifting, the Lord is raising up a spiritual army of believers, who will reject the ornamental cross of Christianity without obedience; Christianity without discipleship; Christianity without suffering. Rather, they will cling to the Old Rugged Cross; the bloodstained cross; the cross that speaks death to those who follow. Jessie Penn-Lewis, in her book, “Dying to Live” eludes to this army: “How many of us will be found faithful? How many of us will be true to God? How many of us will stand the test? The world needs martyrs and there are many secret martyrs among God’s children...God is maturing in a furnace many souls who will shine as gold in the day of His appearing. Let us choose this path of giving ourselves over to the hand of God, to be handed over to the fellowship of His Son for the manifestation of His life, and the outflow of His life to others.” Is this the desire of your heart?

World Ministries International exists for the sole purpose of calling individuals and nations back to covenant relationship. We, like the Philadelphians, are determined, by the grace of God, to uphold His Word and His name as we proclaim the Kingdom of God to the nations. If you would like to join and support this end-time army, please contact us today. Every two weeks you will receive an article such as this one. I want to thank my son-in-law, Pastor Ty Gulstrom for writing this article as I was in Jamaica, and I want to thank each one of you for your prayers and support.

May God richly bless you all.
Rev. Jonathan Hansen

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