

HOLD ON!
Revelation 3:7-13

(Read Revelation 3:7-13)

Intro: Back when I turned sixty years old Toby gave me some words of assurance. He told me, “Sixty is just a number. It’s a really BIG number, but it is just a number.” Thanks for the encouragement Toby.

That was seven years ago.

I saw a list somewhere this week of people who are much older than me and, seemingly, going practically as strong as ever. They are aging actors and recording artists. Remember Petula Clark, she’s 90, and so is Willy Nelson. Dick Van Dyke isn’t known for his recordings, but he’s 97 and still going strong and Clint Eastwood is presently directing another movie AND HE’S 93 YEARS OLD!!!!

Another 89 year old is someone I actually thought of as I read those words from our text, *Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.* Revelation 3:11b. The aging crooner I was thinking of as I read that scripture is Frankie Valli, who sang,

Let's hang on, to what we've got,

Don't let go girl, we've got a lot.

Frankie was hoping his girl wouldn’t cut him loose and he’s reminding her of how much they’ve invested in their relationship. In our text Jesus is saying he **IS** the very hope of salvation in the midst of a culture that is full of temptations – so the Christ Followers in Philadelphia need to hold fast and never let go.

This is the sixth of the seven letters to churches here in Revelation. It is written to the church in Philadelphia. As you probably know, Philadelphia comes from the Greek words that mean “brotherly love”. That might be a familiar name to you since William Penn named the town he founded in Pennsylvania the same thing. Penn had high hopes for his city. As a man of God, and a Quaker, he wanted it to be a place where all peoples would be welcomed, and so immigrants, especially those who were fleeing from persecution in Europe, like the Mennonites, Brethren, and other Anabaptist groups, poured in. For a while Philly lived up to its name – but over the years as its sports teams struggled, not even Santa was safe in the City of Brotherly Love. When, back in 1968, fans threw snowballs at another fan who was wearing a Santa costume it has taken almost 60 years to live down their awful reputation.

The City of Philadelphia in Revelation had a different reputation. It was the newest of all the cities we’ve studied and the most unstable. By unstable I mean it was very prone to earthquakes and had been destroyed and rebuilt numerous times in its short history. You might wonder why they would keep rebuilding it if it was on such tenuous ground. Well, probably for two reasons: One was that it was strategic. William Barclay tells us that Philadelphia was a prosperous city that “*commanded one of the greatest highways in the world, the highway which led from Europe to the East. Philadelphia was the gateway from one continent to another.*” And then he goes on to point out what several historians and commentators also do: that “*Philadelphia had been built with the deliberate intention that it might become a missionary city. Beyond Philadelphia lay the wilds of Phrygia and the barbarous tribes; and it was intended that the function of Philadelphia should be to spread the Greek language, the Greek way of life, the Greek civilization, throughout the regions beyond.*” By the way, its founder wasn’t someone who had high hopes for the citizens who would inhabit it, instead he probably named in honor of his brother, Attalus II Philadelphus, a king of Pergamum.

Here in this missionary city – on mission for a pagan civilization – is a faithful church of people who are staying faithful to the word of Jesus Christ. Last week we studied the letter to the church in Sardis, which is about 30 miles to the northwest of Philadelphia, and you might recall that Jesus had no praise whatsoever for the Christ Followers in that city. It’s refreshing then, to see that the people of God in Philadelphia are lavished with praise. There are no ifs, ands, or buts, instead, Jesus tells them *I know your works. Behold, 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.* Revelation 3:8. And that’s not even the end of it. From the praise, Jesus moves into the promises that will come from their faithfulness. In his joy Jesus shares his plans for the ministry he sees for his people in Philadelphia. Let’s look at it and learn.

First, Jesus knew the Greeks had intended for Philadelphia to be a frontier mission outpost for their lost culture, but he intended to use his Church there his own . . .

Mission outpost for the Gospel

- *Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut.* Revelation 3:8. What he opens no one can shut and what he closes, no one can open (v. 7). The door is open! Don't miss your chance!
- It's a message for us ABC! We have a privilege in this culture to share Jesus that people in closed countries do not have. And yet those churches are the ones that are growing as the American church falters and stagnates. We have an open door. Let's take it. It's our commission – Jesus said to go and make disciples – the opportunity is now.
- Paul was sharing some travel plans with the church in Corinth. He told them he planned to travel through Macedonia and then on to Ephesus. Listen, *for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.* 1 Corinthians 16:7. He saw an open door and he took it – even if there were threats. Sometimes people don't want to hear the Good News but that must not stop us.
- The struggle the Believers in Philadelphia had was with the pot-stirring, trouble making Jews that Jesus calls the synagogue of Satan. It wasn't the Roman officials or the Greeks who pushed back, it was the people who should have known better. The promise is clear though – they will soon be very aware of the truth.
- In the meantime Jesus tells them, the door is open, and . . .

You can count on me

- You have a little strength – and with my great power added to it, you cannot lose. The Gospel cannot be stopped. When Jesus says in verse 8 *you have but little power* he isn't implying they are weak, but that their realization of their weakness combined with his power gives them real strength. Think about that . . .
- They are invincible because of him. David Guzik says this *“They were weak enough to be strong in the Lord. We can be “too strong” or “too big” or too sure of ourselves for God to really use us. The church in Philadelphia had the poverty of spirit to know they really needed God’s strength.”* Vance Havner says this, *“It is not a matter of great strength, not great ability but great dependability. Samson had great ability but poor dependability. A little strength faithfully used means more than much strength flashily and fitfully used.”* If you are weak enough to rely on Jesus to do what he promises, he will do great things through you.
- So . . .

Hold on – I'm coming soon!

- Stay faithful, Church! Jesus commended them for not denying his name. (v. 8) Help was on the way. In the meantime – faithfully carry on the work and don't let anyone seize your crown. Jesus is using a lot of imagery as he assures the good people of Philadelphia. He says, *The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God.* Revelation 3:12a.
- The picture is clear – be faithful – I'm on my way. In the earthquakes that often hit the city, the only thing that was left standing were the pillars of the temples. The names written on those pillars cannot be erased. Specifically it will be three names. Listen, *I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.* Revelation 3:12b.
- Be ready! Jesus's coming soon is not that he will come shortly – John recorded Jesus's words in about 95 AD and he has yet to return; his warning is to be ready. When Jesus returns it will be sudden and unexpected. But for the ones who have his names written all over them it will be expected. Be ready, and by bringing others through that open door of opportunity, they will be expecting him too.

Conclusion: Philadelphia was just a little church on the edge of civilization – but Jesus had the most glowing words for them. But he didn't allow them to bask in the glow of his praise – he told them to remain faithful and seize the opportunities at hand.

ABC is just a little church on the edge of civilization looking into a culture that would rather we didn't remind them of their need. But just look at the promises Jesus makes to the faithful in Philadelphia – and know they are the same promises he gives to us here at ABC – the door is open. We don't need a bigger building or a bigger budget, we just need a bigger vision of the souls who need Jesus. Hold on to Jesus and step through that open door of opportunity. Amen.