

# (The Lord and His Church) 9. the Faithful Church

by Zac Poonen

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*Zac Poonen's sermon emphasizes the faithfulness of the church in Philadelphia and the promises of God to those who overcome in trials.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 10:28, Luke 21:18, John 17:23, Romans 1:1, Romans 16:20, 1 Timothy 3:16, 2 Timothy 2:8, James 1:4, 1 Peter 2:22, Revelation 3:7

**Topics:** "Church Obedience", "Spiritual Perseverance"

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## Description

Zac Poonen preaches on the message to the church in Philadelphia, emphasizing the significance of Jesus as the holy and true One with the key of David, who opens doors no one can shut. He highlights the importance of holiness and authenticity in believers, pointing to Jesus as the ultimate example of overcoming sin and Satan. Poonen stresses that as followers of Christ, we must trust in God to open the right doors for us and close those that lead us astray, illustrating this with the story of Jonah. He commends the church in Philadelphia for their obedience and perseverance, assuring them of God's protection during trials and encouraging them to hold fast to their faith until His return.

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## Transcript

"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this: 'I know your deeds. Behold I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name. Behold I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews, and are not, but lie - behold, I will make them to come and bow down at your feet, and to know that I have loved you. Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth. I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it any more; and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'" (Revelation 3:7-13).

The Key of David

The Lord calls Himself here the One who is holy and true.

"He committed no sin, nor was any deceit (hypocrisy) found in His mouth" (1 Peter 2:22).

He looks for holiness and for reality in His messengers too.

He also says that He has the key of David. The gospel of the new covenant concerns the Son of God who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh (Romans 1:1-3).

One of the last exhortations that Paul gave Timothy was to remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David had risen from the dead (2 Timothy 2:8). The implication there is that even though He came with David's flesh, yet He never sinned. Therefore He was considered worthy by God to be raised from the dead. Christ manifest in the flesh and declared righteous by the Spirit is the secret of godliness (1 Timothy 3:16).

The key speaks of ability to open a door. It is because Jesus came in David's flesh (which is the same as our flesh) and overcame sin and Satan, that He has been able to open a way for us to walk in. Jesus is the Forerunner and Example for all who want to overcome.

### The Key to Every Door

The Lord also describes Himself as the One who can now open or shut any door. If we are overcomers, we need never stand before a closed door at any time, when it is the will of God that we should go through.

But the Lord also shuts certain doors before us, so that we don't go into paths that He has not ordained for us - paths that He knows will not be profitable for us. It is really an exciting life to be an overcomer. The Lord Himself decides which doors we should go through, and which doors we should stop knocking at.

In the book of Jonah, we see how the Lord shut one door (of a ship, by getting Jonah thrown overboard) and opened another (of a fish's mouth, by getting it to swallow Jonah). When the fish came to the coast of Israel, the Lord opened the fish's mouth once again to place His servant ashore. Thus God brought Jonah back to "Square One". Then He told him once again to go to Nineveh, where He wanted him to preach. Then Jonah went.

If God wants us in any place for any purpose, He has ways and means of closing the wrong doors before us (getting us thrown out of somewhere perhaps!) and of opening the right doors in front of us. He even has means of transporting us back to "Square One" in our lives, so that we don't miss His best! What He did for Jonah, He will do for us too. He will do even more.

The key to every door is in His hand. If you are a wholehearted disciple of the Lord with no ambition in life but to glorify God, you can be certain of one thing - that nothing can stand in your way. Like automatic doors that open as soon as a person comes near them, every closed door that hinders you from moving forward in the fulfilment of God's will, will open up before you - as soon as you come near it. He opens each door at the right time - not too soon and not too late. He will also close those doors that would make you miss His perfect will for your life.

### An Exemplary Messenger and Church

Here in Philadelphia, we see the second of the two messengers and churches that receive no rebuke at all from the Lord. The first we saw was the one at Smyrna.

These two examples show us that it is possible to be such a messenger of the Lord and to be such a church as to receive no rebuke at all from the Lord when He examines us. This should be a challenge to all of us.

The messenger and the saints here were a weak people (verse 8). They had very little human influence and power. But they had obeyed God's Word and confessed the Name of the Lord.

These are two primary requirements for the days in which we live - and that is why we find them being repeated again and again in the book of Revelation: OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S WORD AND HOLDING FORTH THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS.

Because of their faithfulness, the Lord says that He has set before them an open door to witness for Him. No one will be able to shut that door (verse 8). Their witness will naturally be opposed by Satan. But the gates of Hell will not be able to prevail against this church - for this is a triumphant church that Satan himself is afraid of.

#### Opposition from Religious People

The church here was being opposed by a synagogue of Satan - similar to the one that was in Smyrna (verse 9). Notice that the synagogue of Satan opposed only two of the seven churches in Asia - the very two that the Lord commends unreservedly. Those churches that are most wholehearted for God are the ones that Satan opposes the most. And Satan's opposition comes mainly through religious people.

Jesus was opposed in the days of His flesh, not by the Romans or the Greeks, but by religious Jews who studied their Bibles daily! It will be the same for the body of Christ. Our main opposition will come from those who claim to be Christians, but who don't preach freedom from sin's power.

The Lord says that He will make the synagogue of Satan recognise in an obvious way that He is with the church at Philadelphia. The agents of Satan will be compelled to bow down before the church (verse 9). God has destined that Satan should be crushed under the feet of the church (Romans 16:20). We must never forget this that God is always on our side against Satan. So we need never fear Satan or his agents at any time.

Jesus prayed that the world would know that His disciples were loved by the Father (John 17:23). This prayer was to be answered in Philadelphia. The synagogue of the Jews would be made aware of the fact that the Lord loves the church and that He would stand by them (verse 9). God has wonderful ways of confounding our enemies and of making them aware that we are the objects of His love and care!

The church in Philadelphia had kept the word of Jesus' perseverance (verse 10). They had obeyed the word of the Lord and endured to the end in obedience. It is only by enduring faithfully in times of temptation, that we become perfect, lacking in nothing (James 1:4).

#### The Lord's Promises

The Lord's promise to this church was,

"I will keep you from the hour of testing that is about to come upon the whole world" (verse 10).

Here the Lord warns them in advance of a time of trial that was going to come upon the whole world at that time (at the end of the first century or in the early second century). The church in Philadelphia was promised Divine protection during that time of testing.

How did the Lord "keep them from that hour of testing"? It was certainly not by rapturing them out of the world. No. They were KEPT SAFE IN THE MIDST OF THE TRIAL. They experienced the Lord's protecting hand in the midst of their tribulations.

This is a word of encouragement for us too - for the Lord will similarly keep us also safe from evil in the midst of the great tribulation during the time of the Antichrist. He will keep us exactly as He kept the church in Philadelphia in the second century - on earth, safe from evil, even though we may have to suffer for His Name's sake.

Jesus has said,

"You will be hated by all on account of my Name ....but do not fear those who kill the body ....for the very hairs of your head are all numbered ....Not a hair of your head will perish" (Matthew 10:28, 30; Luke 21:18).

Even during the tribulation, not a hair on our head can be touched by anyone without the Lord's permission. So we can be at rest.

The Lord then tells the church at Philadelphia that those who are going to be tested during "the hour of testing", are "the earth-dwellers" - those who have made this earth their home, whose minds are set on earthly things, and who pursue after wealth and seek the honour of men (verse 10).

No overcomer is such an earth-dweller, for His mind is set on the things that are above.

The Lord goes on to tell the church here to hold fast to what they have until He comes back to earth, so that they may not lose their crown (verse 10). It is possible therefore for someone else to get the crown that God meant for you.

God has planned a task and a crown for you. But if you are unfaithful in fulfilling that task, you won't get that crown. God will raise up someone else to fulfil that task and he will get the crown that was meant for you. This is a real possibility. So we must be watchful.

God had planned a specific task for Judas Iscariot, just as He had planned tasks for the other apostles of Christ. But Judas was unfaithful. So he lost his crown. Someone else (perhaps Paul) fulfilled the task that Judas was to have fulfilled. That person will now get Judas' crown in addition to his own.

We have to hold fast what God has given us. We cannot afford to take things easy at any time.

The overcomer will be made a permanent pillar in the church (verse 12). What that means is that he will be a support to others in the church, bearing their burdens. He will be a spiritual "father" to others. In every church there is a great need for such pillars.

The overcomer will have the name of God, the name of the New Jerusalem and the Lord's new name written on his forehead. In other words, he will be publicly identified as a wholehearted disciple of Jesus, wherever He goes. This will lead to his being despised on earth now, but honoured by the Lord when He returns.

The New Jerusalem is a symbolic name for the bride of Christ (Revelation 21:9, 10). The name of that city will be written on the forehead of the overcomers. And so we see once again that only overcomers will constitute the bride of Christ.

Those who have ears to hear must take these words of encouragement very seriously (verse 13).

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