



Looking Inwards (15 mins) Caring For Each Other

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however: 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) Concern For Others

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

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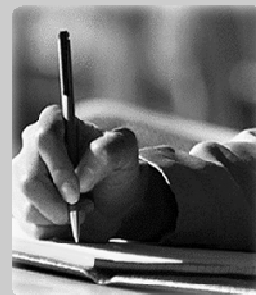


You've Got Mail: The Seven Churches In Asia HG85: Philadelphia: Weak, Yet Faithful

Revelation 3:7-13

Home Group Study Notes

24th November 2013 - Revd Tom Loh



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.



Welcome (10 mins) Ice Breaker

How many different sets of keys do you have? What's the biggest or most important door that you have the keys to open?



Looking Upwards (10 mins) Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



Looking Upwards (40 mins)

Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1: Verse 7 – Why is Jesus described in this particular way in this particular letter?

2: Verse 8 – What is the Philadelphian church commended for? How can we receive a similar commendation?

3: Verse 9 – How are these so-called-Jews troubling the church? In what way do we experience a similar thing today as Christians?

They had no worldly things to boast about or take strength from, other than that they knew Jesus. He was their strength, for in worldly terms they had none of their own. What a blessed position to be in, and an important reminder not to be so quick in despising worldly weakness. Of all the churches mentioned in revelation, this weak church in Philadelphia remained faithful to Jesus long after the others ceased to exist. Long after all the surrounding country had succumbed to Muslim control under Turkey, Philadelphia held out as a Christian populace till 1392.

The truth is we cannot overcome. Only Jesus can. Elsewhere the Apostle John writes *“everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.”* (1 John 5:4-5).

Promise

To the Christian that overcomes, their patient endurance will have been well worth it. God will give the triumphant Christian a sure and certain place in his New Creation. More than being welcomed into the Father's house, the Christian becomes a pillar in it - part of its very foundation. Without the pillars the house would collapse. In other words, without us, heaven just wouldn't be heaven. That is how precious we are to the Lord God. Once we've arrived in that future kingdom, never again will anything be able to take us away from it. It is an eternal dwelling. Jesus himself will write the name of God on us. He wants to make a permanent claim to us.

In this life we all bear the name of someone, usually our earthly father's name. But in heaven, we will bear the eternal name of our heavenly Father – who was, and is, and is to come. In fact, Jesus will give us three names: the name of God, the name of the New Jerusalem and the new name of Jesus. Jesus wants us to be sure of one thing. We belong to him and share in his eternal future. Through this letter, Christ wants to strengthen us in our present weakness as we bear the shame of being a Christian in this temporary and passing age, by holding out before us the glories that are to come. Jesus is the gatekeeper. No other voice matters other than his. If he is for us, then does it matter who is against us?

Our feelings of worthiness and assurance of God's love can be easily taken from us. We may think to ourselves: if only I had more faith. If only I was more religious. If only I was more knowledgeable, self-confident, more together, or more holy, then I would know God loves me and accepts me.

Whilst we live in this age of present darkness the world will always find ways to shut the door on us, and tell us we're wrong. Our faith will be undermined in a hundred different ways. We may even at times wish to abandon the truth we hold in Jesus. But Jesus writes this letter to the Philadelphians to remind them of what is really real. When the end comes, and all the voices are silenced, then the entire world will be made to acknowledge the truth: that Christ loves the church (verse 9) and the door of heaven will never be closed to them.

We, like the Philadelphians, are living in the last hour (1 John 2:18), or last days (2 Tim 3:1, Matthew 24) between the resurrection of Jesus and his second coming. Jesus tells us that, verse 10, the 'hour of trial' is falling on 'those who live on the earth' - a term used throughout Revelation to refer to the unbelieving world. The world experiences all kinds of trials in the form of disasters, war, disease, economic hardship and death. These are all signs that the end is coming – birth pains before the new life of Jesus arrives (Matt 24:8). The promise of verse 10 is not that the Church will be spared suffering, but that they would be kept safe, carried on through the open door into heaven to await the final day of resurrection. *The great danger of suffering is not that we suffer or die, but that in our trials we might turn away from the Lord Jesus (c.f. John 17:15).*

Challenge

Hold on to what you have. Given these wonderful promises and assurances of Christ, the Philadelphians are urged to keep going in the faith. Jesus promises that he will return soon and deliver them from the suffering and opposition of this life. If the Philadelphians continue in their patient endurance then their crown will not be taken from them. This crown refers to the glory that will be theirs when Christ returns – his acknowledgement and vindication of them, and his warm welcome into the eternal glory of heaven.

How can we keep going like the Philadelphian church? The culture we live in is subtle in its erosive power on our faith. Increasingly our faith is considered unreasonable, fanatical and dangerous to the public good. On top of this the pressures and trials of life might become too much for us to cope with – the darkness closes in, and hope is squeezed out. Perhaps as we grow old, perhaps as sin repeatedly has the last word in our lives. Fears, doubts, anxiety, the loss of loved ones might eventually erode our faith. Amidst all this, we feel weak. The world around us mocks our hopes as nothing more than the wishful thinking of fools, and we begin to listen. How do we carry on and not lose our crown? How do we overcome all this?

Throughout the letters of Revelation we are repeatedly told to overcome. But given what we're up against, we can feel too weak. Yet, it is our very weakness that is our greatest strength. Like the Philadelphians, our weakness makes us cling to Jesus all the more.

4: Verse 10 – Why is our patient endurance so important?

5: Verse 11-13 – Why does every letter end with a reference to “him who overcomes”? What is the ‘new Jerusalem’ and where will we read of it again?

6: If you feel like sharing, in what areas of life do you feel of ‘little strength’, how does this letter of Jesus encourage you in your weakness?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



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Home Group Sermon Notes

24th November 2013 - Revd Tom Loh

Introduction

Philadelphia means 'brotherly love' and the ancient city was situated about twenty-five miles southeast of Sardis, along the Hermus River valley. The imperial post road of the first century A.D., which came from Rome, passed through this valley and Philadelphia on the way to the east. It was an important and prosperous city. Not much is known about the Philadelphian church in the Bible. It is one of the seven churches in Asia Minor – modern day Turkey, and it seems that it is a weak church (of little power, v8). This could mean that it was numerically few in membership compared to other religious or social groups, or like the Corinthian church its members were not from notable stock in society (1 Cor 1:26). This might explain why the church in Philadelphia was troubled by the Jewish element in the city, who were perhaps more confident in their better social standing, superior education and religion.

Of the seven churches the Philadelphian church, along with Smyrna, are the only ones that do not receive any chastisement from Jesus. Perhaps it was their weakness, or low position that produced in them a humility that the other churches lacked and, as always, Jesus proves a good friend to the lowly. Those of little power that the world rights off, Jesus considers richly blessed (Matthew 5:3-10). Therefore, Jesus wants to encourage this church so that they do not lose heart: "*A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out*" (Isaiah 42:3).

Greeting

In this letter Jesus introduces himself as "*him who is holy and true*". What a comforting introduction he makes to this weak church. In describing himself thus, Jesus is affirming his trustworthiness. When we're weak it is easy to listen to what the world has to say. Our faith can seem so small and ridiculous. It is then that we need to be reminded that Jesus is with us, and that we can trust him. He always tells us the truth. Furthermore we can believe what he says because his life backs up what he says and he always makes good on his promises. He speaks the truth *and* he is holy.

Jesus also introduces himself as the one who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. Again, Jesus is seeking to encourage and bolster the Philadelphian church. What is this key of David referring to? Jesus is quoting from the prophet Isaiah (chapter 22:20-22).

In the days of Isaiah Shebna was the gatekeeper to the city of David, Jerusalem. The gatekeeper of Jerusalem was second in command to the King and had the power to grant or deny access to the city of God and to the King. Yet he chose to trust in the strength of humans rather than in the Lord to protect them from their Assyrian enemies by building a reservoir and aqueduct. Therefore, the Lord God stripped Shebna of his position, and the door was slammed shut on him. Eliakim, who trusted in the Lord, replaced him.

Jesus is the true fulfilment of this prophetic story in the history of Israel. Christ is the gatekeeper (and also the gate itself John 10:7-9). No one can gain entry into the presence of God accept through him (John 14:6). Through his death and resurrection, Jesus opened a doorway to the city of God that he alone controls. No longer is death a closed door, but an open one that leads to eternal and glorious dwellings. Those who trust in him will find the door open, but those who deny him and look to worldly strength will find the door closed.

Address

Jesus knows the good deeds of the Philadelphian church, that they had not denied Jesus, but maintained their faith and witness to him despite opposition, verse 8. It must have been hugely relieving to hear Jesus say these words. It appears that a Jewish element in the city had been trying to close the door on these Christians by denying them access to God. Jews, who claimed that they were the rightful heirs of the kingdom of God, often fiercely opposed the early Christian movement of the first century. Theirs, and not the Christians, were the Law of Moses, the Priestly system, the ancestry of Abraham and the inheritance of eternal life. The Christians had no business claiming the favour of God, unless they converted to Judaism and followed their practices.

For the second time in his letters to the seven churches, Jesus asserts that these Jews are not really Jews at all, but liars belonging to the synagogue of Satan, verse 9. This is very strong language, but the reality is that many Jews rejected the Lord Jesus whilst still claiming to be children of Abraham. In John 8, Jesus assures these Jews that if they were Abraham's descendants then they would accept him as Abraham did. But because they do not they are nothing more than Jewish in name and religion. They still lack the inner regenerate heart that is born of the Spirit.

The Apostle Paul (a Jew himself) says the same thing: "*A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, but the Spirit, not by the written code*" (Romans 2:28-29). Thus, according to the New Testament to be Jewish is to be someone who is born again by faith in the Messiah, Jesus.

The Philadelphians must have felt under enormous pressure to adopt the practices of the Jews to legitimise themselves. Would God reject them if they didn't? We can feel the same sort of pressure today. There are so many voices in modern day life that make the Christian voice seem so small and out-dated. Often times we can be made to feel not good enough even by our own churches and religious leaders.