



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Revelation 3:7-13 Revelation

“The Faithful Few”

Revelation

TRANSCRIPT

We are back in the book of Revelation and we’re continuing where we left off, chapter 3 and we’re going to begin with verse 7 through verse 13, the Lord’s letter to the church of Philadelphia. This is a very interesting passage, particularly because of verse 10, of which I’m sure most of you are aware regarding this text. Many discuss the rapture, and so we will consider that issue this morning to some extent – maybe not as much as you’d like. And if you would like to know more about it or go into it in more depth than I’m going to do this morning, I recommend Dr. Johnson’s series. He preached, I think, two lessons on this, and one was given specifically to the subject of the rapture. I hope I deal with it fairly. I’ve tried to. But if you’re interested in something more than what you’ll hear this morning, then get those tapes by him.

Revelation 3:7.

“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—I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and *make them* 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 on the earth. I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will 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 anymore; and 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 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.” ’ ’ May the Lord bless this reading of His Word. Let’s bow together in prayer.

Father, we come before You and we pause at this moment to give You thanks for Your faithfulness to us. You’re always faithful. We don’t know what the future holds. We study a book that tells us about the future, that sets forth Your grand plan for history, and so we know what ultimately is in store for us. There is a glorious kingdom coming and a new heaven and a new earth. That’s our destiny. And we have that great hope. And while we do not know what is coming tomorrow, or next month, or in the immediate future, we do know that You’re faithful and that You will bless us, regardless of our circumstances. And that’s a comfort, Father.

And we’re reminded in this book of Revelation that Jesus Christ walks among the golden lamp stands, that He walks among His churches, that He’s present with us now. And He’s with us when we leave this place. That He will never leave us nor forsake us. We have that great promise. And we’re told that He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He’s always faithful and He’s almighty, and He’s able to do what He promises to do, and He will do it.

So we have this confidence, Father, and we give You the praise and the thanks for it, that regardless of what tomorrow brings, it will all be good because You cause everything to work together for good for those who love You and are called according to Your purpose. We give You the praise.

And so we look forward to what’s coming and pray that our time of study in this text this morning will give us encouragement to do what our Lord told the Philadelphians to do, and that is to hold fast. May we hold fast to our confession, and may we be men and women who are bright lights of testimony in the midst of a dark world. May we be men and women who stand firm and hold fast to the testimony of Jesus Christ. May our time together be to that end in our lives. May it encourage that in each one of us.

Bless us spiritually, Father, and we pray also for our material needs, which are great. We are dependent upon You for everything we have. Certainly eternal life is a gift. We could not earn it. We cannot keep it. We are kept in the life that You have purchased for us at the cross and given to us through Your work of the Spirit. But it’s true with the material things, as well. We did not decide to be born. That was Your will. And you give us all of the material things that we have. We thank You for every breath of life that You give us.

And we remember those, Father, who within Your sovereign will are undergoing great difficulty: those who are sick, and those who are grieving, and those who are weighed down by the various cares of life. Those who are going through difficulty in work or in the home. You know their needs. You know them better than we know our own needs. And so we pray for each one of those, Father, that You’d give healing mercy, that You’d give encouragement, that You would lift up Your people. Help all of us to focus upon the blessings that You’ve given us and know that You will be faithful.

We pray for our nation. We pray that You’d bless it, bless our leaders with wisdom. We pray for peace. We pray that You would bless our servicemen abroad and that they would be used of You for a good end, and bless particularly the men and women who are abroad who are Your people, believers in Jesus Christ, that they would have a good testimony in a dark place. We pray these things in Christ’s name, Amen.

It’s been said and it’s probably true, that Americans love superlatives, words like “greatest, biggest,” and “best.” Maybe that’s just human nature. But people do tend to think that the biggest is the best. The Lord, however, looks at things quite differently. In Zechariah 4:10, he warns against despising “the day of small things.” In Luke 12:32, He encourages His disciples with the words, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom.”

In Revelation 3, He gives similar encouragement to the church of Philadelphia. He describes it as having “little power.” They were a small congregation. But they had kept His Word in hard times and He promised to keep them in times of trial. And He promised to make this little flock a pillar in God’s temple. It’s not size that pleases God, though sometimes size is God’s blessing. The Lord builds the church,

and sometimes He builds it big and He builds it strong. Still, what pleases Him most is not bigness or size, but faithfulness. And He blesses it.

We see that here in Revelation 3:7-13. This is the sixth letter to the churches of Asia. The postman has almost completed his circle. He delivered the first letter to the church of Ephesus on the west coast of Asia Minor, went due north to deliver the second letter to Smyrna, and north again to Pergamum. Then he went southeast to deliver his fourth letter to Thyatira, continued southeast of there to Sardis, and now he travels southeast of there to arrive at the city of Philadelphia.

It was a relatively new city. The newest of the cities where there seven churches were located. It was established to be a missionary center, to spread Greek language and culture to the backward highlands to the east in Asia. It was well located for doing that. It was located at the juncture of trade routes leading east to Mysia, Lydia, and Phrygia. And that location helped to earn it the name “gateway to the east” and made it a place of commerce and a place of some importance and prosperity.

The city was built in an interesting area geographically. It was built on a volcanic plain, and that was to its advantage because the earth was very fertile and the people there were able to grow grapes and produce a significant wine industry. But it was also a region that was subject to earthquakes. One occurred in AD 17 that leveled the city. The emperor Tiberias rebuilt it and he renamed it Neocaesarea. Later, the emperor Vespasian renamed it Flavia after the family name of that family of Caesar’s. But the old name, Philadelphia, persisted and continued to be used through all of these attempts to change it.

It was a pagan city, as all seven cities were. The cult of Dionysus was the chief religion. Dionysus or Bacchus was the god of the vine and fertility, and so the rights of Bacchus, the parties that were thrown in celebration of that god often turned riotous and turned into orgies. So that was the environment which this church, this small church lived and actually thrived. Thrived in a pagan city, a very pagan environment, and yet it wasn’t the pagans that caused this church difficulty. It was the Jewish population. That’s very similar to the situation in Smyrna. Both churches were opposed by what the Lord calls a “synagogue of Satan.”

In fact, the letters to these two churches are very similar. These are the only churches for which the Lord has no criticism. Both churches are given unqualified praise by Christ. He introduces Himself to the church as the “one who is holy and true.” And literally, that is “the holy and the true.” Now, I mention that because “the Holy One” is a title in the Old Testament that’s used of God. It’s a description of Him. I’ll give you one example of that. It’s in Isaiah 40:25, where we read, “ ‘To whom then will you liken Me That I would be *his* equal?’ – ” in other words, what god can you compare me to? There’s nothing like me. He says that and then he ends by saying, “says the Holy One.” It’s a title for God, and here the Lord takes that title to Himself. It’s not simply “holy and true,” but it’s “the holy.”

So He is ascribing to Himself deity, ascribing Himself as the true Messiah who is God, as well. So the one who speaks to the Philadelphians is the divine Messiah, and therefore His Word to them is true. He keeps His promises. He not only speaks truth, but He is one who is able to act on it and complete the promises that He makes. How important that is for us to know and believe. We have a sovereign God who makes wonderful promises, glorious promises. We have some here. And He’s able to keep them.

Important to know that and it was important for these saints in Philadelphia to know that. They had experienced hardship and they were facing even greater peril. They needed to believe that when they went through the storm, the Lord was with them and would protect them. He is, as I said, sovereign. He says He is the one “who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens.” The “key of David” is an expression that’s taken from Isaiah 22:22, where the Lord promises to depose a man, an official named Shebna, depose him from being the chief steward of the king and give that position to another, to a man named Eliakim.

He says, “I will set the key of the house of David on his shoulder.” And what he means by that is he will give to this man, to Eliakim, the power or the control over the royal household and authority to grant or refuse access to the king. He’s the one who will open the door to people. He’s the one that will shut the door. He will let people come in or he’ll keep them from having an audience with the king.

And what we have in that picture of Eliakim is a picture or a type of Christ, who has the key of David. In the greatest sense, in the greatest meaning of that word, He

has more than the key in the temporal sense of that kingdom that is now passed, but to the future kingdom of David, to the kingdom of God. He has full authority over David’s kingdom. That’s what the Lord is claiming. As the Messiah, as the Son of God, Christ determines who enters the kingdom and who does not enter the kingdom.

We’re responsible individuals. Every man, woman and child is responsible to act upon the truth of God and to act upon the gospel and to believe it. We must do that. We’re responsible. But ultimately, it’s not man that determines these things. It’s the Lord God. He is sovereign over salvation. That’s what He’s saying here. Now, all of this I say again is important to understand. Christ ascribes deity to Himself. He is very God of very God. He is God the Son and He determines the destinies of men. He isn’t saying here that He has the key and He can open and He can close, that as God He has the ability to do that. He certainly has that. He’s saying far more than that, though. He’s saying that He does it. This is His activity. But He does this work of salvation, of opening and closing, He does that through His church. He uses people to carry out His purposes.

And in verse 8, the Lord praises the saints of Philadelphia for their service in spite of their small size. “I know your deeds.” He says. “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.” The church’s “little power” is a way of describing its small size. They had deeds, He says, which indicates that they had some power. But it was power at work in a little number of people, a small group of people.

They were small, but they were faithful. So the Lord was giving them more opportunities. He was opening doors for them. That’s what happens when people are faithful. You may be small, you may not have great significance where you are, you may not have great funds with which to finance a work of the Lord. But what you have, you use, and as you use it faithfully, God increases, increases the opportunities. If we can’t do much with the little that we have, why would He entrust much to us? This small group of people was faithful with what they had. And so the Lord is opening doors for them.

But this image of an open door in the New Testament is frequently used of opportunity to preach the gospel. A door is open, that’s opportunity to go forward

and give the gospel. A door is closed, well, the Lord is leading elsewhere. Now here we read of an open door. So in the city known as the gateway to the east, that was founded for the purpose of being a missionary center to spread Greek language and culture, the church there was a missionary church and it was established by the Lord to spread His language, to spread the gospel, to spread His culture, to spread eternal life to those in other parts, to the east, to the north, to the south, everywhere. It had an open door. It had a gateway and it was assured of success because the Lord has the key. He opens the doors for us and no one can shut them.

An example of the Lord’s power to do that is found in Isaiah 45:1-2. It’s not a gospel text. It’s a prophecy about a king. It’s a prophecy about Cyrus given 100 years or so before Cyrus was born. And through Isaiah, he prophesies this great king that will come on the scene, but the point that is made is his success – and Cyrus had great success. He conquered the Babylonian empire. He spread his empire throughout Asia. It’s a great, powerful empire. It was all because of God’s will, and that’s the point that he makes. Isaiah prophesies that God would take him by the hand. So you see this great king being, as it were, led by the hand, by the Lord God, and he would “subdue nations.” And Isaiah says that the Lord will do this. He will “open doors before him so that gates will not be shut,” and he would “shatter the doors of bronze.”

That’s what the Lord God can do. That’s what He did for Cyrus. That’s what He does for kings. He gives them conquests and He also gives conversions to churches. Those are the conquests that He gives us. That’s where our work is done. It’s not in changing society, will if we’re obedient men and women. Be salt and light in the earth and have an influence upon our culture. I believe that. But that’s not our great mission in this world. It’s to preach the gospel. It’s to live for Christ. It’s to be lights in the midst of darkness, and He’s opening a door, He says, for this church to do that in Asia. And He does that for us. We don’t open doors. Christ does that. And we must be wise about that. We must wait on Him to do it. He has the keys. He has the power.

John Stott gave wise counsel, I think, when he wrote, “there is no sense in trying to barge our way unceremoniously through doors which are still closed. Damage is continually being done to the cause of Christ by brash or tactless

testimony.” I don't know about you, but I've seen some of that. I've met people who are brash. You appreciate their zeal, but you really wonder if it's not fleshly, and generally it is when you have this kind of activity. And it doesn't produce a good result. That's what Mr. Stott is going to say. He says, “It is, of course, right to seek to win for Christ our friends, relatives, neighbors, and colleagues, but we are sometimes in a greater hurry than God. Instead,” he writes, “we need to be patient, pray hard, and love much, and to wait expectantly for the God-given opportunity to witness.” That's true.

Well, you do that by walking with the Lord, by being students of His Word, by living an obedient life, walking by the Spirit, being sensitive to the Spirit's leading, and watching His providential hand in Your life and waiting upon Him. Ultimately, it's the Lord's work. He works through us, through His people. And what we notice here is He works effectively through those with little power, through the small. A church can be small, but very effective. Its people simply need to be obedient to the Lord. And knowing who He is, that He's absolutely sovereign, encourages that obedience and it gives steadfastness when there is opposition.

And there was opposition to the church in Philadelphia. It came from the synagogue. In verse 9, it is called the “synagogue of Satan.” It was opposed to Christ. It opposed His work. It rejected Him as the true Messiah and opposed His people, tried to frustrate the gospel that was being spread in the town of Philadelphia. But the Lord promises that the church will be vindicated. He says, “I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and *make them* know that I have loved you.” It's a way of saying that someday they will recognize and confess the truth of the gospel. Someday in the future, the church will be vindicated.

Now there may have been some vindication in that day that we're not aware of. But certainly, that will be true at the end of the age, when, as Paul writes in Philippians 2:10, “every knee will bow” to Christ. But what they will recognize in that day is not only the truth of the confession that these people made as they gave the gospel and the truth that Christ is Messiah, but they will know – and this is what He underscores here – that He, the true Messiah, “had loved” these Christians of Philadelphia, that the Messiah had an eternal electing love for them.

There are two kinds of love that God has. He has a love for all His creation. He has that love as the Creator. We’re going through Ezekiel on Wednesday nights and in at least two places, in chapter 18 and then in chapter 33, the Lord makes the statement that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, no pleasure in the death of anyone. He has no pleasure in that because as the Creator, He has a love for His creation. But there is another kind of love that He has. It’s a specific kind of love. It is a saving love for His elect. It is a love of distinguishing grace. And that’s obviously what He means here. He doesn’t mean they’re going to learn that the Messiah or that God has a general love for everyone. That’s a given. But then He has special saving electing love for these people.

Now, I find great encouragement in what He’s saying here because what this says to us is that there is vindication for His people. I don't know what all they went through with the synagogue and how they were opposed, but no doubt they were mocked, they were ridiculed, they were belittled, and that happens to us. That may happen to you at work. That may happen to you within the home. You give the gospel. You’re shouted down. You’re laughed at, whatever. And that can be very discouraging, but the encouraging thing to know and remember is the day of vindication is coming. The day is coming when you will be seen to be right and your statements of the gospel were true. We’ll be vindicated. That is encouragement for us to do what the Lord will encourage them to do in a moment, and that’s hold fast. Encouragement to us to do that, as well.

Now, in verse 10, the Lord promises the church a particular blessing. Because they had kept His word, He would keep them “from the hour of testing, which is about to come upon the whole earth.” What is the “hour of testing” and what does the Lord mean by the promise to keep them from it? The testing is described as worldwide. At least it seems to have that sense. It is about to come upon the whole world, the whole inhabited earth. So many commentators interpret this as something beyond the local situation and interpret this to be the future tribulation that precedes the Lord’s return. What we will begin to study in the weeks to come, particularly when we come to chapter 6 on through chapter 19. And the keeping is a keeping from that hour through the rapture of the church. Literally, the promise can be translated, “I also will keep you out of the hour of testing.”

So the Lord’s promise is that He will keep the church outside of that hour of trial, and He will do that by taking the church out of the world through the rapture, an event that Paul clearly describes in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, and in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52. “The Lord will descend from heaven with a shout, the dead in Christ will rise first.” And then, Paul says, “we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”

Many interpret Revelation 3:10 as referring to that event. Many also, however, disagree. Post-tribulationists don’t agree that verse 10 teaches the rapture of the church. They believe the rapture will happen at the end of, or post, after, the tribulation. And they have some exegetically sound reasons for believing that. For example, when Paul says the rapture happens at the Lord’s coming, the word that he uses for the Lord’s coming is *parousia*, and it’s the same word that the Lord uses in Matthew 24 when He describes His second coming. It would seem, then, that the rapture takes place at that time, at the second coming, not seven years earlier. So they teach that. They teach that the church will pass through the tribulation, but that the Lord will protect it from His wrath, the wrath that He will pour out on the unbelieving world, just as, for example, the Lord protected the Israelites in Egypt when He poured out His plagues upon the land of Egypt. He will protect His church through that period of time, as well. There will be suffering for the people of God during that time, but God will protect them from the plagues that He pours out.

And they find some support for interpreting Revelation 3:10 in that way from another text that’s very similar to this, and that’s John 17:15. That’s Christ’s high priestly prayer, where He prays for the protection of His church down through the ages. Now, both are statements by Christ. Both are statements recorded by the apostle John. And these two verses, John 17 and Revelation 3, are the only places in the New Testament which have the phrase “to be kept from.” In John 17:15, Christ says to the Father, “I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil *one*.” Or literally, “from the evil,” perhaps meaning the apostasy that’s to come. The grammar is the same as we have here in Revelation 3:10. It’s literally “keep them out of the evil,” or “the evil one.”

Obviously, the promise to keep from or keep out of is not a promise to take the church or take the apostles out of the world, because the Lord explicitly says, “I do

not ask You to take them out of the world.” The promise is to keep them from Satan’s influence and preserve the church through all of the trials and testings that the evil one may bring. That, they argue, is the idea of Revelation 3:10. It is simply a promise that the Lord will preserve the church during the tribulation, and that is a sound explanation. But I think there is an answer to it in John 12:27, where Jesus, knowing that His time of testing was coming, knowing that the time of the crucifixion is near, asks, “What shall I say, ‘Father, save Me from this hour’?” Now, He refuses to ask that. But the phrase “from this hour” is the same phrase that’s used in Revelation 3:10, which means to take out of. “What shall I say, ‘Father, save Me out of this hour’?” And, obviously, what the meaning there is, deliver me from this hour, take me physically away from this world so that I not suffer these things.

So there is some precedent for understanding “taking out” in the sense of being physically removed. And that may be very well the Lord’s promise here to the church of Philadelphia. And I say it may be, because having said all of this, it’s not altogether clear that this text is about the future tribulation. This is a promise to the church of Philadelphia, and we would expect that church to have received this promise that the Lord had given to them. So some interpret this to refer to a coming period of persecution such as occurred under the emperor Trajan not many years after this, which was an empire-wide persecution.

And that may be the meaning of this statement “testing upon the whole world.” Well, that seems like it would be global, and yet that same expression is used in Luke 2:1 of Augustus Caesar taking a census of all the inhabited earth, the same word that is used. And so obviously, Caesar didn’t take a census of those in China, and those in Germany, and those in the Americas. It was the empire-wide census, and that may be the meaning here. Some take it in that way.

Even so, having said that, the rapture of the church is taught in the Bible and we do want to know where it relates to this book of Revelation. And I think a good case can be made for understanding it to be a pre-tribulation rapture. First of all, there is the matter of immanency, which seems to favor, and I think does favor a pre-tribulation rapture. That the Lord’s return is imminent, that the Lord’s return could happen at any moment. That’s the hope of Titus 2:13, “looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.” We’re to

be looking for His appearing. A post-tribulation rapture doesn’t allow for that. If that’s the case, then we’re looking for the tribulation, after which the Lord will come. But we’re told to be looking for His coming.

A post-tribulation understanding of the rapture also has a problem of explaining how the millennial kingdom will be populated. The church with Israel will rule over the inhabitants of the world. Where will those inhabitants come from? If all who are saved during the tribulation – and multitudes will be saved. It’s going to be a time of great evangelism. But if all of those who are saved during the tribulation are raptured at the Lord’s return at the end of the tribulation and the wicked are destroyed, who is left to enter the kingdom and be governed by the church? No one, it seems. But if the rapture happens at the beginning of the seven years, then the multitudes who are saved during that period enter the kingdom under the rule of Christ and His church.

I think it’s also worth noting that while there are numerous references to the church in chapters 1 through 3, from chapter 4 on, there’s no mention of the church until we come to the very end, 22:16, where the Lord says that this book is for the churches. Now, there is an interesting verse in light of that in 13:9. At the end of all these letters, you have this formula where the Lord says, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Then we turn over to 13:9, and there is a statement, “If anyone has an ear, let him hear.” But there’s no mention of the churches, which suggests that the church has been taken out of the world before the judgments are poured out.

And I think these are valid arguments for a pre-tribulation rapture. But let me say this. This is not a clear-cut issue. The rapture of the church is clearly taught in the New Testament, but the time of it, the chronology of it is not. Nowhere do we read that it will happen before the tribulation or after the tribulation or in the middle of the tribulation. Views on that are arrived at solely by inference, by conjecture, by implication. Now that’s valid to reach a conclusion in that way, but at the same time, I think it cautions us to be careful. This is not a cardinal doctrine of the faith, and in my opinion – and this is my opinion – in some circles far too much importance has been attached to it. But if we are to pre-tribulation in our understanding of the rapture – and Believer’s Chapel has generally held that view – I think we should ask

ourselves what would it do to our faith if we, it turns out, have misinterpreted things? What if the church will go through the tribulation? Would that shake your faith?

It shouldn’t. God’s plan is perfect. There will be saints in the tribulation, multitudes of them. They will be persecuted by Satan and the antichrist, just as the church is today. But they will be exempt from God’s wrath. He will protect them from that. It will be a time of great evangelism, of heroic service for Christ. It will be a period when the suffering saints will be covered with glory. I don’t think that they will regret having been born in that period of time and having passed through that time of great service and opportunity to suffer for Christ.

One reason the book of Revelation was written was to encourage the church in times of trial and persecution. We’re not exempt from that. We shouldn’t think and we shouldn’t hold to the pre-tribulation rapture because we think that, “Well, it’s more favorable for us. We’re going to be exempt from hard times and tribulation.” No. Paul tells us in Acts 14:22, and remember he said this after he had been stoned and left for dead. He said, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” There is nothing in my opinion that’s inconsistent with God’s grace and the church going through the tribulation.

And I don’t say these things in order to disabuse you of a pre-tribulation view of the rapture or to discourage that belief. I think that’s a view to hold. But I say this only to say that we should be ready to suffer for Christ and understand that the principles of this book apply to us now, just as they will to that great generation of future saints. We learn from all of this and it applies to our present situation. If God can protect and vindicate His saints in the great tribulation, then He can certainly protect us and bless us in all other tribulations. We can be assured of that. And I think the book of Revelation gives great encouragement in that way.

Now, in verse 11, the Lord gives the church the hope of His soon return. He says, “I am coming quickly.” That’s the keynote of the entire book, according to George Ladd. That’s not only an encouragement to us, but that is an incentive to be faithful in times of difficulty. And so the Lord continues, “hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.” Well, now what does that mean, “no one will take your crown”? Well, it’s not a warning against losing one’s salvation. That’s impossible, and we could spend a lot of time on that. Just read John chapter 10 and

how Christ explains, in my opinion, undeniable words that His sheep are absolutely secure. They’re in His hand, and He’s in the Father’s hand. No one can pluck you out of the Father’s hand.

No. That’s not what He’s speaking of here. This is a warning about losing rewards. The Lord is saying, “Don’t let the enemy rob you of that, of your crown, of your reward.” Don’t miss the opportunity to witness and to serve. Hold fast and get the crown. The crown was a wreath that was awarded to the winner of an athletic contest, and **Philippi** was a city that hosted games. And so the athletic contest, the Greek games, were very prominent in their thinking, very popular. And the readers, when they heard this or read this, would have thought of those athletic contests. They would have thought of the perseverance of a runner or a wrestler in a contest, striving to win. The struggle is great and hard at times, but the reward will be greater than anything we suffer.

To those who hold on, to those who persevere to the end, to the faithful, the Lord gives a great promise in verse 12. “He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and 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 out of heaven from My God, and My new name.” A promise of being made a pillar. It is a promise of security and stability. You remember we’ve pointed this out as we’ve studied these seven churches that the historical background serves as a kind of foil or an illustrative point for the warnings and the exhortations that the Lord gives to these various churches in these various cities.

And you see that in this promise to be a pillar in the temple of God because that would have resonated with these Christians in **Philippi**. They lived in a very tenuous place. They lived in a place that was subject to earthquakes, and they’d experienced one in the earlier part of the first century in AD 17 that had destroyed the city. And so, the people lived in great uncertainty. That’s how they lived their lives in the city of Philadelphia. When tremors would occur, the people would flee from the city. They’d go outside into the countryside, where they would live in temporary shelters. So to a people who are familiar with uncertainty and instability in life, the Lord gives the promise of absolute security, of being a pillar in God’s temple, from which they will never go out anymore.

We’re always being tempted to live for this world, to settle into it and find our security in this place. And we all do that. We look for it in the stock market. We look for it our job. We look for it in a relationship. The list goes on. We try to find our security in this world, but there’s no real security here. “The world is passing away.” That’s what John tells us in 1 John 2:17. And what he means by that is the world is presently passing away. We’re at the end of another year. Where did it go?

I remember years ago – and I give myself this sermon all the time – years ago I was coming out of a chapel at seminary. I was just finished first year Greek course one summer and I was talking with my Greek professor and I said, “Boy, it just went by like that.” And he said, “And it goes by faster every year. Every year goes by faster.” And I remembered him saying that, and I’ve remembered that ever since. Every year goes by faster and faster.

Time is just fleeing. It’s passing away. That’s the way the world is. We’re going to find no security in this world, even if the world stays around for awhile, we don’t. No, our security is in something else, and it is those who invest in the world to come who have real security. They will be permanently present with God like immovable pillars that not even Samson can shake. And so, as someone has said, “If we become a pilgrim in this life, we will be a pillar in the next.” If we live as not having any stability in this life, moving from place to place, like the patriarchs did, we’ll be permanent in the next. That’s the way we should live. That’s what Christ promises.

And then He says that He will write on us “the name of His God, and the name of the city of God, the new Jerusalem.” Well, putting a name on something showed possession. Twice, the Roman emperors tried to name the city of **Philippi**. They gave it their own names. The names didn’t stick. What the Lord is saying is, “I’m greater than any of the emperors and I’ll give you a name that does stay, a name that’s permanent.” And again, that indicates the security that we have because the name indicates possession. We’re His possession. His name will never be taken from us. We’ll always be His. Nothing can change that. We’ll never be lost. We have great security.

All of this is encouragement to serve and not be frustrated by the world around us. Take the opportunities that the Lord gives us to serve Him. Look for those doors

that He opens, and He will open doors. We are to be a missionary church like the church in Philadelphia. It was small. It had little power. You wouldn’t have been impressed by this church if you visited Philadelphia. You wouldn’t have been enamored of its size and its wealth. There’s nothing impressive about it in terms of outward things. No, but the Lord loved it. He loved it greatly. It was faithful and used by Him, and that’s the encouragement that the Lord gives us here at Believer’s Chapel.

He will use us greatly. He’ll use us far beyond our size if we keep His Word, if we’re faithful to His Word. He’ll use you personally, though you may be, in your mind, insignificant and have little to offer, if you’re faithful with what you have, God will use you greatly. So we’re to keep His Word.

And the time for doing that is short. The Lord said, “I am coming quickly.” We should be looking for that blessed hope. It may be very soon. And that, I think, is great incentive to serve, to be found faithful when He comes. But it’s also a warning to those who don’t believe the Lord is coming and the time of testing is also coming upon the earth, and it will be a time when God pours out His wrath on the unbelieving. The way to escape that is through faith in Christ, the Savior of the world. He came and He died in the place of sinners, and He came to save them from the judgment to come, and all who believe in Him are saved. So look to Him and believe.

It’s all a person must do, simply receive the free gift of salvation from the Lord who gives it. May God help you to do that and may He enable all of us to see the open doors before us and to be active in His service, knowing that His coming may be very soon. Let’s pray.

Father, we do thank You for the great promises of this text. Your Son says, “I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have.” Father, may we do that. May we not let anyone take our crown from us. May we be energetic and active in our service for You. We have every reason to be. You will take care of us. Your Son is with us. We are absolutely secure in Him. So help us to live a life that’s pleasing to You and active in Your service. We look forward to the day of Your Son’s return. Help us to be even more eager for it. We pray these things in Christ’s name, Amen.