

**Articles and Sermons :: A GREAT EXAMPLE by Zac Poonen**

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In Rev. 3:7-13, The Lord describes Himself to the church in Philadelphia 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.

Here in Philadelphia, we see the second of the two messengers, and churches that receive no rebuke at all from the Lord. The first 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 (Rev. 3:8). 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 (Rev. 3:8). 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.

The church here was being opposed by a synagogue of Satan - similar to the one that was in Smyrna (Rev. 3:9). Notice that the synagogue of Satan opposed only two of the seven churches in Asia - the very two that the Lord commends unsparingly. 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 (Rev. 3:9). God has destined that Satan should be crushed under the feet of the church (Rom. 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 (Rev. 3:9). 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 (Rev. 3:10). 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 promise to this church was, "I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world" (Rev. 3:10). 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" (Matt.10:28,30; Lk.21:17-18). 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.