

Text: Rev. 3:7-13

Title: "The Son of Man's Local Church at Philadelphia" -  
Part 1

Time: 5/21/2017

Place: NBBC

Intro: Philadelphia, PA was named by William Penn. *Philadelphia* is a Greek word that means *brotherly love*. Penn named the city that because he was a Quaker, and as a Quaker he had experienced religious persecution in England. He wanted Philadelphia to be a place of religious tolerance and freedom.

The city of Philadelphia, of course, has not always lived up to that ideal of brotherly love. I have heard it labeled by Philadelphians as "the city of brotherly shove." In 1845 the Pennsylvania General Assembly passed a law requiring the city of Philadelphia to employ one police officer for every 150 taxable residents. They did so in response to what are sometimes called the Philadelphia Bible riots of 1844.

The potato famine of the 1840s brought many Irish-Catholics to Philadelphia. At one point, one of their bishops solicited the public school system to allow Catholic children to be exempt from the reading of Protestant Scriptures each morning in the schools. He asked that they be allowed to read the Douay version. Some nationalist Protestant groups caught wind that the Catholics were trying to remove the Bible from the schools, and mob riots eventually broke out.

Catholic churches, homes, and even the Seminary of the Sisters of Charity were attacked and burned. Both sides, Catholic and Protestant, were responsible for the violence that killed around 15 people and injured scores of others.

So in the end, Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love established to provide religious freedom and tolerance, had its very own war of religion. Historically, there always has been some question whether Philadelphia, PA deserves its name, "City of Brotherly Love."

Well, when it comes to the Son of Man's local church at Philadelphia, there is no such question. This church lived up to the name, "Church of Brotherly Love." It is one of two churches that are not given correction by the Son of Man in these letters of Revelation 2-3. For that reason, our study of the letter will have only three of the normal four points this morning: (1) the Son of Man's glory in the church; (2) the Son of Man's encouragement of the church; and (3) the Son of Man's reward for the church. This morning we will only focus on the first of these.

#### I. The Son of Man's glory in the church (v. 7-8).

Appl: Each of these letters to these local churches begins with a reference to the glory of the Son of Man, Jesus Christ. That should be where the worship of our local church begins this morning. It should be our first and primary goal in assembly today to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus describes His glory for this church in three ways:

##### 1. He is the Holy One.

The KJV phrase *he that is holy* is literally *He that is the Holy One*. There is a definite article there - *the Holy One*. The idea is that when it comes to this kind of holiness, there is only one who is the Holy One. It is a name we find in the Old Testament for God:

Hab. 3:3, "God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise."

Isa. 40:25-26, "To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth."

Jesus tells this local church of His that He is the Holy One. As we worship Jesus this morning, we worship the Holy One. This means that He can only be worshipped in the beauty of holiness (Ps. 29:2, "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness"; Ps. 96:9, "O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth." 1 Chron. 16:29, "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness").

How can a local church comprised of us who are sinful by nature worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness this morning? We can do so only confessing our sinfulness and pleading the righteousness of Christ imputed to us. Have you come today to worship the Holy One in the beauty of holiness? This is the glory of the Son of Man in this local church.

2. He is the True One.

Verse 9 tells us about some false ones - people who claimed to be Jews but are not. The Judaism that crucified the Messiah was and is a false Judaism. Today, many also

claim to be Christians but are not. Jesus is not fooled. He is the True One. He knows the lies we tell our own hearts, and He will deal with us truly.

We completed not long ago a study of the Gospel of Matthew. Thirty times in that Gospel, Jesus told someone, "Verily [Truly] I say unto you." Jesus speaks the truth to us in love. John teaches us that we should do the same for one another. He says that he had no greater joy than to hear that his children walk in the truth. Lies are a dime a dozen. We can always find a lie that will justify our satisfaction of the desires of our flesh. Yet Jesus is the True One. We should hear Him and desire to be like Him and learn to discern the difference between His truth and the lies of our sinful flesh.

How do the desires of our hearts, the direction of our decisions, and the deeds of our hands line up with the truth of the True One? Are we living a lie while claiming to be Christians?

3. He has the key of David.

Ill: It can be an important thing to have the right key. I was at a basketball game on a chilly snowing night last winter in northern Maine with Kent and James. After the game I went out to the car to warm it up before our departure. At that time the electronics on the vehicle were a bit messed up. The back window would pop open by itself, and on this occasion the doors automatically locked on me when I started the car. We came back to the car and could not get in because we did not have the key. One of the host school administrators spent about an hour prying open the door and helping us get in again.

Appl1: Here we read about the key of David. Jesus has that key, and it means that when He opens something, no man

can shut it; and when He shuts something, no man can open it.

It is an image that comes from Isaiah 22, the passage we read this morning, where God was going to remove the materialistic Shebna from his office, and replace him with a godly Eliakim. Eliakim would have this key of David set on his shoulder. He would be a father to Judah, the servant of the Lord, a source of stability for God's people as a tent peg, and the seat of their nation's glory as a throne. But then the passage says that at some point that peg would be pulled up and the blessing of Eliakim's ministry would come to an end.

Jesus here tells us that He is the Eternal Eliakim. He is all the things to our local church that Eliakim was to Judah. The one difference is that He will never be dislodged. We know some godly Eliakims, but our faith is not in even the best of men, but in the Lord Jesus Christ. He and He alone has the key of David. He opens and no man shuts; He shuts and no man opens. We must trust that Christ has the key.

I believe He has opened the door very wide for our gospel ministry here in New Boston, and that no man can shut it. Do you believe that? Do you believe that He has the key, or do you think someone else does? Honestly, I think that an evil enemy has wished for the closing of New Boston Baptist Church throughout its nearly 50-year history. Praise the Lord, that enemy does not have the key of David. Jesus does. Listen to these New Testament descriptions of the open door that churches like ours have before them:

Acts 14:27, "And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles."

1 Cor. 16:9, "For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries."

2 Cor. 2:12-14, "Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother: but taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia. Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place."

Col. 4:3, "Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds."

These open doors of ministry were not always the ones that provided the most carefree lifestyle to church members. They were doors that required imprisonment, no rest in the spirit, the confrontation of many adversaries, and a willingness to pray that God would work in a way no man can. When Jesus uses the key of David and opens a door for us that no man can shut to minister to someone, it can be a difficult door to walk through. In fact, if it is a door that makes life smooth and easy for us, I might question whether it is the one the Lord has opened for us after all.

Appl2: So Jesus gives this local church in Philadelphia an open door that no man can shut, and He tells them why He has given them that open door (v. 8) - "because you have a little power, have kept My word, and did not deny My name." That is how to keep the door of our ministry open. Jesus mentions three things that keep the door open for a local church. If it has these three things, no man can shut it.

1. A little power. Jesus keeps the door open for a church because they have a little power. The day that our church thinks that it has great power in the size of its crowds, or the wealth of its bank account, or the beauty of its buildings is the day we are in danger of seeing our open door close. Whether or not God gives us those things, we must always be a church that recognizes we have only a very little power. When we know that we have very little power, we make room for God's great power. We pray more when we know we have only little power.

2. Keeping God's Word. To keep God's Word is to read it and to obey it. Pharaoh's response to God's Word was "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice?" (Exod. 5:2). That arrogant attitude cost Pharaoh dearly. Jesus slammed his door shut, and all the armies of Egypt could not open it again. Are we a church that is keeping God's Word? Do we read it and obey it? I think this is something that should concern us as we desire our door to stay open.

3. Did not deny My name. The text here refers to a crisis at some point in the past at which this local church refused to deny Christ's name. For that reason, Jesus would keep their door open. It was a time of choosing, and they chose to wear the name of Christ rather than deny it as Peter did three times. I have faced those times of that temptation. I have had to ask for forgiveness for denying Jesus's name. When we do not deny His name, He keeps our door open, and no man can shut it.

Conclusion – Part 1: Jesus told this church, I know your works. He knows ours too. What does He know about our works? Will He keep our door open?

II. The Son of Man's encouragement of the church (vv. 9-11).

III. The Son of Man's reward for the church (vv. 12-13).

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*