

Text: Rev. 3:7-13

Title: "The Son of Man's Local Church at Philadelphia" -  
Part 2

Time: 5/28/2017 am

Place: NBBC

Intro: Perhaps the most famous of Philadelphians in this country was the gifted and skeptical Benjamin Franklin. Franklin was a printer in 1739, when the Great Awakening came to Philadelphia in the preaching of George Whitefield. Franklin wrote about Whitefield's arrival in his *Autobiography*:

"In 1739 arriv'd among us from England the Rev. Mr. Whitefield, who had made himself remarkable there as an itinerant Preacher. He was at first permitted to preach in some of our Churches; but the Clergy taking a Dislike to him, soon refus'd him their Pulpits and he was oblig'd to preach in the Fields. The Multitudes of all Sects and Denominations that attended his Sermons were enormous and it was [a] matter of Speculation to me who was one of the Number, to observe the extraordinary Influence of his Oration on his Hearers, and how much they admir'd and respected him, notwithstanding his common Abuse of them, by assuring them they were naturally half Beasts and half Devils. It was wonderful to see the Change soon made in the Manners [behavior] of our Inhabitants; from being thoughtless or indifferent about Religion, it seem'd as if all the World were growing Religious; so that one could not walk thro' the Town in an Evening without Hearing Psalms sung in different Families of every Street."

On this Memorial Day weekend, many will visit the grave of Benjamin Franklin at Christ's Church in the Old City, where he and six other signatories of the Declaration of In-

dependence are buried. That church was one of the churches that actively resisted the preaching of Whitefield shutting its doors against him.

Well, the Son of Man's local church at Philadelphia, Asia Minor, would have welcomed the gospel of George Whitefield with open arms. We saw last week how that the Lord Jesus revealed His glory to this church, that He is the Holy One, that He is the True One, and that He possesses the key of David, opening what no man can shut and shutting what no man can open.

This local church's door of ministry was wide open, for they understood that they had only a little power, they kept God's Word by reading it and by obeying it, and they did not deny the name of their Savior when faced with the pressure of a great crisis. I believe that by the grace of God, we have this in common with this church. We cannot claim a famous burial ground or a storied history that dates back to the Great Awakening, but we do have an open door of ministry given to us by Jesus Christ. This week we will look at what the passage says to encourage a church like ours, and what it says about the reward we can look forward to.

I. The Son of Man's glory in the church (vv. 7-8) – see part 1.

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

III: Often before the Lord can encourage as we have seen Him often do, He first has to allow us to face some discouragement. We can all point to many ways that has happened in our lives this past week if we give it a little thought. I was encouraged Wednesday evening by the Lord as we prayed together. We had some who were out of town and

so were a smaller group than normal, and I was being asked where some were, and that can be a source of discouragement for me as I come to pray with God's people. But the encouragement came when my three children led out in prayer. I said to my wife after the prayer meeting, how many parents do you know who get to hear that at their church's prayer meeting? We may be the only parents who ever get to experience that particular blessing. Honestly, I share this not to boast in ourselves, but to boast in the Lord and His ability to encourage a pastor's heart that is tempted by discouragement from time to time. We all need that, and we all know that our Savior does that for us.

Appl: So to understand the encouragement Jesus provides this church in Philadelphia, we first need to understand the nature of the discouragement He was allowing them to experience. He certainly understood it well (v. 9a). They were facing what Whitefield faced from false Christians in colonial Philadelphia - religious opposition. In this case, it is not false Christianity that opposed them, but false Judaism. They claimed to be the sons of Abraham, but they were lying about that, because they did not have the true faith of Abraham. We saw that problem before in Smyrna (2:9), and it is very interesting to me that this problem is mentioned as faced by the two ministries that require no correction from the Lord. The power of false religion can be a difficult source of discouragement. Jesus encourages the congregation in Philadelphia with three encouraging promises.

1. "I will change them" (v. 9b).

Ill: There was some controversy about whether our president bowed to the king of Saudi Arabia this past week. Evidently, he bent over to receive a medallion of some kind, and someone called that bowing to the king.

Appl: Well, the Old Testament is full of promises about the fact that in the future the nations of the world will do a lot of bowing in Israel. Those promises are the background for this phrase in verse 9, I will make them come and worship before thy feet. That almost sounds like Jesus is promising that church members will be worshipped as gods, but that is of course not what is being referred to here. Listen to some of these Old Testament promises to Israel:

Isa. 45:14, "Thus saith the Lord, The labour of Egypt, and merchandise of Ethiopia and of the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over unto thee, and they shall be thine: they shall come after thee; in chains they shall come over, and they shall fall down unto thee, they shall make supplication unto thee, saying, Surely God is in thee; and there is none else, there is no God."

Isa. 49:22-23, "Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders. And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me."

Zech. 8:20-23, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts: I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the na-

tions, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you.”

So in all of these promises, it is the Lord who is being worshipped, and the nations come and treat Israel like royalty and worship the Lord with them. This first promise of encouragement to this local church struggling with the opposition of false religion is that Jesus would make the same thing happen for them. Some from those false religions would be made by Christ to see that we truly are the people of God, and that they should respect us as such, and they should come and worship our God with us. This is the miracle that Paul describes in 1 Cor. 14:24-25. When that happens, people in the clutches of false religion come to understand that Jesus Himself loves us (v. 9b). Those who fail to realize that in this life shall bow the knee in the next.

It is encouraging when we realize how much Jesus loves us. It is doubly encouraging when someone else realizes how much Jesus loves us. And it is triple-encouraging when Jesus does the miracle that causes a religious enemy of our church to realize how much Jesus loves us. Jesus promises this will happen. It may not happen in this life; we may have to wait for the next as did Israel. But it will happen, and those who despise a local church like ours now will someday come to understand and admit that Jesus Himself has loved us. That should encourage our hearts this morning. Note the second encouraging promise:

2. “I shall keep you” (v. 10).

Appl: Again this verse refers to an Old Testament promise about the coming Day of the Lord. Here Jesus calls it *the hour of temptation that will come on all the earth*. Because we have kept the word of His patience, we shall be kept from

that hour. He kept that word of patience before us, and so it is the word of *His* patience that we keep. He was the great example of patience for us, becoming man, ministering patiently among men, and bearing our sins patiently on the cross. Those who follow His example are kept from the tribulation that is going to happen on all the earth. Much of the Book of Revelation is about what happens to the earth during this time. Those who are kept out of it are described in 7:9-17. He shall keep us by rapturing us to heaven before the Great Tribulation. That should encourage our hearts this morning.

### 3. "I am coming" (v. 11).

Appl: Jesus mentions two things about His promised second coming. First, it is going to be quick or sudden. Paul says it will happen in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye at the blast of a trumpet (1 Cor. 15:52). So we have to be ready at all times. And then secondly, the way we prepare is to hold fast to what we have in the Lord, that we might receive and not lose our crown. It will be worth it all when we see Jesus, and this should encourage our hearts in our local church ministry this morning.

Are you encouraged by the Son of Man's encouragement for the church this morning? If you are a faithful, struggling, church member who is tempted to be discouraged, you will find these things very encouraging. And what's more, there is a reward promised here as well.

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

Appl: The reward for overcoming is that we get to be a part of the next tremendous program of God's plan for mankind

- the New Jerusalem. It is called His *temple*, and overcomers are going to be pillars there. Today, overcoming is rewarded with the privilege of being a part of the local church of the living God, the house of God, and the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). Tomorrow, it will be this other temple that is important to us. None who overcome will say then, "No, I really do not want to be a part of that temple of God." In that regard especially, the New Jerusalem will be very different than our struggling local churches today. Jesus names His ministry programs, and He puts His name to them. We should put ours to them too.

Conclusion: John taught elsewhere that those born of God through faith in Christ are those who overcome (1 John 5:4). Although Christ Church in Philadelphia resisted the arrival of George Whitefield in Philadelphia, Benjamin Franklin often opened his home to Whitefield. Franklin wrote of their friendship,

"He us'd indeed sometimes to pray for my Conversion, but never had the Satisfaction of believing that his Prayers were heard. Ours was a mere civil Friendship, sincere on both Sides, and lasted to his Death."

Franklin, as far as we know, never was an overcomer, because he never did believe. He was never born again. How tragic to think that a man could have the mighty Whitefield for a friend and never believe on Whitefield's mightier Savior. Equally tragic would be your failing to overcome by faith in Christ this morning. Do you believe? Have you overcome? Have you been born again?

“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*