

The Church in Philadelphia: Lovers of God, His Name and His Word

by Phil Beach Jr.

The sermon emphasizes the importance of love, humility, and faithfulness to God's Word as exemplified by the church in Philadelphia.

Scripture: Matthew 5:3, John 14:15, 1 Corinthians 10:12, Philippians 2:3, Hebrews 12:2, James 4:8, 1 Peter 5:6, Revelation 3:8, Revelation 3:10-11

Topics: "Faithfulness To God", "Sacrificial Love"

Description

Phil Beach Jr. preaches about the church in Philadelphia, commended by Jesus for their little strength, faithfulness to His Word, and love for His name. They were pleasing to the Lord because they were filled with God's sacrificial love, living selflessly and seeking His will above all else. Despite their weaknesses, they were promised an open door for sharing the gospel and defended by God against their enemies. However, they were warned to guard against losing their heavenly reward by turning their focus from Jesus to worldly desires or human sources.

Transcript

. "...Thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word and hast not denied my name..." Rev. 3:8b. God has always had to bring His people to weakness and desperation before He would show mercy and move on their behalf. A beggar knows he has nothing and is starving, in need of daily food, lest he perish. Likewise, those who are truly beggars in God's kingdom are those who know they are bankrupt apart from living on the Bread of heaven and they feel the pains of barrenness and hunger, and the thirst of knowing they are without true water.

Such have no taste for the things of earth knowing they cannot satisfy. The Lord promises to draw near to them and give ears to hear His Word and grace to follow Him in obedience. They shall both seek and be filled with the glory and grace of another, namely the Lord of glory; and to His name alone will they be faithful. Additionally, they will be filled with joy when rejected for His name's sake and pray for those who abuse them and speak evil against them for no just cause.

This is the narrow way walked upon by these dear ones who lived in Philadelphia. Now, let's look and see what the Lord had to say to them. Sometimes when we have very little strength we think that something is wrong. We often despair because we do not seem to be as strong or as wise as others. In our weakness

we can begin to compare ourselves with others and become discouraged and often heavy hearted. However, as we look at the message that Jesus gave to His church in Philadelphia, we can be encouraged because it is for all of His children who have been made weak by His hand and have found His strength to help them.

Remarkably, there is no rebuke from the Lord to these believers. Let's carefully look at the words Jesus spoke to this church and ask Him to help us to see why they were so pleasing in His eyes. By His help we can also pray that our hearts would be fashioned like theirs, so that we too may be pleasing to our Lord. Before we move on it is good to note that the word "Philadelphia" means one who loves his brother. This brings great insight as to why this church was pleasing to the Lord.

God says that there is no greater love than divine, which is willing to lay its life down for a friend. In order for this kind of love to live in our hearts, we must first be willing to deny our own lives, and be subject to the Lord's rebuke. As we embrace His life and Word, He gives us His love, more and more. Godly love working in our lives perfectly satisfies the moral law of God. When we are living in God's love and being moved in our actions and words by His great love, we are doing no harm to anyone.

Such heavenly motivation frees us from living our lives in selfish ambition with greed, lust for money and power as the moving force behind our actions. Living in the love of God enables us to esteem our brother more highly than ourselves and helps us to seek out others' interests and not just our own. Whenever we are being filled to overflowing with God's great love it is joyous to become involved in others' lives so that we may grow together with them in the love and truth of Christ.

When we are filled with God's sacrificial love we are moved with compassion for the souls of all men, and our lives revolve around the great heart of our Shepherd who seeks to both save the lost and perfect His own in His likeness and moral image. Lives that are being filled with the amazing love of God are able to manifest the beauties of Christ's very character, seen in forgiveness towards one another, patience, gentleness and the absence of evil thinking. It is this very love that holds the true church together and beautifies it with heaven's fragrance.

No doubt this is the reason behind the Lord's pleasure and no rebuke for His dear ones in Philadelphia. However, we should not forget that before these believers were able to walk in such a fullness of God's love, they no doubt had to experience much personal failure. God's great victory is always seen brightest in those who have failed. Remember Peter, before he was able to love His Lord deeply enough to lay his life down for him had to suffer the pain of denying him. Peter confidently boasted at the last supper that he would be willing to die for His Lord, but found out he was only willing to deny Him!

We too, will have to come to see that our own human love and devotion to our Lord coupled with our arrogant confidence in human strength is not adequate before we can be filled with His sacrificing love. Now, let's look further at His message and pray for open hearts to receive His love into our hearts. An Open Door to Those Filled with God's love Each time Jesus speaks a message to His church in Asia Minor, He reveals an aspect about Himself which addresses the church's specific need.

To this church, He reveals Himself as the holy and true one. Because these believers were walking in the light of the Lamb, living in His love and grace, they were becoming living examples of their Lord's holiness and truth! Jesus was commending them by claiming that He was the source of their holiness and truth which was being evidenced in their lives. These Philadelphia believers had come to live so deeply in union with their risen Lord that they were a light and testimony to a lifestyle that was both set apart for the Lord's

interests as well as filled with truth.

Christ is indeed the holy one--fully set apart to God and the exact representation of God's nature of love. Additionally, Christ is the true one. This Word means genuine and is the opposite of false. Christ is the real, living expression of God's character and possesses all that we need to be pleasing to God. This group of believers was living in union with their Lord so deeply, they were able to express His likeness, the real and genuine life that pleases God, both to one another and to the city they lived in.

It is because of this union with the One who is holy and true, that the Lord gives these believers this wonderful revelation of Himself, "...He that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth and no man openeth." This refers to a story in the Old Testament. King Hezekiah had a servant whose name was Eliakim. This man was a very special friend to the King and was placed in charge of the King's affairs. No person could gain entrance to the King unless they came with this servant's permission.

This statement of our Lord refers to the absolute authority He has over all the affairs of the world. Jesus Christ alone holds the keys to open and close any door of His own choosing. Because these believers were so filled with God's love, living selflessly for each other and God's eternal interests, the Lord promises them an open door that no man will be able to close! No doubt this open door was in relation to the great opportunity this group of believers had to share the gospel.

This city of Philadelphia touched the borders of three different cities. Also, the city lay on the imperial road of Rome. Jesus Christ said that He came to seek and to save those who are lost. These believers were sharing in this very passion and because of this the Lord gave them a great open door to share the gospel message. Paul also mentions that the Lord had given him an open door, but with that door came much affliction and trial. Besides saying that this church had little strength, the Lord also mentions that they kept His Word and were faithful to His name.

What a beautiful picture of a healthy, Spirit-filled group of believers. Because they were of little strength, they had to depend upon the strength of their Lord. Paul too was brought by His Lord to a place of great weakness. But the Lord told Paul that when he was weak and with no strength in himself then the Lord would become his strength. In their weakness these Philadelphians had much grace and help from the Lord to keep His Word and be faithful to His name. God kept them from promoting their own names, which is an ever present danger.

God cannot give us an open door without the danger of selfish ambition creeping in--unless we share in the same kind of weakness that was present in the church of Philadelphia. Because of indwelling sin, our hearts tend to use God and any doors He may open for the advancement of our own interests. For this reason, we must come under the Lord's hand of purging before it is safe for Him to open a door for us. Often, if we are persistent in wanting to do something for God before His timing and are lacking the virtue of contentment, we may be given an open door and end up bringing shame to our Lord because of abusing and misusing the door He opens to us.

It is safer to wait on the Lord and be content to be a lover of Jesus and learn to walk in humility before Him and let God alone open doors to us without our help, in His own timing. It would do us well to remember the words of the Old Testament prophet, "What does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." This should be our first and foremost desire, beloved! It is important to note that the Lord places much value on the keeping of His Word.

Several times in the Gospel of John, Jesus tells us that the proof that a person loves Him is evidenced by obeying His Words. John also tells us in his epistle that God will give us the requests of our hearts if we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His eyes. How important it is to understand that, the more deeply we love our Lord, the more fully we will keep His Words and obey His teachings. John tells us that we can know that we are true followers of Christ if we keep His commandments.

Also, Jesus tells us that only those who obey His Word are considered His friends. So, by these scriptures we can see that these followers of the Lamb in Philadelphia were so filled with God's love that they kept the Words of Jesus and were truly His friends. When the Lord considers us His friends, then He lets us know what His will is and opens up the doors for us to do His will because He knows that our desire is to stay true to His name alone. These believers loved God's Word and often read it, in private as well as in public meetings; pondering it, meditating upon it and most importantly, obeying it!

Of course, Jesus wonderfully sums up the whole of keeping His Words by telling us that the most important commandment is to love God with all our hearts, mind, strength and soul. He then shows us that the second most important sum of all His commandments is to love our neighbors. As we are empowered to love God and others, in purity and truth, we are able to keep the Lord's Words, and in such a setting, God's Word is not burdensome to us, but a joy! Oh, that we may be filled with the awesome love of God that moves us to lay our lives down for the Lord's interests and our brothers and sisters.

Truly this group of believers was freed from the selfish ambitions that so many of us fall into and was passionate in their love and devotion for the Lord. God Will Vindicate Those Who Love Him By nature, we like to be esteemed and looked up to, but in God's kingdom, we must learn to dislike and avoid this dangerous lust and seek to be perfectly honest and humble, esteeming others better than ourselves and seeking to show only the truth about our lives and not grand illusions that are wrapped in pride.

Then we can be free, as these believers were, to love one another in the love of God. This love is rooted in truth and not in false notions about one another and is morally pure, free from strings and selfishness, giving honor to whom it is due, while holding only one in very high awe, namely, our blessed Lord. Brokenness attracts the gentle, loving Savior. Empty, broken hearted vessels are most prone to seek the fullness of another, namely the Lord Jesus, while hard hearted, pride-filled vessels are busy seeking their own fullness.

A heart fattened full of the cares, comforts and many callings of this world cannot see the Lord of glory, is deaf to hear His lovely voice and is dull in understanding His ways. Such a heart is offended by truth, and is easily overcome by resentment towards the Lord's rebukes, while all along remaining quite religious. The greatest need of this hour is a work of God to produce desperation in the heart for God alone, like we see in this church in Philadelphia. Truly they walked in the Word's of Jesus, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Because these believers lived in brokenness before God, the Lord promises to bring them comfort and defend them against all their enemies, even making them to come and bow at their feet! The Lord says that vengeance belongs to Him. This church was willing to love those who despised them and pray for those who were abusing them, most likely both verbally and physically. Jesus promises to set the record straight, in His own timing! Because they refused to defend themselves before their enemies, God promises to defend them!

May the Lord help us to lay hold of this truth. Additionally, Jesus promised those who keep the word of his patience will not be destroyed in the coming storms that will try the whole world, This hour of testing and storm will come to all, but only those who are standing on the solid Rock, which is obeying His Words, will be kept by the power of Jesus. May God help us to come to Him by the blood of the Lamb and with true hearts, find grace at His marvelous throne. Hold Fast and Stay Guarded Unless You Lose Your Crown Finally, the Lord speaks a very sobering Word to the church in Philadelphia.

In the midst of all the commendation and approval He warns them to lay hold of what they have so that no man would come and take away their crown, which represents their heavenly reward. The fact that Jesus warns them of this proves such a thing to be possible. Perhaps one of the most subtle dangers we face is not when we are openly in disobedience to our Lord but during the times when we are broken at His feet, worshipping Him with grateful and thankful songs of praise! It is interesting that Jesus says that the danger to this group of believers was that they could lose their crown by having a man take it away!

Jesus repeatedly tells us to keep our eyes on Him, as the author and finisher of our faith. He insistently claims to be the good and great Shepherd of the sheep and that He alone is the one who can satisfy our deepest longings and needs. He also promises to be the only one who knows the way for us and bids us to seek His counsel for direction and guidance along life's daily path. No doubt, the secret to this group of believer's great love for God and His approval in their lives was the absolute focus of their hearts upon the Lord alone!

Though they loved one another deeply and most likely had wonderful times of fellowship together in His presence, they guarded their hearts to keep them from straying from seeing Jesus. They were careful not to fall in love with the Lord's work and out of love with the Lord of the work! They were finding in Jesus the power to love those who hated them, to pray for those who were abusing and using them and the living water to quench the deep thirsting of their souls. As they loved God's Word and spent time in His presence, praying and pondering His person, they were kept aware of their deep poverty and inability to trust in their own wisdom for guidance.

But alas, dear friends, the temptation to turn the eyes of their hearts from seeing Jesus to a man or human source was great. Should this group of believers begin to look to themselves, to a man or to any other place in earth or heaven as the source of their spiritual life and fullness, they would fall from this place of grace and be in danger of losing their crown. When this happens to us, our spiritual eyes become blind to seeing the Lord and we begin to trust in what we are seeing, rather than the Lord, resulting in disaster and spiritual decay.

Additionally, we become just like the thing our eyes are now fixed upon, and it is to that image and likeness that we are fashioned and that we lead others. Entire families and churches can be ruined when just a few no longer focus on the Lord and become obsessed with another passion other than knowing and loving Him. Children will follow the god of their parents and church folks will follow the god of their leaders and elders! What god are you following hard after today? Some fall into the error of a drive for money, worldly success and a lust for bigger and better things and instill this image and likeness into those they are leading, while others become obsessed with making a religious name for themselves by promoting their own ministries and gifts.

Still others make the cares, worldly comforts and careers of this world their god and fashion their children into that image, preparing them to pursue the same things when they become adults. Whose name and

interests are we promoting today and who are we influencing to follow in our steps? God's Word warns us to beware lest we drift away from the Lord and grow cold in heart, fall into prayerlessness of spirit and develop a taste for the things of this world. In this way it is possible for such believers to have their crown taken from them!

To this ever present danger, our Lord addresses His loving warning! May the Lord help us to carefully ponder our Lord's message to His church in Philadelphia, considering the importance of being committed to His name and Word alone. Are our eyes focused on our Lord alone or have we become led astray and captured with a vision of something other than Jesus and His beauty? If so, we are in danger of losing our crown and must quickly repent and turn back to the Lord. We are in need of deep honesty before the Lord and one another as we ponder these piercing questions!

May God help us to allow Him to make us of little strength in ourselves so that His mighty power may freely work through us. Finally, may we never seek revenge and may we pray for all men, knowing God will care for us and one day balance all the books and vindicate those who are dear to His heart. As the Lord closes His message to this church by telling them to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches, so may we too have ears to hear what God's Spirit is saying to us today.

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