

# The Grace of Wrath

Studies in the Revelation of Jesus Christ

Text

Chapter 3:7-13

Topic

Jesus tells the believers in Philadelphia that they are serving Him exactly the way He wants them to

Title

*"It's Always the Son's Way in Philadelphia"*

## Introduction

No one likes waiting in line to begin with. It's even worse when waiting in line makes you feel foolish.

I walked up to Bank of America about the time it was supposed to open. A line had formed, and I took my place in it.

Fully five minutes after the bank was supposed to be open for business, while at least ten of us were grumbling in line, a person arrived who by-passed the line, went to the door, pushed on the door, and went right in.

**The door had been open the whole time;** we just assumed it was locked because the first person in line hadn't tried it.

Open doors are featured prominently in the letter from Jesus to the church in Philadelphia. He tells them, "I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it..." (v8).

Many significant scholars identify the church in Philadelphia with the missionary period of church history, beginning in the 17th century and extending to our own time. That being the case, we want to pay special attention to what Jesus is saying to us as we seek to serve Him by taking the Gospel to the whole world.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You're To Keep Working While The Doors Are Open, and #2 You're To Be Waiting When The Door Opens.

### #1 You're To Keep Working While The Doors Are Open

(v7-9)

Biblical Philadelphia was in Turkey, as were all the seven churches Jesus wrote to in the Revelation. Today it is the city of Alasehir.

It was founded by a ruler called Atillus who loved his brother so much that he said, "I am going to call my new town *brotherly love*."

Five separate main roads converged at the ancient City of Brotherly Love. Coming from the west, these roads go out into Asia; they go on from there to India and right out into the Far East to China.

Philadelphia was, quite literally, an open door to the rest of the known world. Part of its official function in the Roman Empire was to export the Greek Hellenistic culture to the rest of the world via the many travelers who stopped there.

It was, in fact, a missionary city for Rome.

Do you ever think of secular institutions as being missionary? They are; in fact, most institutions have a carefully crafted Mission Statement.

Colleges and universities, for example, want to change the way students think; they want to convert them to their worldview.

Before I will read a book identified as 'Christian,' I want to know the mission of its author. If I know where the author is coming from, I will know where they are trying to take me; and I can decide ahead of time if I want to go there.

One other thing about Philadelphia needs to be mentioned. Along the main street were a series of pillars on which were the names of citizens whom the emperor or ruler wanted to honor.

Think of it like the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

We don't know how or by who, but a church was founded in Philadelphia, right along this critical highway with open doors to the rest of the empire, and the world.

Jesus decided He could use the physical situation of Philadelphia to His advantage, to spread the message of salvation from the church there to the rest of the world.

Rev 3:7 "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, 'These things says He who is holy, He who is true, "HE WHO HAS THE KEY OF DAVID, HE WHO OPENS AND NO ONE SHUTS, AND SHUTS AND NO ONE OPENS":

The "angel," meaning the pastor, read the Revelation to the believers, and, while he was reading, he came across this passage addressed directly to them.

Have you ever received a life-altering letter? Like a college acceptance letter? Or, for that matter, a college rejection?

No correspondence could possibly compare to a personal letter from Jesus.

Of course, we understand that this letter **is** addressed to us - and to all believers - just as the entire Bible is addressed to us.

Do you believe, right now, that your life could be forever altered as you encounter Jesus in His Word? It can.

Let's get back to trembling with anticipation and expectation as it is read. It should *always* be life-altering, in every encounter.

Jesus describes Himself as "holy" and as "true." By emphasizing these two attributes, Jesus was reassuring the Philadelphians that He could honestly, accurately assess their spiritual condition. They could absolutely trust His judgment.

I think it might surprise them that Jesus had no words of correction or condemnation for them, but only commendation. Jesus being holy and true, they must take Him at His word.

Jesus claimed to have "the key of David." This is additional to the keys of Hades and death which we saw in His possession in chapter one.

In the Gospel of Luke we read, "[Jesus] shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (1:32-33).

There is a kingdom coming in which Jesus Christ will actually rule the earth from David's throne in Jerusalem. This book builds-up to it - taking us, chronologically, through the church age, then the seven-year Tribulation, to the Second Coming, to the one-thousand year kingdom of Jesus on the earth.

Jesus has a full keychain. I mentioned that He has the keys of Hades and death, and the key of David; but He also has keys to all the "doors" on the earth that He "opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens."

These are doors of ministry that He opens and shuts to direct His followers in their service to Him. In the case of Philadelphia, He was reminding them that, situated as they were, they had the perfect location from which to spread the Gospel all along the roads that led into and out of their city.

It was His strategy for their ministry. It was therefore their priority to discover ways to affect folks passing through so that the Gospel could spread from there all over the Empire, and beyond it.

Every church ought to constantly assess what doors of ministry Jesus has opened, and what doors He has shut.

By "assess" I first mean we must pray, and hear from God the Holy Spirit. In the Book of Acts, for example, a group of leaders were worshipping together while fasting when the Holy Spirit told them to send-out Paul and Barnabas on a mission.

How did God the Holy Spirit make Himself known? The text doesn't say, except that it mentions some of them were "prophets."

God the Holy Spirit can still make God's will for us known to us as we worship the Lord. We should not succumb to human logic, or statistics, or demographics to determine open doors.

Consecrated circumstances, too, can play a role, as God puts us in situations, and creates relationships, that incite invitations and reveal open doors.

Rev 3:8 "I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.

He had judged their "works" thus far, and was pleased with them.

When you go to the Lord, are you always expecting Him to criticize you? Do you anticipate Him constantly telling you where you are falling short? He can just as readily have words of commendation. He most certainly desires to encourage you in your service.

They had discovered, and were going through, the open doors of ministry.

- For one thing, it must mean they were sending-out believers to minister elsewhere.
- For another thing, it must mean they were ministering to travelers, leading them to Jesus, who then went on to their respective cities east and west with the Gospel.

Jesus commends them for three things.

"For you have little strength." This can mean at least two things; and it probably means both, since they are related:

1. We hear "little strength" and immediately think that the church was small in number, with very limited resources. That was probably true. Jesus doesn't quantify the way we do. He still works with five loaves and two fishes, if that's all we have; or with a widow's mite, if that's what we give.
2. "Little strength" can also mean a proper humility in understanding that it's not by might, nor by power, that we are to minister; but by the Holy Spirit.

May it be our prayer that we always have "little strength" - even if or when blessed with abundant resources.

Second, Jesus commended them, saying, "[you] have kept My Word." You could meditate on this a long time; it can have any number of possible meanings in Philadelphia.

One application that seems in context is that they believed Jesus' Word was sufficient for them. They weren't looking to supplement it in any way, but to share it, and let the inherent power of it transform lives. In other words, I envision Philadelphia as a church emphasizing evangelism.

Over the years I've heard Christians criticize churches that seem overly-evangelistic. They say things like, "they never really teach the Bible, because they are always concentrating on getting people saved."

They say, "that's a great place to get saved, but if you really want to grow, you'll have to go elsewhere."

Those criticisms are lame. What's wrong with inviting nonbelievers to be saved while you are teaching the Bible? And how is it a sign of really growing in the Lord to always be learning about Jesus but never sharing Him with others?

Third He commended them by saying, "[you] have not denied My Name." This alerts us that they were being persecuted; that they were being pressured to deny Jesus Christ. They would not deny their Lord - no matter the cost.

At least some of the persecution was coming from the folks in verse nine:

Rev 3:9 Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie - indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you.

We've encountered these guys before in the letters to the churches. I explained why we do not think they were Jews, but, rather, Gentiles who were claiming to be the 'true' followers of God.



For one thing, the words they "say they are Jews and are not," seems to communicate rather plainly that they "**are not** Jews," but are Gentiles.

It's not at all unusual for a group of Gentiles to claim to be Jews. You are undoubtedly familiar with the fact that the Jehovah's Witnesses claim that some of them are those who are called in the Bible the 144,000. It is their doctrine that only these 144,000 JW's are going to be in Heaven.

The number comes from later in the Revelation where we are told God will seal and send out 144,000 witnesses to the earth during the Tribulation. They are meticulously described as being 12,000 from twelve tribes of Israel. They are Jews.

*Yet the JW's claim it is them.* "They say they are Jews and are not, but lie..." They are therefore not a Kingdom Hall, but are, in fact, a "synagogue of Satan" in that they are following the doctrines of demons.

Don't be disturbed by the phrase, "I will make them come and worship before your feet." Jesus didn't say they would worship the believers, but that they would worship Him in their presence.

This is another reference to the future kingdom in which every knee shall bow before Jesus as He rules from David's throne.

Here it serves as an encouragement to the Philadelphians that no matter how hard things get, their victory is secure.

In every phrase of this letter, I hear Jesus saying, "I'm coming." In light of His coming, we are to be about His business in spreading the Gospel.

We spread the Gospel by discovering, and then going through, open doors of ministry.

There's nothing wrong with trying doors. The Lord will show you if they are open or shut.

The apostle Paul always tried doors.

Acts 16:6 Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia.

Acts 16:7 After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit[ did not permit them.

Acts 16:8 So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.

Acts 16:9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."

Acts 16:10 Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Paul was going for it. He seemed to assume doors were open unless he was forbidden to go through them. Once he discovered the open door, he rushed through it, believing God would honor His Word.

It's one thing for me to wait outside BofA for the door to be opened, only to find out it was open all along.

It's a more serious thing for me to wait to try spiritual doors, when they are, in fact, already open.

## #2 You're To Be Waiting When The Door Opens

(v10-13)

There are open doors of ministry to discover on the earth. There is also a door in Heaven that will one day open for us to enter in.

That door is prominent in the remaining verses.

Rev 3:10 Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

The Philadelphians probably had some knowledge of "the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world." After all, it is predicted in the Jewish Scriptures we call the Old Testament; and Jesus spoke of it in some detail in His Olivet Discourse.

As the Revelation progressed, they would get an almost blow-by-blow description and chronology, as their pastor read to them chapters six through eighteen, leading up to the Second Coming of Jesus in chapter nineteen.

Jesus called it the "**hour** of trial." He wasn't talking about the trials we can all expect, as believers, which come for a season. It was a very specific and set period of time.

Notice, too, it was coming "upon the whole world."

- It wasn't a local persecution in Philadelphia; that's not "the whole world."
- It wasn't the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple; that's not "the whole world."

It was going to be global. The only possible time that qualifies as a specific, set period of trouble coming upon the whole world is the seven-year Tribulation period.

The Philadelphians were promised they would be "[kept] from the hour of trial." As far as they were concerned, the rapture was pretribulational.

Now, some want to say that this can mean they would go *through* the Tribulation, but be "kept" safe. They cite, as an example, Noah and his family being kept safe while the earth and its inhabitants were destroyed by the global flood.

That cannot be what Jesus meant, for these three reasons:

1. First, the words "keep you *from*" literally translate to "keep you *out of*."
2. Second, the emphasis is that they were going to be kept out of the entire period of time itself - not just kept safe through the trouble.
3. Third, when Jesus said they "kept [His] command to **persevere**," the verb *persevere* is in the past tense. He wasn't exhorting them to persevere through the future Tribulation; He was telling them that, because they had **already** persevered in their walk and work and witness, they would be delivered *from* it entirely.

One more thing. One of the purposes of the Tribulation was mentioned by Jesus, when He said it is, "to test those who dwell on the earth."

This is a technical phrase that means nonbelievers. Whenever "those who dwell on the earth" is used in this book, it is talking about nonbelievers.

Specifically, in Revelation 17:8 you read, "those who dwell on the earth will marvel, **whose names are not written in the Book of Life...**"

One great purpose of the Tribulation is to "test," or to try, nonbelievers - meaning to give them one last opportunity to repent, and be saved. It's why I call this series in the Revelation, "The Grace of Wrath," because it is God, pouring out His wrath, yet still offering salvation by grace to sinners.

The Tribulation is what we might call a severe mercy. It will be horrible; but in God's wrath He remembers mercy and calls out, through many means, to *every* human being on the planet, urging them to repent and receive the forgiveness of their sins, and eternal life.

The other great purpose of the Tribulation is to prepare Jews to receive Jesus Christ as their Messiah at His Second Coming. In fact, the Tribulation is elsewhere called, the Time of Jacob's Trouble.

We read that all the Jews alive at the end of it will look upon Him whom they pierced; **all** Israel will be saved as a result of the Tribulation.

The thing the Tribulation is *not* at all for is to prove or purify the church. Jesus does that a different way. In Ephesians we are told how He does it.

Eph 5:25 ...Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,  
Eph 5:26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing  
of water by the word,  
Eph 5:27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church,  
not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should  
be holy and without blemish.

Jesus is not going to purify His church by leaving them on the  
earth to suffer the wrath of God.

But didn't the Lord keep Noah safe through the flood? He did; but  
before He did, He called Enoch home to Heaven in a rapture.  
Enoch is a type of the church - kept from the trouble. Noah is a  
type of Israel - saved through the trouble.

It is not wishful thinking to say that the church need not, and thus  
will not, be on the earth for any part of the Tribulation. We won't.

Rev 3:11 Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have,  
that no one may take your crown.

"Quickly" doesn't mean soon, or even immediately. It's that word,  
again, from which we get our word tachometer. When you put the  
pedal to the metal in your car, the tach redlines all at once.

The use of "quickly" here means *at any moment*. This is very  
definitely a reference to the imminent coming of Jesus for His  
church. It's the rapture.

The Bible mentions several crowns as potential rewards for  
believers. For example, every believer gets the crown of life as a  
result of salvation; but only those who die for Jesus get the  
martyr's crown.

Before we decide who can "take your crown," and how, consider this: You don't get your crown (or crowns) until Jesus gives them to you in Heaven.

Coupled with His command to "hold fast," I think Jesus means to go for it serving Him so that you can earn even more crowns, even more rewards. Don't hold back, and thereby miss-out on crowns you could have received.

In fact, the word translated "hold fast" means *to seize* - so it is definitely looking ahead to crowns you haven't earned yet.

Remember the popularity of the phrase, *Carpe diem*, - "Seize the day"?

"Crown" in Latin is *corona*. "Seize the crown" would be, *Carpe corona* - a great motto for us to encourage one another.

(Unless it makes you think of the Mexican beer... That wouldn't be good).

Rev 3:12 He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. 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 I will write on him My new name.

Are you an overcomer? If you are a believer, yes, you are.

First John 5:4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith.  
First John 5:5 Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

It is the Christian who "overcomes," not the overcomer who becomes a Christian.

We mentioned the practice, in Philadelphia, of putting the names of outstanding citizens on the pillars along the main road. Jesus promised them, and us, that we all are going to be pillars in Heaven. Every one of us will be known, and be known; we will enjoy equal status, equal access.

I'm sure the believers in Philadelphia were thrilled by this teaching they would be pillars in the Temple. If they were listening closely to the end of the book as their pastor read it, they'd hear, "but I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (21:22).

If there is no Temple, how can believers be its pillars??

There IS a Temple; it's the presence of God, and of Jesus Christ.

We will be its pillars in this sense: We will be forever vibrantly, vitally, connected in fellowship with God and with Jesus, for eternity. Everywhere we are, or go, is the Temple in the sense of enjoying the presence of God.

"He shall go out no more" certainly speaks of the permanence we will enjoy in Heaven, throughout eternity.

Do you realize how temporary, how fleeting, everything is on the earth? How quickly you can be uprooted from a place, or from a person - and feel lost and alone?

Never in Heaven will you feel that way. You will be home, forever and ever.



Rev 3:12 ... 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 I will write on him My new name.

We will see the New Jerusalem at the end of the Revelation. It isn't Jerusalem, in the Middle East, rebuilt. It is a city that comes down out of Heaven and is in orbit with the earth.

It's the city whose streets are made of gold, where our mansions are being prepared for us by Jesus.

If you have a problem now with tattoos, you're really gonna have trouble in Heaven. *Jesus is going to ink you.*

You're going to get at least three lettering tattoos according to Jesus.

1. "The Name of My God."
2. "The name if the city of My God, the New Jerusalem."
3. "My [i.e., Jesus] new name."

I have no further commentary on these names - except to say I see no reason to think Jesus was speaking metaphorically. He really is going to write them on you.

Have you seen that Facebook post, Hilarious Misspelled Tattoos?

- Instead of *No Regrets*, the tattoo reads, *No Regerts*
- *You Only Life Once*
- *Never Don't Give Up*
- *It's Get Better*

I'm sure Jesus will nail the spelling. You might want to think about fonts and colors and placement.

Rev 3:13 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." '

This is the common closing to these letters. It puts us on notice that, even though the letters were written to seven specific first century fellowships, they are also for every church, and every Christian, in any century.

Jesus opens doors; He shuts doors.

Are you - are we - seeking the Lord, to show us by His Spirit which doors are open and which doors are shut?

Don't just wait in line. Let's go for it and *Carpe corona*.