

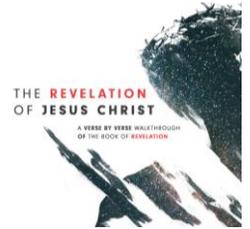
Title: Revelation, Part 10: Stand Strong

Speaker: Charles Stone

Passage: Rev. 3:7-13

Big idea: The ancient church in Philadelphia shows us four ways to respond during the covid crisis (or during any difficulty).

Memory verse of the month: Rev. 2:4-5 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.



The covid pandemic has certainly been a grind on us in many ways. No doubt it's been hard. But throughout history, difficulties both world-wide and local and personal have been perpetual and are a given in life. As we've dug into our study of Revelation, we've learned some interesting and helpful insights about life from ancient churches located in what is now Turkey that Revelation was written to. The church we are looking at today, the ancient city of Philadelphia gives us some powerful lessons that apply during this difficult time we are now in with covid.

So let's read the scripture, [Rev. 3.7-13](#).

Rev. 3:7 "To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. ⁸ I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. ⁹ I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. ¹⁰ Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. ¹¹ I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. ¹² Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. ¹³ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Big idea: The ancient church in Philadelphia shows us four ways to respond during the covid crisis (or during any difficulty).

Several interesting facts make Philadelphia stand out: how it got its name, what it produced, and who led the church.

This king, Eumenes II founded the city in 189BC and named it for the love of his brother, who would be his successor who was named Attalus II whose loyalty earned him the nickname, "Philadelphos", literally meaning "one who loves his brother". That's how it got its name. He named it out of his love for his brother. Philadelphia, Penn is named after this ancient city. Philadelphia means city of brotherly love.

There is not much left of it because an earthquake devastated the city in ad 17.

This ancient city had something in common with the central valley of California. We lived in the central valley for 4 years and it's an incredibly fertile area of the world with amazing produce. When I would jog, I'd pick up almonds in almond orchards and eat them as well as peaches on the side of the road that had fallen off trucks. Over a third of the USA's vegetables and two-thirds of the country's fruits and **nuts** are grown in California. Philadelphia also lay in a similarly fertile area. It was known for the grape growing, their vineyards and what the grapes produced were famous. This fact will come into play that I will explain in a bit, so hang on to that tidbit.

This church was also led by a woman, a prophetess. Her name was **Ammia**. She led the church for 60 years. The book of acts also refers to some prophetesses, female prophets and leaders. Biblical historians generally recognize her ranking as up there with the female prophets in the book of acts.

Rev. 3:7 “To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David.

Jesus is holy and utterly trustworthy and reliable in his words and deeds. There are two words for true. One would be used to describe a statement that is true. Another would describe something that is real vs unreal. John uses the second use here. In Jesus there is real reality. He is the embodiment of truth.

He mentions that he holds these keys. When somebody has keys, it grants the holder access to things within.

Some movies are built around the missing key or the mysterious skeleton key or the bank key that opens a safe deposit box with something really important in it. You’ve probably seen these scenarios in commercials when a dad buys his daughter a car when she graduates from college and before she sees it, he gives her a key. She soon realizes it’s not any old key, but a key to a car. The key represents something else.

The key of David is another OT allusion. In those days, kings had assistants and to some of those assistants the king would give great authority, the keys to everything so to speak. Here John is again alluding to an OT situation when a certain king’s chief steward (the person who took care of all this stuff) had misused his authority. Because he misused that authority he gave that role, the key, to another guy named Eliakim, whose heart was right.

What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.

Jesus alone has all power in His kingdom. He has the keys. And open and shut means that Jesus has absolute power.

⁸ I know your deeds.

Jesus was intimately acquainted with their work in that city and he nothing but compliments. And he is also intimately acquainted with our deeds as well.

See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut.

The city was originally established to spread Greek culture to the east. This church was given a similar opportunity, only to spread the gospel. It was the eastern-most city to Asia. the open door God was giving them was an open door to spread the gospel in that direction. So, despite its small strength, it was in a strategic position because the road of the imperial post office passed through it, it joined with other cities, Caesar’s armies passed through it, and caravans of merchants passed through it.

An open door points to the opportunity to share the gospel.

Acts 14:27 ... they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

1 Corinthians 16:9 because a great door for effective work has opened to me,

I know that you have little strength,

Little strength might mean their small number or simply the energy they had, or their influence.

yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

Not only had they kept his word, Philadelphia was known as a place where Christians were fearless and aggressive in their witness.

⁹ I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.

A “synagogue of Satan” appears to describe a Jewish element that vehemently denied Jesus as the Messiah and that actively persecuted others who made this claim. A true Jew in the view of Jews like John and Paul is one who has found

forgiveness and life in Jesus the Messiah, while a false Jew is one who rejects those who believe in Jesus and openly persecutes them.

This group of Jews had apparently so compromised their faith with the culture that later Rabbinic authorities even condemned them.

When the final judgement comes, those who hated and opposed Christ will then, regretfully, realize who they opposed and will have to acknowledge their rejection of Jesus and give respect to the very ones they persecuted.

The Scriptures say that every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. That does not mean universalism, that in the next life everybody gets a second chance. Nope. Rather, those who reject Christ will one day realize that the Gospel was true, but they can have no part of it then because they rejected it and they will live eternally with that regret apart from God.

Some scholars say this may allude to a future point in time as the end times events roll out when great revival will occur and when many Jewish people will turn to Jesus. Apparently, God will give many open doors for them to hear the gospel and come to faith.

10 Since you have kept my command to endure patiently,
Jesus affirms them again.

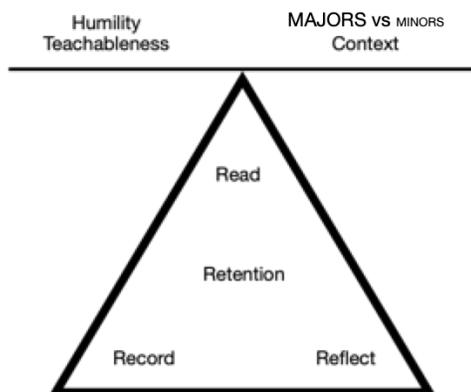
I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.

First, this passage is interpreted differently which leads to different end times views. Before I explain those, a couple of initial insights.

First, testing and trials we may experience now or in the future in the end times has a double effect of purifying and strengthening believers on the one hand and at the time further hardening the hearts of those who reject Jesus.

Second, this 'keeping them from the trial', this protection, is primarily spiritual protection rather than physical protection. God does not promise that Christians are exempt from life's difficulties and sorrows. The book of Revelation is all about persecution. Covid has impacted non-believers in Jesus and believers in Jesus.

When we think about the end times, what does he mean when he says that he will keep them from the hour of trial? Two possibilities.



Let's remember, however, the retention triangle and the attitudes we must approach Revelation with.

We approach this deep dive into Revelation with humility and teachableness.

Many biblical scholars believe the hour of trial is not something particular to the church in Philadelphia. Rather, it refers to a time of intense trouble to fall on the world before the coming of Christ. The rest of Revelation explains these woes and difficulties.

As we go through this study, I will often give two interpretations of a puzzling passage, with either one having good biblical support by good biblical scholars.

Two primary views come into play here depending on how this verse is translated.

I will also keep you from [out of] the hour of trial

The phrase could be translated **from** the hour (something happens to Christians before this tribulation) or **out of** the hour (something happens to Christians after this time of tribulation).

This something is called the rapture where living Christians are taken up into heaven.

One view, if you translate it 'out of' is called, **post-tribulation** or **mid-tribulation**. These views believe that the church will have to go through all this persecution or part of it, and the church will be in, but not the object of, the great tribulation. Although persecution will come from the world, God will protect the Christians from his wrath upon evil and protect them from the Satan's harmful power during this time.

I will also keep you from the hour of trial

The other view, if you translate the phrase, 'from the hour' is **pre-tribulation**.

It means that God will protect Christians from this trial by simply removing them from it, that is the rapture happens before this great tribulation and they will return with Christ seven years later as a part of his millennial kingdom.

So, good scholars support both views. And we must love our brothers and sisters who may hold a differing viewpoint.

11 I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.

Jesus reminds us to be faithful with the opportunities he's given us. When he says that *no one will take your crown* does not imply that you could lose your salvation, but probably means you could lose your opportunities for kingdom impact and the spiritual rewards that would follow. Several times in scripture when God gave opportunity and responsibility to one person, and they squandered it, he gave it to someone else.

Coming soon is not meant to imply a date we can identify, but to reinforce his promise that he will return.

Remember I said that they lived in a very fertile area known for its vineyards.

An event literally left a very bitter taste in their mouths. As you can imagine their economy was dependent on these vineyards. And one of their chief gods was the god of **Dionysius**, the son of the head Greek god Zeus. He was the god of agricultural fertility and specifically of vineyards. They believed that Dionysius had *greatly blessed* the city with prosperity from the grape production. Well, in 92AD the current Roman emperor, Domitian, to protect Rome's vineyards from competition, had Philadelphia rip up and burn half of their vineyards and would not allow them to replant them. You can imagine how angry they were at the economic impact and how disappointed they were in their god Dionysius for letting them down.

With that context and in contrast, we see the character of Jesus in this passage. He is encouraging them that he is faithful, and he would not let the believers down, as the general populace had believed their pagan god had let them down.

¹² Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God.

Here's another common image that the people in this church would immediately understand.

Remember this area faced a devastating earthquake in AD 17 that leveled the city. Only a few strong things were left standing. This is a picture of some of the remains of a nearby town that was hit by



that same earthquake. What prominent structures remain? Pillars. Pillars from temples were some of the strongest parts of a building and several of them made it through these earthquakes.

Jesus' words allude to that. As we overcome difficulty, he makes us stronger, able to stand strong when things get shaky around us. Nothing external can topple us as we trust the Lord. We are like those pillars.

The Holy Spirit builds more and more character in us so that this character becomes a strong constant in us, just like that pillar was a strong constant through earthquakes. Other stuff may crumble around us (like our culture), but our character won't.

He then talks about writing names.

I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem... and I will also write on him my new name.

After this earthquake in ad 17, the Roman emperor helped them rebuild by ending tribute or taxation for 5 years. Imagine getting a 5-year tax exemption. To express their gratitude for his help, they inscribed the name of that emperor, Tiberius, on their coins and on other things.

Also, a faithful municipal servant or a distinguished priest was sometimes honored by having a special pillar added to one of the temples and inscribed with their name.

So, when Jesus talked about writing these names, he was reminding them that as lowly overcomers who had little strength, Jesus promises recognition in his kingdom worthy of the most notable hero of any society.

Let's return to our big idea.

Big idea: The ancient church in Philadelphia shows us four ways to respond during the covid crisis (or any difficulty).

1. Refuse to let depletion result in defeat.

He described those in this church as having little strength. They weren't an example of great influence or important people in the community or a big mega-church with a famous podcaster at the helm. They were small and didn't have much. But what they did have, though small, didn't result in their giving up.

Jesus commended them. They kept his word. They did not deny his name. They endured patiently. They stood strong like those pillars. He had nothing but good things to say about them, even though they had little strength and were small.

So, if in your current circumstance you are tempting you to say... *I just can't keep going. Yes you can. I'm just gonna' giving up.* You don't have to. *I have no more energy to live like this another day.* Yes you do.

You may need to phone a friend for some encouragement. You may need some support from the church. You may need to quit something. You may need to make some tough decisions. You may need to see your doctor or a counselor. But being depleted, having little strength does not automatically mean defeat.

As underwhelming as they were in strength and numbers, when Islam began to take over that part of the world over several centuries, this church was the last bastion of Christianity. It withstood growing Islam and did not fall until Islam overwhelmed the city in mid-14th century. They stood strong to the very end, though they lacked strength.

2. Consistently calibrate your life according to God's Truth.

Some of the very first words in this passage were the words that Jesus said about himself. He says that he is 'holy and true.' We can trust that God's word and the direction Jesus gives us by his Holy Spirit will always point our lives in the right direction. Following Jesus is based on truth and when you base your life on truth, it will remain true. It's like how a ship's captain sets a course for his ship.



This is the **Queen of the North** ferry. On March 22, 2006, disaster struck with 101 people aboard. The ship was navigating the inside passage along the British Columbia coast. It was night. Because there were several shallow areas, the captain had to set the GPS parameters exactly to safely navigate that channel. Unfortunately, he set the settings just slightly off, a half a degree off course. And the navigator who manned the bridge while the captain was sleeping failed to note the error and make appropriate adjustments along the way.

Let's say that this was the safe direction for the ship, the appropriate trajectory to avoid getting grounded. However, because the initial settings were slightly off, slowly, imperceptibly, the ship drifted off course, each km she travelled put her more and more off course until she finally ran aground, sank, and two people died.

For that ship to travel safely, it required an initial setting based off true north and ongoing calibrations to stay on course.

That's what I mean when I say, consistently calibrate your life according to God's truth. Calibration requires knowledge of that true north (God's word) and constantly monitoring and recalibrating our lives as needed if you start to veer off course. We recalibrate our lives when we gather with God's people live or online, when we read and study God's word, when we hang around other believers.

So, refuse to let depletion lead you to defeat and regularly recalibrate.

3. Look for *your* open doors of opportunity.

Remember that city was located near the easternmost part of this circle of churches. Jesus talked about the open door he had given them, an open door to the eastern part of that world to spread the gospel.

What open doors is God giving you to serve others in Jesus' name, do good in his name, share your testimony, share the gospel? At work, in your neighborhood, in your family?

We may think, I don't have any opportunities while locked down. You may have open doors and not even realize it.

I was in the hospital with a blood infection at the end of April and God opened a door to share my personal testimony with one of the nurses. ...Ben, I will ad lib here a bit.

If you don't see any opportunity in your current situation to have a spiritual conversation, maybe you need to look harder for it.

*Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.
(1 Pet 3.15)*

4. Respond to difficulty in a counter-cultural way.

Remember that we saw from this passage that this future testing will result in one of two different responses, believers will be strengthened in their faith and the hearts of those who reject God will harden further still.

This thought raises this question. Let's all get convicted now, me too. How have you responded to and in the covid crisis? What has your attitude been? Have you been whiny, angry, bitter, defeated, hopeless, short with people, argumentative on social media, critical, harsh in your view on what should or should not have done?

Or have you been realistic (this is not good), hopeful, trusting, encouraging, supportive, growing, making the best of things?

As followers of Jesus, we have the Holy Spirit in us. We don't have to respond like any in our current culture respond to crisis and difficulty.

Rom. 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Col. 3:2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

John 14:27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

1John 5:4 for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.

How different has your response as a Christian been in comparison to the response from a person far from God? Hopefully different.

So, this week, consider these **four statements**.

1. Refuse to let depletion result in defeat.
2. Consistently calibrate your life according to God's Truth.
3. Look for *your* open doors of opportunity.
4. Respond to difficulty in a counter-cultural way.

Which one might need more attention from you? Pick one and spend 15 minutes this week considering its application to you and how Jesus might want to change you in that area.

