

### **Philadelphia: “You Have Kept My Word”**

Of the seven churches that the book of Revelation addresses, only two of them have the unqualified approval of Jesus Christ and one of those is the church in Philadelphia. Of this church Jesus pays the highest compliment he could pay her. He says, “You have kept my word and you have not denied my name.”

The situation this church found herself in was difficult. The church in Philadelphia, like all of the churches this letter was addressed to, was surrounded temples dedicated to idols. In fact, Philadelphia was known for having so many temples it was referred to as ‘little Athens’ which was the center of the worship of the Olympian gods. (William Barclay)

In addition, also it seems that the Christians in Philadelphia (like the church in Smyrna) had been kicked out of the Jewish synagogue because of their belief in Jesus. (How is that for brotherly love?) Remember, many of the first Christians were Jewish and they continued to worship God on the Sabbath in the synagogue until they began to get push back from the Jews who did not embrace Jesus as Lord. This led to many of these Christians being kicked out of their churches. This explains why Jesus refers to these Jewish churches as “synagogues of Satan” because of what they did to the Jewish Christians who were worshiping in them. On the surface such an accusation might sound anti-Semitic but it is not because our Savior himself was Jewish.

Nobody likes being marginalized, side-lined, kicked out, or losing friends but this is precisely the situation the Christians in Philadelphia found themselves in. they were on the outside and they faced a real temptation. Should they compromise their faith in order to get back in the good graces of the wider society or should they remain true to the faith and keep the Word of God and not deny the name of Jesus? The church in Philadelphia chose the latter and she received the unqualified praise of her Savior.

When we die and meet our Maker the only thing that is going to matter is whether or not we get the approval of our Savior. Our Savior’s approval or non-approval of us will determine whether or not we will be in the Kingdom of God. At our deaths and the final judgment we will either find our names in the Lambs Book of Life or we won’t. At our deaths and the final judgment Jesus will either say to us “Come you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world” or he will say “depart from me, I never knew you, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”

When we die it will not matter what the world thought of us or what politicians thoughts of us or how many friendships we preserved in this lifetime because we never rocked the boat. The only thing that will matter when we die is whether or not we were on the right side of truth. Jesus said that he is the way, the truth, and the life and that no man comes to the Father except through him. The only thing that will matter at our deaths is whether or not we have kept his word.

Please do not misunderstand me here. To keep his word does not mean that we will be perfect. We all break the law of God. Christians are new creations in Christ for sure, but when we come to Christ we don't become or morph into sinless creations. We still mess up. We still sin. So to keep his word does not mean that we will be perfect but rather it means that the trajectory and desire of our lives will be moving closer to Christ, not further away. It means that the aim of our desires will be to please the Lord and not ourselves. And it means that when a choice has to be made between saving our friendship in the synagogue at the expense of deny Christ's Word or following his commands even though the synagogue doesn't like it we will choose Jesus, not the world.

One thing interesting that I learned in my studies this week on this text was that of these seven churches that Revelation was addressed to only two of these seven still have a significant Christian presence in them today. Would you like to guess which they are? They are the two churches that received Jesus' unqualified praise. The church in Smyrna and the church in Philadelphia. All seven of these churches are located in modern day Turkey and as you know Islam swept through that nation and Christianity all but died, but not in Philadelphia and Smyrna. Both cities still have a significant Christian presence there as compared to the other cities. Why? Because the other five churches succumbed to worldliness and were more concerned with having the approval of their friends than they were living for Christ. But not Philadelphia and not Smyrna. They stood strong.

What this means for us as a church is that if we want to survive and thrive then we will have to make keeping his word a top priority in our lives as individual congregants and as a church. This is what we must do in order to have a bright future. The surest way to kill a church and to kill ourselves as Christians is to go soft on following Jesus.

In a way this kind of talk is silly because in a sense we shouldn't even be thinking in terms of how are we going to survive and thrive as a church? as important as that may be.

Our goal at FPPC should not be how are we going to survive and thrive as a church? If that were our goal we could offer free beer on Sunday nights and hire some go-go dancers and put them on Davie Avenue and we might get a slew of people in our church but that wouldn't be right. Our goal as a church should be to follow Jesus faithfully in a relationship with him, obey the Word of God, serve and love our neighbors, and pursue the Great Commission. These things should be our goal, not how will be survive and thrive as a church. If we will make these things our goal, as the church in Philadelphia did, then the fruit of having kept his Word in our lives will be a church that is thriving at 1026 Davie Avenue. If you and I together will give God something to work with He can and will do something great in our lives, in our church, and in our community through us, if we will but take seriously the aim to keep his Word in our lives.

What might a church who keeps his Word look like today? Here a couple of things that came to mind.

First, it starts with being born again. Jesus said unless you are born again you cannot see the Kingdom of God. There is one thing that must precede keeping the word of the Lord and that is a relationship with Christ. If you do not know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior how are you going to keep his Word? Why would you keep his Word? A faithful church who keeps the Word

of God is a church that is comprised of people who are in a living relationship with the Son of God and pursuing that relationship with all they got.

The second thing I offer you is Acts 2:42-46. Let's turn there and look at the text.

As I look at what Luke recorded about the early church I see two areas that we need to improve on as a church. There is only one area that we don't need improvement on and that is eating together with glad and sincere hearts. All the other areas we can improve on, but especially two.

They are the devoting of ourselves to the apostle's teaching, which is another way of saying that we will devote ourselves to the reading and studying of the Word of God in Holy Scripture, and the other one is prayer. And of these two I think we do better on devoting ourselves to the apostle's teaching than we do prayer, but we need greater faithfulness on both, but especially prayer.

If we want to see God really move in our lives and our church then we must devote ourselves greater to the apostle's teaching (the Bible, not romance and western novels, the TV, internet, or the IPOD; solid, truthful, biblical teaching, not heresy and bad doctrine) and to prayer (not Roberts Rules of Order, committee meetings and marketing strategies; though those things have their place). This needs to happen individually but also corporately.

Right now we don't even have a prayer service. I'm not sure we've ever had one with any degree of consistency. What are we thinking? Our Korean brothers and sisters are accustomed to meeting together for prayer in their churches at 5:30 in the morning. It's in their DNA. How come we don't do that? I shoulder the blame for some of that. I haven't led in that kind of way. How could we or I ever dream of keeping Christ's word apart from prayer?

Nonetheless, these two things, prayer and the apostle's teaching, I think, are our ticket to becoming a pillar of God and us having the name of Christ written upon our lives and our church, which is really God's life and God's church.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Amen.