

# Jesus Holds the Key (*Philadelphia*)

Revelation 3:7-13 on September 4, 2022

Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson

*Please read Revelation 3:7-13 before going further in this transcript.*

Today we're continuing in our study of the 7 churches from the book of Revelation, and we're going to look at Jesus' letter to the church in Philadelphia. My wife, Debbie, and I had the privilege of visiting Ancient Philadelphia over my sabbatical this past spring.

Jerry at St. Jean Church (Philadelphia)



St. Jean Church arches



Most of the remains of this city have either been removed, or they lie underneath the modern-day city of Alaşehir, which you can see in the background of these pictures.<sup>1</sup> One thing that does remain are the remnants of the 6<sup>th</sup> C AD St. Jean Church. It mostly just the bottom of these two HUGE arches and a few relics lying around in the grass. Despite what some of the locals might tell you, this was NOT one of the seven churches from Revelation.<sup>2</sup> We can be sure of this for at least two reasons: One, it's from the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, some 500 years after Jesus' letter to the church in Philadelphia. Secondly, the early church met in people's homes;<sup>3</sup> they didn't meet in buildings until some 250 years later.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Alaşehir "Al uh shh HERE" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xtBWjPiH3V0>

<sup>2</sup> See Ege Yayinlari & Mark Wilson, *Biblical Turkey, Corrected 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.*, Zero Produksiyon, Istanbul, 2014, p. 297.

<sup>3</sup> In fact, perhaps I better explain what I mean when I say that we "visited the 7 churches." The fact is, Debbie and I visited the 7 ancient SITES where these churches were once LOCATED, but the fact is, the churches in the first century didn't have church BUILDINGS, they met in HOUSES. For example, in Romans 16:5 Paul says, "Greet also the church that meets at their house...." (Which could very possibly be referring to their house in Ephesus, although they also helped with the church in Corinth. See Acts 18:1-3, 18-19, 26 as well as 1 Corinthians 16:19.) And in Colossians 4:16 he says, "Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house." (See also Philemon 2, "the church that meets in your home.")

<sup>4</sup> "As scholar Mark Wilson notes that, "for the first 250 years of church history Christians did not meet in special buildings but rather in homes... If wealthy persons were members of a house church, they would host meetings [because their homes] provided the maximum amount of space." Ege Yayinlari & Mark Wilson, *Biblical Turkey, Corrected 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.*, Zero Produksiyon, Istanbul, 2014, p. 216.

Jesus' letter begins in Revelation 3:7, "To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true...." The *ESV* translates "holy and true" as "the holy one, the true one." In other words, these are both divine titles used to describe WHO Jesus is.<sup>5 6</sup> So when Jesus opens His letter to the church in Philadelphia, the first thing He reminds them of, is who He is. Or we could say, He reminds them of who is on their side in a tough and discouraging time in church history. In other words, Jesus begins His letter with a strong note of assurance to the downtrodden and persecuted Christians in Philadelphia: The One "who is holy and true" is "on their side."<sup>7</sup> Revelation 3:7 continues "...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." This echoes the words of Isaiah 22:22, "I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open." Back in Isaiah's day, the Lord was clarifying here who has ACCESS to the kingdom in Jerusalem.<sup>8</sup> And not only access, but also AUTHORITY to open and shut the doors, to determine who was allowed in, and who was not.<sup>9</sup> Now here, in the context of Revelation 3:7, Jesus proclaims that He "holds the key," that He is "the Davidic Messiah who controls entrance to God's kingdom...."<sup>10</sup> NT scholar Grant Osborne explains, "The Jews had probably excommunicated the Christians in Philadelphia from the synagogue...but this declares unequivocally that only Christ...has the authority. He alone can 'open' and 'shut' the gates to heaven."<sup>11</sup> So King Jesus holds the key to His Kingdom, the Messianic Kingdom, promised long ago through King David's bloodline.

Revelation 3:8 continues, "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." Jesus continues to build this imagery of an "open door, that no one can shut." This door is the door to Christ's Kingdom, the Kingdom to which He alone has the key. This, brother or sister in Christ, was a source of incredible assurance for the believers living in Philadelphia, and it continues to be a source of incredible assurance for us as believers today!<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> In fact, "Christ is often referred to as 'The Holy One' in the New Testament attesting to His divinity, "that He is one with Yahweh." See Mark 1:24; Luke 1:35; and John 6:69. Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, footnote on p. 186.

<sup>6</sup> We see these divine attributes show up again in Revelation 6:10, "They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth...?"

<sup>7</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 186.

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah's original context was of the Lord demanding that Eliakim be given "access to the king and his palace." Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 187.

<sup>9</sup> See Matthew 16:15-19 when Peter clarifies that Jesus is the Messiah and Jesus mentions the "KEYS of the kingdom of heaven."

<sup>10</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 187.

<sup>11</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, pp. 187-188.

<sup>12</sup> Jesus has opened the door into His Kingdom, nobody can shut that door in the face of the Philadelphian believers. They have guaranteed access as long as they continue to persevere.

Notably, the church at Philadelphia is one of the only churches where Jesus doesn't mention ANY weaknesses or give them ANY rebukes.<sup>13</sup> To be clear, there are no perfect churches, but in verse 8 Jesus does give them a strong commendation, "...you have kept my word and have not denied my name." So apparently, they'd had opportunities when it might have been tempting to deny Christ, when maybe things would have gone a little easier for them in this pagan culture. But they had remained faithful. Jesus knew that their church had "little strength," which indicates that they were probably just a small church that lacked any significant clout or influence in the city.<sup>14</sup> <sup>15</sup> They didn't have a reputation for anything particularly grand or impressive... unless of course... you consider FAITHFULNESS impressive. What do you think? What's more impressive? The size and scale of a church, or the faithfulness and devotion of the followers within in it? The fact is, when Jesus returns, He's not going to commend E-Free Bemidji for having a huge building or a large attendance on Sunday mornings, or for having a bunch of money in our reserves or a big children's ministry or youth ministry. He's going to commend us, if we've remained faithful to Him.<sup>16</sup>

Revelation 3:9 really grabs our attention, "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." We talked about this "synagogue of Satan" before, back when we read the letter to the church in Smyrna.<sup>17</sup> <sup>18</sup> This doesn't mean that the practicing Jews in Philadelphia were having satanic worship services in their synagogue. But they were actively partnering in Satan's evil work by persecuting the Christian believers in their city.<sup>19</sup> This is what leads many commentators to believe that they were kicking Jewish Christ-followers out of the synagogue. Not to mention that Jesus Himself warned of this very thing back in John 15:20-16:2, "...If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.... They will treat you this way because of my name.... All this I have told you so that you will not fall away. They will put

---

<sup>13</sup> "The letters to Smyrna and Philadelphia do not contain any weaknesses, and the letter to Laodicea does not contain any strengths." Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 106.

<sup>14</sup> "means that the church lacked size and stature in the community... BUT they were faithful, and that has always been the [litmus] test of divine blessing rather than success [by the world's standards]." Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 189.

<sup>15</sup> Despite having very little power or influence in the city of Philadelphia, Jesus commends the believers there for remaining faithful to Him. See *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2594 footnote on Revelation 3:8.

<sup>16</sup> In 2 Timothy 4:7-8, Paul says, "...I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness...."

<sup>17</sup> See Revelation 2:9.

<sup>18</sup> "No archaeological evidence for a synagogue ('of Satan'; Revelation 3:9) has been found in the city. However, a 3C AD inscription was found 10 miles east of Philadelphia mentioning a 'synagogue of the Hebrews.'" Ege Yayinlari & Mark Wilson, *Biblical Turkey, Corrected 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.*, Zero Produksiyon, Istanbul, 2014, p. 297.

<sup>19</sup> Let's be clear. John is not making some kind of an antisemitic statement here. After all, John himself was a Jew. And Jesus, the One who this letter is from, was also a Jew.

you out of the synagogue....”<sup>20</sup> So when Jesus refers to the “Synagogue of Satan,” it’s “a bold metaphor directed against unbelieving and hostile Jews.”<sup>21 22 23</sup> All of this makes it quite likely that the Jews had indeed CLOSED the doors of the synagogue to the Christ-followers in Philadelphia, even to their own Jewish kin, who’d decided to follow Jesus.<sup>24</sup> And that’s why Jesus makes it clear, in the opening verses of His letter, that He’s placed an OPEN DOOR before them, one that NO ONE can shut!<sup>25 26</sup>

Jesus then makes an intriguing proclamation of what He will make them do: “I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.” (Revelation 3:9) Once again this echoes the Old Testament prophet Isaiah. Isaiah 60:14 says, “The children of your oppressors will come bowing before you; all who despise you will bow down at your feet and will call you the City of the LORD, Zion of the Holy One of Israel.”<sup>27</sup> The Jews would have seen the connection that Jesus is making here, and the unbelieving Jews would not have appreciated how Jesus chose to switch things around. You see, Isaiah’s verse was meant to be an indictment against the unbelieving Gentiles who had oppressed the Jews, and who would one day have to come and bow before the Jews.<sup>28</sup> But Jesus flips the script; He reframes it and uses it as an indictment against the unbelieving Jews.<sup>29</sup> This was a sobering warning to the unbelieving Jews living in Philadelphia who’d rejected Jesus as God’s Messiah, declaring that they were no longer a part of God’s righteous people. In other words, in Revelation 3:9, Jesus is providing vindication for

---

<sup>20</sup> Some of us will remember from our study through the book of Acts, that the Jews were the primary source of Christian persecution; in fact, the Jews were the primary reason the Christians had trouble with the Roman government. “the Jews were the primary opponents [of the Christians] and caused many more problems than the Roman authorities, who often were reacting to Jewish complaints.... (e.g., 13:45-52; 14:19; 17:6-9, 13; 18:12-17; 21:27-40)” Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, top of p. 131.

<sup>21</sup> *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2154 footnote on Revelation 3:9.

<sup>22</sup> See John 8:44 and 2 Corinthians 11:14-15.

<sup>23</sup> The Jews living in the city of Philadelphia were not in step with God’s Master Redemptive Plan for humankind. Much to the opposite, they were opposing the followers of Jesus openly. Instead of aligning themselves with God’s Messiah, Jesus Christ, and with those who were following Christ, they were aligning themselves with Satan. (Consider Matthew 16:23.) Romans 2:28-29 explains, “A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. 29 No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code....” (Also consider John 8:44-47 and Acts 13:10.) So they say they are Jews, but they really aren’t. At least not the Jews with whom God was pleased. Grant Osborne gives some helpful background information: “Rome had given the Jews the right to practice their religion, and they did not want this precious privilege threatened. In addition, in the 80s Judaism had excommunicated the Christian ‘heretics’ from their synagogues, and they wanted nothing to do with them.” Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 127.

<sup>24</sup> See *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2594 footnote on Revelation 3:7.

<sup>25</sup> So a primary source of persecution were unbelieving Jews in that area, who likely slandered Christians in Roman courts, “aligning with Satan against God’s purposes.” *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2591 footnote on Revelation 2:9.

<sup>26</sup> NT scholar G.K. Beale notes that this reference in verse 7 to who actually has the authority to open and shut, is probably a divine corrective “against the local synagogue, which claimed that only those worshiping within their doors could be considered God’s true people and which may even have excommunicated Christian Jews.... Christ’s followers could be assured that the doors to the true synagogue were open to them, whereas the doors remained closed to those who rejected Christ.” G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 284.

<sup>27</sup> See also Isaiah 49:23, “...They will bow down before you with their faces to the ground; they will lick the dust at your feet. Then you will know that I am the LORD; those who hope in me will not be disappointed.”

<sup>28</sup> See *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1189 footnote on Revelation 49:7.

<sup>29</sup> See Philippians 2:10-11.

these persecuted believers. Vindication meaning “proof that they were right.” Jesus turns the tables on the situation in Philadelphia, by authoritatively declaring who has God’s favor, and who will submit to whom.<sup>30 31</sup> Put another way, in the end, Christians will be vindicated for their faithful devotion to Christ. These Jewish unbelievers, who were persecuting these Jewish and Gentile Christians for their faith, will one day have to acknowledge that these Christ-followers were right about Jesus, and that they were right, about His great love for them.<sup>32</sup>

Jesus then makes a promise to these faithful believers in Revelation 3:10, “Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.” Believe it or not, verse 10 is one of the most highly discussed verses in the entire book of Revelation. The discussion centers around this phrase “keep you from,” or more precisely, the word “from.” The Greek word is just two letters “ἐκ,” with a little dash over the “e” (epsilon). Some of you may even have a footnote in your study Bible which explains that “The Greek for this phrase can mean either ‘keep you from undergoing’ or ‘keep you through.’”<sup>33</sup> Since this particular preposition has such a wide range of meaning, it’s difficult to be certain which nuance is intended. Jesus is either saying that He will “keep them THROUGH” during the time that they’re in “the hour of trial,” or He’s saying that He will “keep them FROM UNDERGOING” “the hour of trial,” by getting them out of there before it begins (What’s some call “the rapture.”)<sup>34 35</sup> All of this often leads to a robust discussion of pre-trib versus post-trib positions. But we’re not going to do that, because for this particular sermon series, we’ve agreed from the get-go, that our focus will be on “Taking Revelation to Heart.”<sup>36</sup> One way of taking this to heart is to note that Jesus mentions this same idea of

---

<sup>30</sup> “Jesus’ followers will be vindicated before their Jewish prosecutors, which IRONICALLY fulfills Old Testament prophecies, that Gentile oppressors would bow down before Israel.” *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, pp. 2594-2595 footnote on Revelation 3:9.

<sup>31</sup> In other words, “Christ is promising these persecuted Christians that they would be vindicated by God.... This [falling down at their feet] is submission, not worship.” Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 191.

<sup>32</sup> This “parallels 2:26-27 where the faithful saints are promised that they will participate in the judgment of their (and God’s) enemies.... [By the way] It is important to realize that this is not antisemitism. The Jewish people...are now part of the world due to their unbelief and rejection of the true Messiah. Thus they will experience judgment, but elsewhere in Revelation as part of ‘the nations’ many of them will also experience conversion.” Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 191.

<sup>33</sup> *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2154 footnote on Revelation 3:10.

<sup>34</sup> “The debate is whether it means ‘protect from’ or ‘remove from,’ and the issue centers on the significance of ἐκ (out of). Many scholars...connect this with John 17:15, ‘My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from [also τηρέω ἐκ] the evil one.... [So] it connotes not exemption from trials but protection within trials.’” Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 192.

<sup>35</sup> “Some commentators have affirmed that the way in which Christ will protect believers from the coming tribulation of 3:10 is by physically “rapturing” them from earth into heaven. This is primarily argued on the basis that this view best accords with the most logical and literal force of τηρέω ἐκ (“keep from”). However, Gundry has shown the improbability of this understanding by demonstrating parallels between Rev. 3:10 and John 17:15, which is the only other NT occurrence of τηρέω with ἐκ: there Christ prays, “I ask not that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from (τηρήσεις αὐτοὺς ἐκ) the evil one.” Thus Jesus denies a physical removal from tribulation and affirms a spiritual protection from the devil.” G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 290–291.

<sup>36</sup> So we’re going to by-pass what could be a rather lengthy, deep dive into particular End Times positions.

“keeping you from”<sup>37</sup> in His prayer in John 17:15, “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.” (The *ESV* says “KEEP them from.”) In other words, He asks His Heavenly Father to KEEP His followers from harm, DURING their time in this fallen world. So even though God does sometimes allow believers to go through trials, we can take comfort in the fact that He keeps us THROUGH those trials. He strengthens us so that we can endure whatever this world throws at us.<sup>38</sup> And that’s precisely the kind of encouragement that the persecuted believers in Philadelphia needed at this time in history.<sup>39</sup>

Jesus’ words of vindication continue with two promises in Revelation 3:12, “The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them 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 them my new name.” So Jesus promises to make them a PILLAR and to give them a NEW NAME.

In the 1<sup>st</sup> century, the temple was understood as the place where God’s presence would dwell.<sup>40</sup> When Jesus says that He’ll make them “a pillar in the temple of my God,” it’s yet another bold reminder that God’s presence isn’t limited to any EARTHLY synagogue or temple.<sup>41</sup> Jesus is now referring to God’s HEAVENLY temple, which doesn’t have restricted access areas, where only certain peoples or nations or Levites are allowed. Jesus is clarifying once again, that He has the authority to determine who has access; He will make these believers a pillar in God’s eternal temple.<sup>42</sup> Jesus promises not only to make them pillars, but also to etch His name on these pillars.<sup>43 44</sup> New Testament scholar Grant Osborne calls this the 3-fold name, the name of my God, the name of the city, and the new name.<sup>45</sup> Writing the “name of my God” on them, indicates that they belong to God,

---

<sup>37</sup> In fact, it’s the very same Greek word, τηρέω = “Ⓣ to cause a state, condition, or activity to continue, keep, hold, reserve, preserve someone or something... Ⓣ of being protective... keep τινα ἐκ τινος someone from someone or something. John 17:15; Revelation 3:10b.” (William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1002.)

<sup>38</sup> Consider 1 Corinthians 10:13 and John 16:33.

<sup>39</sup> We find another encouraging word of vindication for faithful Christian living in 2 Peter 2:4-9, especially regarding Lot, “...a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless 8 (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)—9 if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment.”

<sup>40</sup> “the place where God’s presence dwells. Thus no longer may only one tribe (Levites) go into God’s presence, but all believers serve God there, for they have been made priests in God’s service (see 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).” *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, pp. 2159-2160 footnote on Revelation 7:15.

<sup>41</sup> And it’s a good thing that it wasn’t, because by this time in history, the earthly temple had been destroyed.

<sup>42</sup> “Victorious believers will never be excluded from God’s presence in the new Jerusalem.” *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2595 footnote on Revelation 3:12.

<sup>43</sup> Writing on pillars was a common practice in the 1st century. See Ege Yayınlari & Mark Wilson, *Biblical Turkey, Corrected 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.*, Zero Produksiyon, Istanbul, 2014, p. 214.

<sup>44</sup> “We must remember that both the city (due to earthquakes and economic disasters) and the church (due to persecution) had never felt security or permanence, so this promise must have been most welcome.” Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 196.

<sup>45</sup> See “3-fold” explanation by Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 199.

that they are His children.<sup>46</sup> Writing the “name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem” on them indicates, that they were authorized citizens of heaven.<sup>47 48</sup> At the end of verse 12, Jesus says, “...I will also write on them my new name.”<sup>49</sup> This one’s a little more difficult to decipher because apparently this “new name” will remain unknown to us, until Jesus’ 2<sup>nd</sup> coming.<sup>50 51</sup> However, there’s something much more important to focus on than what this “new name” will be. It’s more important that we focus on being VICTORIOUS, so that we’ll be made pillars in God’s heavenly temple, pillars upon which Jesus will write His new name for eternity.<sup>52 53</sup>

Jesus explains what He means by being victorious in Revelation 3:11, “I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.” The crown in verse 11 isn’t referring to a kingly crown, but rather to a victor’s crown in a race or a competition.<sup>54</sup> At this time in history it would have been a laurel wreath,<sup>55</sup> which would have been plentiful in Philadelphia since it was famous for its games.<sup>56</sup> Now, I actually took this picture in Ephesus, but it’s a good illustration of what was common all throughout the 1<sup>st</sup> century world. This is Nike, the Greek goddess of victory.<sup>57</sup> You’ll notice the wreath in her left hand (which is the victor’s crown mentioned in verse 11). You’ll also note the palm branch in her right hand, which was another symbol of victory. Just below her right hand, you’ll notice what some have described as a “swoosh” in her robe, which should look familiar to anyone who’s wears the Nike brand today.<sup>58</sup> A scholar named Mark Wilson makes this



---

<sup>46</sup> See Romans 8:14-17.

<sup>47</sup> Philadelphia had a ROUGH history of being decimated by massive earthquakes, so “it must have been tremendously encouraging [for these believers] to know they were citizens of an eternal city.” Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 199.

<sup>48</sup> Hebrews 12:28 reminds us, “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.” We need this kind of encouragement just as much in our own day. The last two years of this pandemic has been a lot like an earthquake, reminding us of just how unstable our world can be. What a great reminder that the eternal home which awaits us, CANNOT be shaken.

<sup>49</sup> Philippians 2:9 tells us God gave Jesus “the name that is above every name.”

<sup>50</sup> See Revelation 19:12.

<sup>51</sup> Scholar Mark Johnson notes: “[The city of] Philadelphia was given a new name twice in the first century: first ‘Neocaesarea’ after the AD 17 earthquake in gratitude for the generosity of Tiberius, second ‘Flavia,’ the wife of Vespasian after the emperor gave financial assistance following a similar catastrophe.” Ege Yayinlari & Mark Wilson, *Biblical Turkey, Corrected 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.*, Zero Produksiyon, Istanbul, 2014, p. 297.

<sup>52</sup> “The most amazing thing is not the meaning of the ‘new name’ but the fact that we will share it.” Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 199.

<sup>53</sup> Consider the end of Luke 10:20.

<sup>54</sup> See *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2152 footnote on Revelation 2:10.

<sup>55</sup> So not a diadem (i.e. Rev. 12:3), but a stephanos (Rev. 3:11).

<sup>56</sup> *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2591 footnote on Revelation 2:10.

<sup>57</sup> The marble relief pictured here is actually from the 4C AD, but “Nike’s depiction is a traditional one found on the coins of Asian cities from the 1C AD.” Ege Yayinlari & Mark Wilson, *Biblical Turkey, Corrected 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.*, Zero Produksiyon, Istanbul, 2014, p. 215.

<sup>58</sup> I’ve also read that the Nike swoosh was designed based on her wings. Either option is plausible.

helpful connection for us: “The verbal form of [Nike’s] name, nikao,<sup>59</sup> [which means “to be victorious] is an important word in Revelation. The letters to the seven churches end with promises given to the victors....”<sup>60</sup>

In some ways though, images of Nike may distract us from what it truly means to be victorious in the Christian life. You see, victory in the Christian life isn’t about being the best, or the strongest, or the fastest. Here’s how Jesus defines victory: “Hold on to what you have.”<sup>61</sup> But, other than persecution and a tiny little church, what did the believers in Philadelphia really have to hold onto...? Revelation 3:8 already told us, “...you have kept my word and have not denied my name.” So they had God’s Word and they had Jesus’ name. In order to be victorious, they simply needed to HOLD ON to what they already had.<sup>62</sup> Jesus is reassuring the believers in Philadelphia that they were already living out a daily, victorious Christian life; all they needed to do was hold on, to stay the course, to not give up, to endure to the end.<sup>63</sup> All of this sure makes it seem like it must have been getting difficult for them to hold on. It makes us wonder if the ongoing barrage of persecution and worldly pressure was beginning to really take its toll on the church in Philadelphia? In fact, they’re urged to hold on, “SO THAT no one will take your crown,” but how could someone take their crown? The only way they could take their crown is if they failed to hold on to Jesus, if they failed to keep His word or if they chose to deny His name.<sup>64</sup>

Many of us can probably relate to this struggle, here in our own church, in our own day and age? Living out a victorious Christian life has its share of challenges, in any day and age, but lately it seems to be getting even more challenging. We may not be facing persecution from “the synagogue of Satan,” but there sure is plenty of pressure to deny Jesus’ name; plenty of pressure to surrender our convictions about the authoritative teachings of God’s Word. The church in Philadelphia gives us a godly example, of what Christ-followers are supposed to do, in the face of a hostile world that

---

<sup>59</sup> νικάω = “(1) to win in the face of obstacles, be victor, conquer, overcome, prevail... (2) in a battle or contest... Of the good athlete... Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:7.” (William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 673.)

<sup>60</sup> “...The church in Smyrna was promised a crown, or wreath, if they are faithful.” Ege Yayinlari & Mark Wilson, *Biblical Turkey, Corrected 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.*, Zero Produksiyon, Istanbul, 2014, p. 215.

<sup>61</sup> We might say KEEP HOLDING ON TO JESUS! “The emphasis is on the continual effort (present tense) needed to maintain their walk with Christ.”

<sup>62</sup> The fact is, the only reason that we’re able to have any kind of victory at all in the Christian life, is that we’ve been invited to share in Jesus’ ultimate victory at the cross.

<sup>63</sup> This is yet another reminder for believers to hold on until Jesus’ 2nd coming. But let’s keep in mind that this reminder comes at a time in history when Jesus is also already there, walking among His churches and ministering to their current needs. Consider Revelation 2:5, 16, and 25 which seem to have a sense of Jesus coming even before His ultimate 2<sup>nd</sup> coming.

<sup>64</sup> Consider 1 Corinthians 9:25-27, especially verse 27 “...I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.” 1 Corinthians 10:12 warns us, “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” This is even more sobering when read in its entire context, 1 Corinthians 10:1-13. Verse 11 summarizes, “These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come.”



becomes more and more difficult to bear: HOLD ON. “Hold on to what we have,” to what we know to be right and true and good. Hold on, to that!