



Recently, I was listening to a podcast where some Christians were discussing the ad campaign during the Super Bowl where it showed Jesus washing the feet of various people. One of the men in the discussion then commented on how he wondered how effective this ad was when most people probably don't even know what foot washing means – even Christians. Then he went back to the cultural understanding of it: only the lowest of the low on the social ladder did this. Then, in the narrative, Peter wants to stop Jesus from doing it for him. Why was Peter resistant? There could be many reasons, but one of the reasons was probably because Jesus was revealing a change of social order. They followed Jesus, and if Jesus is saying he's a slave, then what does that mean for them? It means they're lower than slaves. I read one commentary that said that the disciples would have been maybe understood it if Jesus told them to wash his feet, but Jesus then tells them that they are to wash one another's feet and be enslaved to others. How can Jesus want them to live that way? Isn't he the King? Then he shouldn't act like a slave. Isn't he the Messiah? Well, then they will rule under his rule. Yet again, Jesus is shaking things up. He's calling them to a life of humility. And, at the beginning of John 13, we're told that Jesus does this to show the extent of his love. In a similar way, Jesus calls his followers to show this immense love. Even to the point of washing the feet of our enemies – like Jesus washed Judas' feet.

All of this is a shocking role reversal for the disciples, but I think it's a shocking role reversal for us, too. **What does it mean for you and me to be followers of Jesus in this world?** I'm reminded where Jesus says elsewhere that he is sending the disciples out in the world like "sheep among wolves" (cf. Matt. 10:16). Why didn't say that he sends us out like lions among wolves or eagles among birds or sharks among minnows? Why did Jesus say "sheep among wolves?"

I can't help but wonder if we struggle with the same temptation as the disciples. We have a social order in our minds. We have expectations on how people must treat us and if they don't, then we will reject them. This hit close to home in my own heart this past week when I was sharing with another elder what God is revealing in my own heart, and he said something like, "That reminds me of what I'm working on memorizing in 1 Corinthians 13. Love is not irritable or resentful." He went on to say that we're quick to remember "Love is patient and kind," but what about all the other statements in 1 Corinthians 13? I thanked him for sharing this with me because I can get irritable towards people who get irritated towards others. And if not careful, that irritation can turn to resentment. And what does that mean for my heart if I act in those ways? It means I'm not living in the love of God. And, that was the point in the footwashing of Jesus – to reveal the immensity of God's love, and Jesus is calling us to be showered with God's love so that then we can go out in the world and showers others with the love of God.

But, again, that's not easy. It's actually impossible in our own strength because it involves endurance and perseverance because people, at the core of their sinfulness, reject pure love because pure love looked like weakness. But let me ask you: was Jesus weak when he washed the disciples feet? Was Jesus weak when he let people take him to the cross? No. And, are followers of Jesus weak when they love others with incredible endurance? Absolutely not. That's an impossible kind of power that the Spirit works in those who see and savor Jesus.

I say all of this because in the letter we're looking at today to the church in Philadelphia, we have a church that has been enduring. It is being faithful as servants, but Jesus knows their weariness. Their weakness. And Jesus doesn't want them to lose heart and give in. Here he reminds them that his way of weakness and meekness is *the way* of salvation. Just as Jesus' death led to resurrection, so their dying to self daily leads to resurrection. Instead of resorting to worldly tactics to try to maintain power and control, we are called in Jesus' words here to boast in our weaknesses and focus our affections on Jesus. Through this kind of faithfulness to Christ, the gospel message goes forth and lives are, and can be, transformed in this world.

Will we listen to our King Jesus' words here? Do you feel your weakness and do you feel exhausted in enduring the brokenness of this world? Are you irritated or resentful? Do you feel you've lost endurance? This letter is for you. And so, the main idea of the sermon today is the following: **Jesus' glory compels us together, in our weakness, to love others all the way to a glorious inheritance. "Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches."**¹ Now, please take a moment to pray for yourself and the church family that the Lord would impress on our hearts what we need to hear.

Before we go into the text this morning, let's get a little bit of a history lesson on the city of Philadelphia. Philadelphia was primarily meant to spread the Greek culture into the cities that surrounded it. But it had its difficulties. Philadelphia was very close to seismic activity. In A.D. 17, an earthquake affected Philadelphia, Sardis and other cities in that region. Because Philadelphia was closer to the epicenter, it experienced more shocks from the seismic activity in following years. However, Caesar Tiberius did give money for the rebuilding of the city. In gratitude, the city (along with other cities) made a monument for Tiberius and eventually changed its name to Neocaesarea. Having said this, due to the earthquake activity in Philadelphia, many residents of Philadelphia ended up living in huts or booths outside of Philadelphia. People used various devices to also support and strengthen their houses from the recurring shocks. There was always dread of a new disaster and that feeling probably was still around when this letter to Philadelphia was written. So, Jesus takes this idea of turbulence, that the church would know, and applies it to them spiritually. They're experiencing spiritual turbulence and they feel it. Are they safe? Will aftershocks get worse? And in these words, Jesus reminds them of their security and hope in him.

1. Jesus' glory compels us. . .

What do we need most in our joys and trials of life? Often, we can be tempted to think we just need certain solutions or paths or plans, but I'm struck with Jesus' persistence and insistence with each letter. What we need most in *every* situation of our lives is not "what" but *who*. We need *Jesus*. We need to behold more of his glory. We need to seek him and pray that our vision of him increases. Behold the glory of Jesus to the Philadelphian church. He reveals himself as the Holy One, True, and the one who holds the keys of David.

Jesus is holy. This word for "holy" can mean to be set apart, but it can also mean to be "otherly" in glory and magnificence. Think of Isaiah's vision of God in Isaiah 6. A temple throne room with angels with six wings constantly crying out "Holy, Holy, Holy!" The Lord's magnificence is so wondrous that inanimate objects shake and the room fills with smoke. Isaiah is overwhelmed with the glory and feels unworthy to even enter into the presence of the holy God. Then in John 12:41, Jesus says that Isaiah was talking about him. And even in Revelation, John (the disciple who loved Jesus passionately) fell before Jesus because his glory was so great! Can you picture this? Jesus is the set apart, completely otherly, high and

¹ [Christian Standard Bible](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), Re 3:6.

lifted up, ruler over all things. He reigns. Jesus, the servant, is the Holy One over all! Do you believe Jesus is this glorious and in control? The next revelation Jesus gives of himself is:

Jesus is True. Jesus does not say that He tells the truth. Although it is true that Jesus tells the truth. Jesus says that he *is* true. I'm reminded of Hebrews 6:13 says that it is impossible for God to lie and this chapter also states that **"since he had no one greater to swear by, he swore by himself. . ."**² In other words, because God is Holy and God is True, there is no greater thing to swear by than Himself. His very being is a believer's security. He will follow through on his promises. Jesus is making the same promises to the Philadelphian church. Because He is Holy and True. Because He reigns on high and the train of His robe fills the temple and because He is true, never lying but always faithful to Himself and to His children, He can and ought to be trusted.

Therefore, Jesus has the key of David. . . .

I think that it's on the basis of these realities that we read the following phrase: the one who has the key of David, who opens and no one will close, and who closes and no one opens:³ He is holy and true; therefore, he has the key of David – keeping doors open and shut. The question is, "What does this mean?" This is connected to the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 22:22. In that context, God is giving a man named Eliakim, the chief steward for the King, ruling authority in Israel. And these words to Eliakim are prophetic for the future. These words in Revelation reveal that Jesus is the ultimate and final ruler. Jesus is the one who has the key of David.

Now, we ask the question, "Why does this matter?" In Revelation 1:18, we read that Jesus carries the keys of Hades and of Death. This is referencing the entire afterlife. Jesus has authority over these places and who goes to each of these places. He is the sovereign who knows; therefore, he judges rightly and also justly places people into these locations. Now, we gain further insight into the judgment of Jesus after this life by hearing him say that he has the key of David. Just like Eliakim's key gave him authority over the earthly kingdom of Israel in his day, Jesus says in fullest fashion that he has the key of David over a real earthly Kingdom that will never fade away.

Now, let's combine all the statements of Jesus here in this vision to Philadelphia. Jesus, the one who is holy and true is the one who has the key of David! In the midst of this broken, fallen, war-torn world where people hurt people; Jesus is over all and all of us who trust him have hope! The world isn't winning, Jesus has and is and will win! How do we know this? Because of what we read next: he is the one "who opens and no one shuts and shuts and no one opens." I'll explain that phrase a little more later, but for now, I simply want to say that's a phrase of victory! While Philadelphia might feel like they're about ready to give in, Jesus is winning through them! They can believe him. He's worthy of their trust. This leads to the next point:

2. . . . together, in our weakness, to love others. . . .

Philadelphia feels their weakness. Yet, that doesn't mean they're losing. Remember this. When we feel weak we're tempted to think that's the worst scenario, but it's actually the best. It's actually the best moment for God's power to be revealed! Read verse 8: I know your works. Look, I have placed before you an open door that no one can close because you have but little power; yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.⁴

² [Christian Standard Bible](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), Heb 6:13.

³ [Christian Standard Bible](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), Re 3:7.

⁴ [Christian Standard Bible](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), Re 3:8.

The Christians in Philadelphia have little power. They have been made painfully aware of their weaknesses through persecution and trials. Many people, myself included, can want to resist feeling weak and we can try to polish ourselves up to try to “handle” the trials that come our way. But trials are meant to remind us of our inability and to cause us to run to Christ. If we think we can “handle” life apart from Christ, we’re delusional. Trials are a gift to remind us of our dependence on the Lord. Remember the apostle Paul’s trials? He prayed that they would disappear. God said no. Paul then says this: **Therefore, so that I would not exalt myself, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to torment me so that I would not exalt myself.** ⁸ **Concerning this, I pleaded with the Lord three times that it would leave me.** ⁹ **But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness.” Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may reside in me.** ¹⁰ **So I take pleasure in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and in difficulties, for the sake of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**⁵

Ventura, this mindset is not just to be Paul’s mindset. It’s not just meant to be Philadelphia’s mindset. It is to be *our* mindset. Boast all the more gladly in weaknesses. Why? Because when I know and embrace my weakness, then I am actually strong because my boast then is not in myself. It’s in Christ! Do you know this? If you don’t, I urge you to pray the Lord makes this real for you. Oh how many trials and pains I’ve gone through in my life, and I’ve often lost sight of Christ in the midst of them, but the Lord has graciously been patient with me and enabled me to see his glory is superior! My pains pale in comparison to knowing the gloriousness of Jesus. So, give me Jesus! Can we say this together?

This is what the Philadelphian church needed to be reminded of. This is our need as well because we can be tempted to think, “Why serve Jesus if he doesn’t give me an easy life?” But if we have that mindset, we miss out on a relationship with God. We miss out on revealing the glory of God to others. But even as I say this, you could think, “Easier said than done, Pastor Timothy.” But I’m not saying it’s easy. This is impossible apart from the Spirit at work in our hearts. Only by the Spirit will any of us say that knowing Jesus is worth all. All loss for the sake of knowing Jesus. He’s that glorious! Do you know this Savior? Is he worthy to you? If not, I pray you’d pray for the Spirit’s illumination.

This is what Peter needed to know at his footwashing. Is Jesus so worthy that he’d be willing to be a slave of the Servant King? At first, Peter resisted Jesus washing his feet, but Jesus said, “Then you can’t have me.” There’s a question for all of us here: Do we really want Jesus or just stuff? And the Spirit can give us such a vision of our Lord that we will endure because he is that worthy! Do you see him? Do you know him? Even if your experiences are confusing, Jesus is worthy to be praised and trusted.

And so, we see the Philadelphian church as an example of faithfulness to Christ even while they are experiencing persecution. Read the end of verse 8 again: yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.⁶ This is so different from the church at Sardis, that we looked at last week. They appeared to have life, but they were dead. But the Philadelphian church was genuine. They really did love Jesus. They refused to deny Jesus’ glory. That’s what “name” means. Jesus was worthy of all their hope, affections, and their entire life. Do you see how the Philadelphian church endured not simply because they were checking off a list of commands, but because the Word was real to them, God was real to them. Jesus was real to them! They knew Jesus. They loved Jesus. They clung to Jesus.

Oh, it’s often in the midst of trials and pains and sufferings in this life that God refines our affections, and those of us who trust Jesus are brought to greater places where we can say, “I can lose everything, but if I have Jesus, I have everything.” Praise the Lord for this kind of work. It’s not something we can

⁵ [Christian Standard Bible](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), 2 Co 12:7–10.

⁶ [Christian Standard Bible](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), Re 3:8.

conjure up in ourselves. This is a miracle of God. Do you know this work? If you do, take heart in the encouragement to Philadelphia.

Philadelphians had a door opened that no one could shut. I believe the open door is referring to the proclamation of the gospel. In various other passages of Scripture, an open door refers to the freedom to proclaim Jesus and the good news of his life, death, resurrection and reign. So, what does this mean for the church at Philadelphia and for us? Well, the church is feeling weak, but because they are part of Jesus' church, the gates of hell will not prevail against it, and the One who has the key to the throne of David has opened the door wide so that the gospel will be proclaimed through word and actions and people will come to know Him.

This should motivate us even in our day. We don't know how wide the door is here in Holland, but as long as we are still here, as we boast in our weakness, we proclaim the gospel and can be confident that God is drawing people to Himself. No matter how weak we feel. No matter how resisted we feel, don't become weary in doing well because in due time you will reap a harvest if you do not give up (Gal. 6:9).

At this point, the church could say, "Yeah but, Jesus, do you see the problems in our midst?" Have you ever said "Yeah but" to God? Like, I know your promises, but what about this thing in my life or these people? Oh, Jesus sees! As he saw with the Philadelphians, he sees with us. In Philadelphia, Jesus talks about people who claim to be Jews, but Jesus says they're not. What does that mean? Well, I take that to mean that they were national Jews, but they weren't Jews inwardly. Meaning, they were hostile to Jesus. They were causing problems for the church in Philadelphia. But Jesus says they won't stop the gospel message. The door is open and they can't shut it!

Jesus then goes far enough to say that the Jewish people will "bow down before their feet." I think these are words of both judgment and also salvation. Jewish people will be humbled and either turn from their sins and trust Jesus or they will be humbled through their rejection and be judged. Either way, Jesus, the Holy One who is Truth and holds the Key of David will judge and save. The Philadelphians don't need to worry themselves over these people. The Philadelphians aren't in control of these people. Jesus is. And, as a result, the Philadelphian people are set free to continue to love and proclaim the gospel message. The door is open! Keep living and loving faithfully. The same is true for us, Ventura. As we experience pains and maybe even hostility from the world, don't give into resentment or irritableness or impatience. Instead, open wider. Serve our neighbors and community in greater ways. Let's give ourselves as Christ has given himself for us!

But you could say, "How can I do this?!" Answer: Because we're eternally secure! Jesus protects us from trials. Even if we die, we have life forever! And even in trials, we're protected. Let's read verses 10-11: ¹⁰ Because you have kept my command to endure, I will also keep you from the hour of testing that is going to come on 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 takes your crown. ⁷

Jesus will protect them from greater trials. I do believe that this is talking about something literal in Philadelphia's time, but I also think that this can reference something that's future and hasn't happened yet for Christ's church. Jesus says that he is coming quickly to this whole world. The whole world, for Philadelphia, could be reference the Roman Empire and the hour of trial was great problems that was brought out on the Roman Empire. The Philadelphians were kept from this. This doesn't mean that they were taken out of it, but much like the Israelites were kept from plagues – while still living in Egypt, the Philadelphians were sovereignly protected by God. In a more grand fashion, I think that this passage

⁷ [Christian Standard Bible](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), Re 3:10–11.

alludes to a future day when the trials and struggles are so great that God protects his children from a future great tribulation and keeps them from that hour in order to test the unbelieving world.

It's on the basis of these things that we hear Jesus say: Therefore, "Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown." With Jesus mentioning the need for perseverance in this letter helps us to understand what this crown is: the wreath that athletes received when finishing their race. Yes, we are sheep among wolves, but we are victorious! This gives us great hope to know that God is taking care of us. And, even if we think that this life right now is difficult, Jesus gives us grace to endure. And, His grace is sufficient because He's Holy and True. And, Jesus is saying to all of us even today, "I'll protect you always!"

3. . . all the way to a glorious inheritance.

Reread verse 12 with me: ¹² "The one who conquers I will make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will never go out again. 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 my new name. ⁸

Conquerors will become a "pillar." Gloriously, those of us who are weak (not perfect, but depend on Jesus) are called conquerors!!! Because of our ability? No! Because of Jesus. And then we're told we are "pillars." Pillars in and of themselves seem to represent stability. And, Jesus says that the church of Philadelphia will be in the temple of God, never to be removed. This brings about a joyous hope to the people of Philadelphia – who many of them have moved out of the city itself because of the instability the land has brought. Even the Caesar couldn't guarantee stability in Philadelphia. But, Jesus as the holder of the Keys to the Kingdom, guarantees that we are stable in the New Heaven and New Earth. We will never be shaken no matter the persecution. Will we embrace our calling? We're sheep among wolves, and we, with Jesus, are conquerors – held secure.

Conquerors are sealed with names. To have God's name on You represents his ownership and great care for you. He will not trash anyone with *his name* on them! He loves you dearly and will exalt you in the right time! We also read that all believers will have the name of the city of God written on them. Again, to have this name written on a believer indicates that that they are a part of the city itself. The eternal God is bringing this city down. Ventura, when we're tempted to think this world is too broken and we've lost any semblance of stability in this world, good! Remember this world was never our home in the first place. We are looking for a city whose builder and maker is God! We are journeying home, and God ensures we'll get there. He writes its name on us!

Finally, we read one more name. It is Jesus' own new name. Again, names involve ownership and also involve the character of the person. I believe this refers to greater glory to come. We know Jesus in this life through a dimly lit glass. While the Scriptures accurately portray Him, we still have a very limited understanding of Him. Yet, what we know of Him is perfectly glorious. Yet, Jesus is saying that there's going to be a day when we will understand Him in greater and more glorious ways than we ever understood Him on this earth. This doesn't contradict what we know of Him now, but it reveals that we will learn more of His glorious nature. To those who love Christ, this is such a great encouragement! And, I believe this is true of the Father and Spirit as well, but in this passage, we get a glimpse that there are going to be new realities that we've never understood.

Jesus' glory compels us together, in our weakness, to love others all the way to a glorious inheritance.

"Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. ⁹

⁸ [Christian Standard Bible](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), Re 3:12.

⁹ [Christian Standard Bible](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), Re 3:13.