

John Ames is a fictional pastor in a small town in Iowa in one of my favorite books named Gilead. WWI is raging and the Spanish flu is ravaging the world. People wore masks and many churches have cancelled services. He sits down and writes what he feels is his best sermon. He strives to explain pacifism, rage against the horrors of the war, and defend the sovereignty of God in the midst of great suffering. He feels great about the sermon. But he sits down and realizes the only people in his small church will be a few old widows, who are risking their very lives to come to church, who don't love war anyway. So he burns the sermon and preaches an encouraging gospel message instead. This part of the book has always stayed with me. Because I love listening to passionate fire and brimstone sermons. But here a pastor threw one away because he knew it wasn't what his church actually needed.

That is kind of what happens in our letter this morning. Much of our letters in Revelation have been a little fire and brimstone. God has let each of these churches have it for their sinfulness. And there have been calls to repent and return before it is too late. But that is not what happens to the church in Philadelphia. They are the only church doing well. So they will not be rebuked and instead are encouraged. Because it is what this church needs.

Of all the letters to the churches, this is the one our church most needs to hear. I don't think we, as a church, have the problems these other churches do. But I do think the message to Philadelphia is for us.

Turn with me to Revelation 3:7-13

I. A little power is more than enough (v. 7-8)

A little power is genuinely all that you need.

There's a phrase here early in the letter, where Jesus acknowledges that the church does not have power.

They're not a strong church they are not the most impressive church and yet God can use their weakness.

This is a theme that we see all throughout the Scriptures.

We heard it in our call to worship in 1 Corinthians 1.

God does not require those with great power or influence or ability.
In fact, God often uses the weakest and the lowest and the most forgotten
in order to do the most incredible things.

Because the power of a Christian life does not come from the Christian,
but from Christ.

Let me say that the power of a Christian life doesn't come from the
Christian, but from the Christ.

What makes us powerful is not even necessarily our own faith than our own
ability, but it is Jesus

So again, the letter begins with the description of God.

But this description is not just reminding them of what they need to
remember about Jesus.

This description also reminds them where the true power comes from
The true power that they have comes from who Jesus is.

Verse 7, **"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: 'The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.'"**

Jesus is the holy one.

It's not just a description of how He lives. It is who he is.

There is no part of Jesus that is not holy.

There is no part of Jesus that is not righteous and pure.

And the holy one of Israel is a Messianic title.

It is one of the ways that the prophet Isaiah like to describe the Messiah.

He is the one who is holy

He also is true.

It is not merely that Jesus is someone who always tells the truth.

It is not just that Jesus never lies or mislead or withhold the truth.

Jesus is the truth.

Jesus is the arbiter of what is true.

Jesus is not just an option of truth.

A lot of times you will hear these days of phrase called my truth.
Because we live in a postmodern world where truth is up for debate, and everybody can have some view or some hold of the truth.
But Jesus is the way the light and the truth.
He is the only truth.
So the power that we have comes not from ourselves, but because we follow the God who is the truth.
His truth gives us power.

We also see that He has the keys of David.
David was arguably the greatest king and Israel's history.
Israel was longing and waiting for a king who would come He would be like David who would rule forever.
Jesus having the keys of David means He has the authority of David.
He has the power of David.

And the rest of the phrase of opening and shutting really is about who can be in the kingdom of God.
So only one way you can get into the kingdom of God.
There's only one way that you can find eternal life.
There's only one way that you can live after you die.
There is only one way that the life you live after death.
And that is through Jesus Christ.
Jesus is the one who holds the keys who decides who gets in and who gets out.
It's not decided by bureaucrats or philosophers or academics.
It is not up to you. It is not up to me. It is up to Jesus. He holds the keys.
Not our own power or faith.
And this should encourage us.

Verse 8, **"I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name."**

Jesus says that He knows their deeds.
He knows all of their works.
He knows all that they have done.
And He has said this to a number of different churches.
He has let them know and reminded them that He knows the truth,
What they have done on public and what they've done in the dark.
But the interesting thing about the church in Philadelphia so God says He knows all of their deeds and He has nothing negative to say.

This is the only letter where there is no rebuke.
There is no sin that is called out.
And there's no call to repent.
It's not because Jesus hasn't looked very hard.
He knows their works.
But He calls them faithful.

Because we do not need power, we need faithfulness.
The church in Philadelphia has no power, but they have faithfulness
The church in Philadelphia has no influence. They have been faithful.

If we are honest most Americans would rather have power than faithfulness.
We would rather be significant than faithful.
We would rather be famous and be faithful.

Maybe we would tweak it a little bit.
Maybe we would say well I still only be faithful but how about I'm only 80% faithful and I get to be a bit more famous.
I'll take a bit more power a bit more influence.

But most of us will not sign up for a life where we could be 100% faithful and have no power.
But that's what Philadelphia does.

I used to have great big dreams and desires.

I used to wanna have a lot of influence and a lot of power.

I still have some of that impulse and it is still part of my flesh I have to fight against.

But you know, I used to dream of leading great revivals or preaching to tens of thousands.

And there are ways that we make it seem like it's about God, the kingdom and caring about the lost when it is really about our desires.

Too often we can make it seem as if the real Christians are the ones who do something great.

We think those in D.C. or in large places, or who have big ministries are who we should look too and be like.

But we do not need any of that.

A little power and a lot of faithfulness is enough.

Quite faithfulness, it's worth more than a lifetime of accomplishment.

This church does not have much power they do not have much influence, but they have refused to deny the name of Jesus.

The city of Philadelphia is still lost.

There is not a revival breaking out there.

The church is not huge. Its pastors are not well known in the community.

They have not done anything great or made the newspaper.

But they have been faithful with the little power they have.

That is how it needs to be with us.

We don't need to be discouraged if Duncan has not been changed or transformed because of us.

And if God decides to use us to do some of those other things wonderful praise God, but will do us if we do the great things that we are unfaithful

Philadelphia is praised for their faithfulness.

Philadelphia is a church that would get mocked and made fun of an order in age, but they are faithful.

The pastor of the church of Philadelphia would not be invited to come preach on the concert circuit.

We would not buy books from the pastor of the church in Philadelphia.

We would probably not listen to the sermons that come out of this church.

We would drive by this church and not think anything of it and yet this church is faithful, and God is pleased.

God does not tell them that He wishes they were bigger more wonderful.

He reminds them again that they will get to be in the kingdom.

That those are powerful in the world cannot keep them out.

That is their faithfulness and their faith in Jesus of significant.

The way this applies to us.

We can care about our place in the world.

We can long for power and influence and that's okay.

But much more than that we need to long to be faithful.

And we need to see that we don't need power or significance.

Maybe you had a dream that you would be in ministry and that's not how it worked out.

Or maybe you had a dream that you would lead Bible studies and then everyone wanna come and be really made a difference from you.

Maybe you had a dream that your kids and your grandkids would grow up and become incredible Christian leaders and that hasn't happened.

Maybe you've been disappointed because it doesn't seem like God is giving you a lot of gifts and a lot of ability that you mostly just feel forgotten and significant.

Maybe you look back after you're retired from work and you feel like you never made a difference for the kingdom.

Or you aren't sure if any of it was that significant.

The church in Philadelphia, reminds us those things are not in the kingdom of God.

God cares about our faithfulness.

The insignificant in the eyes of the world are deeply significant of the kingdom of God.

God does not care about our power influence.

He cares about our faithfulness.

It will be much better the life to come for those you have nothing to show but a life of quiet faithfulness and prayer than to be a pastor who lead revivals and lead hundreds of thousands of people to Jesus and planted a big church was unfaithful had lots of sin hidden in his life.

Jesus controls the keys of who gets in and who gets out.

He wants faithfulness not accomplishments.

It's our biggest worry in life should not be a desire for power or desire to win.

It shouldn't be a desire to defeat our enemies.

It shouldn't even necessarily be a desire for a great revival or incredible accomplishment of the purposes of the kingdom of God.

Our primary desire should be one of faithfulness.

If you experience some of those things anyway, then great.

If not, then great.

Because we are not judged in the kingdom of God, based on what we produce but whether or not we have been faithful.

A little power is enough.

II. A little power is enough to be safe (v. 9-10)

Those with a little power can be kept safe

God is the one who keeps us safe.

Our safety does not come from our own power.

It comes from our faithfulness and from our trust in Him.

This is one of the problems that we struggle with in life.

We don't wanna have to depend on God to keep us safe for God to be in control. We want to be in control.

We wanna have enough money that we don't have to pray and beg and hope that will make it to the next month.
We wanna be able to provide for ourselves.

One of the promises that God makes to the church of Philadelphia is that He will keep them safe.

Verse 9, **"Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie - behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you."**

This verse is again referencing the synagogue.

It is talking about the Jewish synagogue because the Jews at this time or persecuting and harming Christians.

And it seems that one of the focuses here in this particular letter is how the Jews have kicked Christians out of the synagogue.

Christians were born Jews and accepted faith in Jesus and followed Him are now no longer welcome and has been excommunicated.

We see this in John 9 there's a man who is born blind, and he goes into the synagogue to tell the Pharisees about Jesus.

Because of his faith in Jesus, he is kicked out of the synagogue.

This is part of why so much of this letter has been talking about that Jesus is the one who controls who gets in and who does not get in.

The door of the synagogue is literally shut to these believers.

They cannot go in. They cannot worship. They cannot gather.

They are no longer welcome there.

And what is it just shut? Those Jewish leaders are telling and proclaimed to them that they are heretics that God is angry with them and they must repent deny Jesus and come back.

And this is why spent so much time talking about He is the one who controls who and who is Him.

Because this is a real experience that these believers are having.

And they need to be reminded that it is Jesus controls it.

This is why Jesus name is the reality.

He says they might claim that their followers of me, but they are not their followers of Satan.

Again, please do not misunderstand and misinterpret this verse and use it as an excuse to be antisemitic and to say hateful things about Jews.

You are not allowed to do that.

The main thing that it's been trying to be communicated here is that these Jews are wrong about who is and who is not in the kingdom.

When they tell this little church that they are condemned they are wrong.

And Jesus says He is going to come, and He has gonna vindicate them.

It is not Jesus saying don't worry about it. You're saved, you are with me.

Jesus is actually saying He's gonna fix this particularly.

That Jesus is going to make all the members of that synagogue come and they will have to bow down before the feet of these Christians.

They will have to acknowledge their mistake.

They will have to acknowledge their witness, and they will fall on their faces, bowing down, begging the Christians for forgiveness for how they treated them.

This is quite a reverse.

And they will learn that God loves them.

This is not just merely romantic language to God is using here.

Although it certainly part of it of the real and deep love that God has for His people.

But this is also contextually covenant language.

Because the loyalty of God is described in terms of love and hate.

In Romans, He says Jacob have I loved and I have hated.

The chosen people of God are described as those that God loves.

Those that God shows His affection and His covenant loyalty towards.

Hatred is just another way to describe those who are not God's people who are not chosen by God.

And so here, God is using covenant language to the Jews in the synagogue would understand to know that these people they rejected are actually loved.

That those who they thought were gentiles, and not a part of God's people are a part of God people.

Verse 10, **"Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth."**

They are honored this way, even though they have a little power because of their patient endurance.

Listen sometimes faithfulness, just looks like patient endurance.

It looks like holding on desperately to Jesus, even when everything is falling apart.

It looks like patiently, enduring persecution without complaint without fighting back.

It looks like enduring suffering of sickness and poverty and mistreatment, clinging to Jesus.

It looks like patiently, following Christ, trusting in Jesus, waiting for the eternal awards patiently waiting, even if it seems like those rewards are slow in coming

Again, the important thing is not their power, but it is there endurance.

I love the way Eugene Peterson late Christian pastor described faithfulness. He called long obedience in the same direction.

It's just following Jesus for a long time while walking towards Jesus that's faithfulness.

And the endurance is being willing to continue following Jesus no matter what's trying to stop you or trying to hinder you.

And if they continue to be faithful, if they continue to be end during patiently, then God will keep them safe.

He particularly says He will keep them from the hour of trial.

And they will be kept safe from judgment.

Now, what is this mean?

There is a least part of this that is a specific problem being made to the church in Philadelphia that when God brings judgment against the Jews in their city and their city in general that they will be kept safe.

That they will be preserved.

Now, what does this mean or was this imply for us as believers?

Part of this is just a simple truth that when you are faithful and when you hold onto Jesus, He is the boat that keeps us safe in the storm and He is the one who will ensure that we get safely to the other side.

Jesus is always the one that we can trust no matter how terrible things get and if we hold onto Him, He will hold onto us.

Now there is also part of this that could be possibly a reference to the rapture.

Now there are not a lot of references in the book of revelation to the rapture.

There are not many places that seem to be talking about Christians and believers being taken up into the sky with Jesus to be safe from suffering before it comes upon the Earth.

This is one of the only places in the book that could be what is happening. Now, if you wanna talk more about the rapture specifically come back on Wednesday because I'm gonna spend a lot of time talking about other passages in the Bible in Revelation and what kind of talk about some different views about the rapture and what it seems like the Bible teacher I'm not gonna take a ton of time to do that right now so if you want that, come back on Wednesday or listen listen to the teaching and get the news later.

I want to admit that this could be referring to the rapture because it does seem like God is keeping his people from an hour of trial an hour of punishment that's coming up upon unbelievers.

Because the phrase those who dwell on the Earth is almost always negative and almost always referring to those who do not know Jesus. But it is unclear what is being kept from means. Does it mean being completely removed from the situation or does it mean that in the midst of it God preserves them and keep them safe. This is an explicit enough for me to say yes this is clearly talking about will happen when Jesus comes, but maybe it is I could be wrong.

But the important thing whether you think it is or isn't is that Jesus does keep us safe and He promises to keep His people safe. He has plenty of different ways that he can do that and means that he can accomplishment, but he will keep us safe.

No, it doesn't mean that the church is gonna be kept from all suffering. Because they're experiencing plenty right now. The following Jesus does not exempt us from suffering. Any of you can testify to us. But to those who endure, even if they have a little power, Jesus keeps us safe.

We do not need to try and do it on our own strength. We can trust the strength of God.

III. A little power is enough to hold fast (v. 11-13).

A little power is all we need to hold on to Jesus.

We don't need more.

Verse 11, **"I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown."**

There is the promise that Jesus is coming soon.

He is coming and it is the coming of Jesus that is our blessed hope.

One of the things we've talked about I haven't mentioned it every week that are our big ideas in the book of Revelation is the Revelation is meant to give us hope.

And our hope is in the coming of Jesus.

Our hope is that when Jesus comes all will be made right.
And so when things are not right, and when things seem to be going wrong, what do we do but hold onto Jesus and look forward to His coming.

Which is why He tells us to hold fast and to hold on
The little strength that you have is enough strength to hold onto Jesus.
Because Jesus is the one who holds onto us not hold onto Him.
He is the one who keeps us safe in His arms, even as we try to wiggle out.
He is the anchor we hold to in the storm.

So we hold fast and no one can take the crown of life from us.
The focus is holding tight so that no one can take it.
It is an awareness and active holding.
It is not lightly holding onto Christ's hand and then looking around distracted.
It is a firm holding on so that no one could take it away.
So that no sin could ever dislodge our grip.
So that Satan no matter how hard he pulled, could not take us off.
So that the world with all of its tricks and deceptions could never make us let go.

Verse 12, **"The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and 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 from my God out of heaven, and my own new name."**

The one who conquers is the one who holds on.
Who refuses to let go of Christ.
And they will be made like a pillar in the temple of God.
I have always loved old Roman columns.
There is something beautiful and powerful about the architecture.
Especially the massive ones that are left standing long after the temples have faded and been lost to time.

God says that He will make us like one of those pillars.

We will have a place of honor and prestige.

Those with no power in this world will be used by God to hold up the church.

Those weak believers who have nothing to offer but prayer are often times the pillars that hold us up.

Not the pastor with their talents or the people with their money.

And on us Christ will write His name.

These pillars in the ancient world were often inscribed by the person who paid for it or by the god of the temple.

But here God's name will be written on us.

And the name of the coming city and New Jerusalem.

Not a place located in Israel.

But the true heavenly city Jerusalem has always been a shadow of.

And this phrase in the middle

"never shall he go out of it."

Those with little power and great faith will never be cast out.

They will never have to flee.

This would have been meaningful to the city.

Because they had been hit particularly by several earthquakes.

Earthquakes that completely destroyed the city and made them flee.

Most had to leave the city behind and live in tents in the country to avoid the danger and destruction.

And there was probably always fear that it would happen again.

But Jesus says that will never happen in His city.

In Christ, there is nothing to fear.

They will never have to leave.

They can come into the temple and city of God forever.

Verse 13, **"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."**

Oh would we hear.

Would we recognize that power has nothing to do with faith.

That this world has little to do with the world to come.

CONCLUSION:

A little power is more than enough. It is enough to be safe and enough to hold fast.

I think this is what we need to hear and remember.

It is great to dream, pray, and hope.

I pray our church will be able to reach more families and children.

I pray that we would see unbelievers regularly come to faith and be baptized.

We can hope our church would grow and reach our community more than we do now.

But we don't have to do that to be pleasing to God.

God has not called us to be powerful or influential, but faithful.

And the same is true in our lives.

A quite ordinary life of faithfulness that no one on earth remembers a few years after you are gone, will be remembered and rewarded forever in the life to come.

Jesus does not need our power, He just wants our faithfulness.

So, let us be content and continue to be faithful.

Trusting that in Jesus, our little power is enough.