

The Church at Philadelphia: the Feeble Church

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[0 : 00] Go ahead and read the text again.

You've got your notes, and actually this is all of the notes for the Church of Philadelphia. So some of this we've already covered, so you just have to kind of find your way back to probably that page where it ends, I think, with...

What does it end with? Jesus is referring to the Great Tribulation. Do you see that? And we'll be ready to move on from there here in just a minute. I want to go ahead and read the letter, though, again, just to keep us fresh on it.

We're not going to go back and review what we looked at a couple of weeks ago, take up pretty much where we left off. Let me read the letter again. That's Revelation 3, starting with verse 7. It is the letter to the Church of Philadelphia. And so here is how it reads. And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, These things says, He who is holy, He who is true, He who has the key of David, He who opens, and no one shuts, and shuts, and no one opens.

[1 : 30] I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it, for you have a little strength, have kept my word, and have not denied my name.

Indeed, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie.

Indeed, I will make them come and worship before your feet, to know that I have loved you.

Because you have kept my command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial, which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

Behold, I come quickly. Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out no more.

I will write on him the name of my God, in the name of the city of my God, in my Jerusalem, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God, and I will write on him my new name.

[2 : 32] He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Alright? As I said a moment ago, and hopefully you remember, that is those who were here a couple weeks ago, some who were not, so maybe you'll have to check the website out, and go hear it for yourself, you can fill in some of the blanks.

But we're looking at two main divisions of this letter to the Church of Philadelphia. We've covered one of those. And I guess I could give you just a really snippet of a review.

The first division, we call Jesus' call to behold. That's the first division. His call to behold. And to behold what?

That all saints are under the Lord's sovereign control. Saints, that is, that's us. And also, all sinners. Not just all saints are under His sovereign control, but all sinners are under the Lord's sovereign control. And then we ended last time with this truth, that all situations of life, every situation of life, it doesn't make any difference what it is.

[3 : 50] No matter how significant or how major, even some of the paramount situations of life, even the hardest of hard situations of life, are under the Lord's sovereign control.

He opens doors that no man can shut. He closes doors that no man can open. No one can open. All right, now, second then. Here's the second division.

Jesus' call to behave. To behave. Now, I don't mean that. I was looking back over this just before church tonight, and I thought, you know, what do we think of when someone says, you know, you need to behave?

Well, to be good. You know, you tell your kids to behave, and you mean, you know, be good. And be obedient. And don't cause a ruckus.

And so on and so forth. But when I say this, I guess it does mean that in a sense, but the idea here is to behave like the people we really are.

[4 : 53] Sometimes we don't behave like we're supposed to or like the people we are. And in this sense, in this passage in verse 12, it is that we're overcomers.

So we're to behave like overcomers. And that's what we are, as we shall see here in just a minute. So verse 12 then begins with that familiar phrase. We've seen it before.

I think it appears in nearly every letter, if not every letter. I didn't go back and look again, but I think it does. This is a key phrase. Not only key in the sense that it's repeated over and over again, but key in its meaning.

And I have maybe given just little indications about what that means. I've said a little bit about it, but we're going to talk a little bit more about it here tonight.

So it begins there. He who overcomes. And then, of course, with every time it appears, there's a promise attached to it. What's the promise here? Well, the promise is, attached to this is a promise, I will make him a pillar.

[6 : 02] That's not something you lie down on at night when you go to bed, okay? Of course, maybe it's just in Arkansas that they pronounce that pillar. Anyway, probably not in Oklahoma, right?

All right. I will make him a pillar. You know what a pillar is. In the temple of my God. That's what you would expect to find in a temple of a pillar. A lot of them. And he shall go out no more.

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 out of heaven from my God. And I will write on him my new name. This is the promise attached.

To the admonition to overcome. He who overcomes and hears the promise. And it's some kind of promise. And really, in the larger sense, I think it's safe to say that the promise pertains to eternal salvation.

Eternal salvation, really, more specifically, the eternal state of salvation. I mean, we're eternally saved now. That is, if you trust in Christ as your Lord and Savior, you're not waiting for eternal salvation.

[7 : 08] You have it right now. It's been granted to you. It was granted to you the very moment you believed. But I'm talking about the eternal salvation in the fullness of it. The ultimate state of eternal bliss, eternal salvation.

And that's what this promise pertains to in a larger sense. Okay? And so the question is, what happens if a follower of Christ fails to overcome?

I mean, that's kind of a natural response to this natural question. Well, he says, he who overcomes, this is what will happen. And so the implication being that maybe some are not going to overcome. And so what happens then, theoretically, when a follower of Christ fails to overcome, is that believer then lost? Don't answer too quickly.

Absolutely not. This is not a statement, you know, teaching any kind of theology of, you know, that we can lose our salvation.

[8 : 15] That's not the point here. And we have to look deeper to find this out. The Greek word for overcomer, I've given you that word, it's nikao.

I guess I put it in there. I meant to put the English translation in it. But nikao is the word. And it means to conquer. I mean, it's a very strong word. Not just kind of overcoming.

You know, sometimes we can overcome something and kind of rise above it a little bit. And maybe we struggle. Maybe we don't come out unscathed. But overcoming doesn't necessarily, with us and our usage of the word, doesn't necessarily carry the idea of conquering.

But that's what this word means. It means to conquer. And so we need to understand that this word, the meaning of the word, because it means this, the word speaks really more of who we are before it speaks of what we do.

The focus here is not on what we're doing. That would be kind of the natural assumption, just kind of reading over it, he who overcomes, that it would be focused on what we're doing.

[9 : 38] The focus, first and foremost, is not on what we do, it's on who we are. We're the overcomers, you see. An overcomer, then, is not what you must do before you become a Christian.

That's not the point here. The overcomer, an overcomer is who you are if you really are a true Christian, true believer. It's who you are if you are a true Christian.

That sounds redundant. It's who you are, not what you do. Who you are after you're born again, after you're born from above. At Romans 8.37, we are more than conquerors.

Actually, more than conquerors is one word in the Greek text. It's the same word, nikao, but it has a preposition on the front of it. Huper, which means above, over and above.

So we are over-overcomers. It's almost redundant. We're over-conquerors, above-conquerors, but not in and of ourselves.

[10:41] It's not something we've accomplished. We are over-overcomers through Him that loved us. And the Him, of course, you know, is the Lord Jesus Christ. 1 John 5, 1-4.

Did I give you these two verses? Yes. In there? Pardon. Sometimes I don't remember what I finally put in the handout. But 1 John 5, 1-4. Let me read it to you. You can follow along there.

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God and everyone who loves Him who begot also... What? Loves Him who begot also...

What is it? Loves Him who is begotten of Him. Did I make a mistake on that? Everyone who loves Him... I'm going to have to look it up. Yeah, there's some problem there.

I'm not reading right names. Of course, maybe it's just... All right. 1 John 5, starting with verse 1. Whoever believes...

[11:45] I should just read it out of the Bible anyway, shouldn't I? You know, it carries with it a little more authority when you read it right out of the book. Amen. Okay, thank you, Jerry. Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God and everyone who loves Him who begot also...

I'm just not reading this right. It's something... Okay. You know, I'm a little punchy today. That's right.

I've got one foot... You know, the most important part is further on down. We're saying... Whatever is born of God...

What? Overcomes. Esneka. There's that word again. Overcomes the world. Whatever is born of God overcomes the world.

And this is the victory. I love this part of the verse. I can read this part. And this is the victory that has overcome the world.

[12:49] There's Nika again. Our faith. King James says, even our faith. By the way, you do notice it says, has overcome. The same word, same idea.

In fact, it's the same guy writing it. Though it's Jesus speaking it in Revelation. Has overcome. Has conquered. It's a done thing.

And how did it happen? Well, by His grace, but through our faith. Through faith. God operated this and accomplished this through the instrument of faith.

Which, by the way, He gave you as well. You didn't have to go ahead and find that for yourself. So all born again believers in Christ, Jesus, are overcomers. Every one of us in this room are overcomers.

Now, we don't actually all the time behave that way. And here's the point. Jesus. And so, who then is Jesus talking about in this passage when He talks about blessing those who overcome?

[13:51] Who's He talking about? He's talking about every one of us. So in Revelation 3.12, Jesus is talking to those who behave like the overcomers they are. Again, not based upon what we do, but who we are.

But what we do should always be in perfect sync with who we are. It's who we are that produces this behavior that is indicative of overcomers.

We are to behave as overcomers. Because why? Because Christ, because in Christ, that's who we are. And we're to live like those who are on the, we could say, the victory side of life.

Now, most believers don't look like they are. And therein lies the problem. We are who we are by the grace of God, but we don't always act like who we are.

We're on the victory side of life. Amen? We are. And so, how we conduct our lives and our outlook on life should reveal that to the world.

[15:08] And Jesus, then, it's a call to behave, to behave as overcomers. Now, with that in mind, then, notice there are two truths about this call to behave as overcomers.

This is what I want you to see. two truths. We can kind of divide the verse even further. Number one, there's this divine initiative that just really leaps out of the verse.

A divine initiative. Three times, you might have noticed in verse 12, Jesus says, I will. So, I say it's a divine initiative.

This is what God says He will do for all overcomers. Some of this has already been accomplished.

Some of it is that we're going to see here is ours right now. We just don't, we don't have the full sense of it, the full impact of it in our lives yet.

[16:16] ultimately, it's a done deal with God, but ultimately, we will realize all of these things that Jesus says, I will do for all overcomers.

So, it's a divine initiative. What will Jesus do for all overcomers? First, He says, I will make Him, or the overcomer, pillars in the temple of my God.

That's the promise. It's a divine initiative. Something He's going to do for all believers. And that speaks of security. Does it not?

I mean, the very concept of pillars and temple speaks of strength and foundation and security.

And though it's ours now, we will fully realize it when we're in heaven. when Jesus one day comes and snatches us out of this world of woe and takes us to heaven, then we will become pillars in heaven.

[17:24] There's security there. In fact, I was reading, they say that today in Philadelphia, the old ancient Philadelphia, there are only two things that remain standing. from ancient Philadelphia, just two things.

And there are pillars, two pillars in old Philadelphia. And now, the church that was there and the church that Jesus wrote this letter to, that church no longer exists.

There's no church there. There's just two pillars. That's all that's left from ancient Philadelphia.

Church is gone. There's no building, no ruins of any kind of church if they ever really had any kind of building per se.

And so, here's the point. The church of Philadelphia, not the building but the people, all right, the believers, the true believers, they're now pillars in the halls of heaven.

That's what Jesus is saying here. And, you know, we don't really know what kind of structure they built for themselves in Philadelphia. I think it's pretty safe to assume that it was nothing like what we have here, nothing like what you would typically see in modern Christianized, the modern Christianized world, you know, big cathedrals and big churches and, you know, multi, multi-million dollar facilities.

[18:52] we didn't have anything like that, of course. And, by the way, the church didn't have anything like that in many places in the world. You know, even in Ukraine where there has been Christianity for a number of years, there are few but not very many of these kind of edifices that many churches have built.

So we don't know what they had but we do know this, it's gone. It's just, it's gone and it's gone actually from this world. The church of Philadelphia is gone from this world because it's gone to heaven.

The true believers are in heaven and I think, you know, there's an important application here that we should not miss. Church today should be careful about what we build and I would add the emphasis we place on building.

We should be careful about that. Our focus on building the church should be otherworldly rather than this worldly. What does that say to you?

Otherworldly. We should be building things that are not for this world. They'll be here for now but it's otherworldly. That's what our focus on building should be because all of this world's constructions are perishing.

[20:22] we just got news, we got an air condition we're going to have to replace those. These things just wear out and dissolve. In fact, one day everything in this world will just simply dissolve.

It will be gone. And so all of our other world endeavors, what about them? They'll last forever, for eternity.

We're talking about, of course, what God leads us and through us accomplishes the building of His kingdom. That's otherworldly and that's why our mission's giving is so very important.

Second, the next I will, in fact, the next two I wills, that completes the three, He said, I will write on Him, or on the overcomer, 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.

That's interesting. Now, Jesus is speaking here, of course, and first He says, the name of my God, who would that be? That would be the Father, God the Father, and the name of my God's city, and He gives us what that is, it's new Jerusalem, which, of course, does not exist today here, it's not Jerusalem over there in the Middle East, and then He says, and I will write on Him my new name.

[22 : 01] My new name is the rest of that verse. Now, every born again believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, we could say, is a marked man or woman, we're marked, in a very good way.

Usually that expression carries with it a negative connotation, marked man, wanted man. But we're marked by the Lord, and so we're marked by three names.

The first one, He says, is the name of my God. The name of my God, and it speaks of relationship. I mean, very profoundly it does. The word there is theos, the standard word for God in the New Testament.

It's not a, I mean, it can be a generic word, but we know in the context of the New Testament, theos is a reference to God the Father.

We're marked by Him, we're marked by Him. That's relationship. That means we belong to Him. You might remember, I don't guess we do this in our nursery.

[23 : 22] Maybe I ought to pay attention, but I do remember when our kids were little, we'd take them to church, the nursery, and they put a piece of masking tape on their back and write their name on there, you know.

So they didn't know it was there, because if they did, they'd tear it off. Some kids, I think, are contortionists, they probably could take it off. I'm thinking of one right now that probably could leave it. But, you know, what does that tell you?

He's mine. He belongs to me. You know, that, he's got my name on his back there, and so that speaks of relationship, and that's why God wants to write His name on us.

Have you considered that? You belong to Him. You know, we're not mavericks and illegitimate. Either we belong to God. He says, I write His name on you. And then, second, Jesus says, He'll mark us with the name of the city of my God, New Jerusalem.

[24 : 28] And that speaks of citizenship, of course. Citizenship. Where is our citizenship? citizenship? Well, you know, it's the United States of America.

Well, in a sense, in a temporal sense, that's true. I'm proud to be a citizen of the United States of America. I wouldn't want to be a citizen of any other country.

But in the larger sense, in the more true sense, I'm a citizen of heaven. We are. This is not our country. We're looking for a country.

Remember that Abraham said that his foundation's maker and foundations are God. All right, so what is this city?

This New Jerusalem is the city of God. We could say it's the capital city of heaven, this New Jerusalem. In fact, it's described for us pretty graphically, and we love this in Revelation chapter 21.

[25 : 29] this is a description of God's city, and we're marked by that city. We haven't fully realized it yet, and that is in the sense that we're actually there and part of that and walking those streets and so forth, but we're not only pillars there, but we're citizens there, and listen to the description.

He said, I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people. God himself will be with them and be their God.

That's our relationship. We're marked by him, we're marked by his city, we're citizens of that great city. God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

There shall be no more death, no sorrow, no crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. And he who sat on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.

[26 : 51] And he said to me, Write, for these words are true and faithful. And he said, to me it is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him that thirsts.

He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. go on with the description. Wonderful. And we're marked by that.

And this is for all overcomers. It is all who are true believers, born again believers in Christ. We're the overcomers. And he said, I will give you the name of my God, the name of his city, New Jerusalem, and forever and ever.

And then Jesus said that he will write on overcomers. He said, my new name. This is very interesting. I think this speaks of not just revelation, but full revelation.

Something we don't have right now. Full, complete revelation. This is Jesus' new name he's talking about, and I don't know what it is.

[28 : 05] You don't either, so don't tell me you do. There's been some speculation about it, pulled from other places of scripture, a number of names in the Bible. Most of the names, even those that are mentioned in the New Testament, more descriptions than they are actual names.

But then, when you're talking about the Lord Jesus, about him and all of his glory, you can't separate the names that describe who he is from his proper name.

because his proper name does speak of and describe for us what he has done. So we don't know what the new name is. His Old Testament name was Yahweh.

His New Testament name is Jesus. What does Jesus mean? Yahweh is salvation. Yahweh saves. His name in heaven? I don't know. but I know it will be a glorious name and we're marked by it. And it will be a victorious name.

[29 : 11] I think Yahweh and Jesus, they describe, especially Jesus in the New Testament, describe his ministry. Yahweh describes his eternal existence.

Jesus describes his eternal ministry. He's the Savior. Savior. God saves. And then in heaven, he's done all that work.

It's done. Completed. And the Bible says it will be given a name that is above every name. We don't know specifically what the name is, but it will be a victorious name worthy of what he has done.

I like MacArthur's, what he said about this. Let me read it to you. He said, the moment we see him, his, in heaven, when we get to heaven, the moment we see him, his persona will take on utterly new dimensions, anything, something different that we've ever known, ever seen.

Whatever we may have called him and understood by the name, his name, will pale in reality of what we see. Not just the incarnate Jesus that we have seen only with the eye of faith, but the all-glorious God, who we will see with the eye of a redeemed body.

[30 : 36] See, we don't have those eyes yet. We have, we don't have a redeemed body yet. We're still walking around in an unredeemed body.

That's why you have all your aches and pains and why one day this body will just totally give out on you. Some of you think it's today. And that's why also that we still deal with the flesh and the cravings, evil cravings of our flesh.

Our body is not redeemed yet. One day it will be. And when we see him, we'll see him with a redeemed body, and there will be a new name to describe him.

We don't know what it is. And he'll give us that new name and we'll be privileged to be called by it. So there's great awe in all of this, excitement about it, and still mystery.

But this is what he's going to give. He says, I will do this for all overcomers. And in the mind of God, it's already done. done. We just haven't fully realized it yet.

[31 : 56] One day we will. All right, so then, finally, I need to, well, we've got a little time, but I think we're about done here. So we have the divine initiative, and then second, the divine invitation.

There's an invitation here. Verse 13, he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Now, we've heard that invitation before, haven't we? And this invitation, I think you need to divide this kind of in two parts, two parts of the invitation, to understand the invitation.

invitation, it assumes, first of all, the ability to hear. He who has an ear. Who has an ear to hear? You know, that is, you have the ability to hear. Hear what the Lord says, what the Spirit says. Not everyone has that ability.

[33 : 05] The unredeemed, unsaved, unbelievers, they do not have the ability to hear. Overcomers have the ability to hear.

So, perk up and listen. What do he say? You can hear. But then, it also very clearly calls for a willingness to obey.

All right, here, I guess we could say, is our part. God's grace enables us, but somehow it's difficult for us to really put a finger on it to understand how this works, but somehow we participate with what God wants to do through us and what he wants to accomplish.

He's going to get the job done, but we must participate so there is our part, our willingness to obey what we hear. He says, let him hear.

I want you to listen. I'm going to read one last thing. It will be finished. It's kind of an excerpt from an account of the Battle of Britain. Britain and help fortify this invitation that's given in verse 13.

[34 : 26] the Battle of Britain was at its height. Night and day the enemy bombers flew in across the English Channel to unload their cargoes of death and destruction on the cities and villages below.

The Royal Air Force had put up a magnificent fight. Sir Winston Churchill, in recounting later what the world owed to that valiant group of men who flew their battled hurricanes and spitfires against the incalculable odds, declared, this is what he declared, never before in the field of human conflict have so many owed so much to so few.

That sounds familiar, doesn't it? In one lonely RAF outpost, a group of fighter pilots was gathered in the mess hall. It was a scene often repeated in those days.

The men were worn out with fatigue. They were dirty and disheveled, and their eyes were bleary and beards sprouted on their chins. They were snatching a moment's relaxation before climbing the skies again to fight off more of the Nazi airwolves.

Suddenly a buzzer sounded, and a voice came over the intercom from the operations room. Bandits at 15,000 feet over P-25 over. Once the pilots were on their feet, racing for the runways.

[35 : 46] Pausing on his way, the squadron leader barked back into the intercom one short reply. Message received, and understood. That's what this invitation is.

Message received, and understood. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit has to say to the church. Thank you.