

UNSTOPPABLE CHURCH

Then and Now
in 30 Minutes



Episode 50 - Prepared

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THE SETTING



We're now in **Philadelphia** in Turkey, the sixth of the seven churches of Revelation. There are almost no archaeological remains of the ancient city, as it now lies beneath the modern city of Alasehir. In fact, all that is visible are a few pillars from the much later Byzantine Church of St. John the Theologian.

Philadelphia was the youngest of the cities addressed in Revelation, having been founded only in 140 BC as a base to Hellenise the world. Its name means "the city of him who loves his brother" or "the city of brotherly love". It was built by King Eumenes II of Pergamum to commemorate the love of his brother Attalus II, whom he called Philadelphus. It stood 38 miles (48 km) southeast of Sardis and lay on a trade route at the gateway to the high central plateau of the Province of Asia. It was therefore an important commercial city. And fertile volcanic soil also made it an important wine-producing centre. Religion played a part in its importance too, with temples there to Zeus, Artemis, Helios, Dionysus and Aphrodite - and, of course, to the Emperor, to whom all the guilds had to offer incense, recognising him as a divine being. In fact, it had so many temples that it was known as "Little Athens".



Pillars of the Byzantine Church of St. John the Theologian built around AD600.

The original church had a multi-domed roof supported by six pillars



This pillar is overshadowed by the minaret in the background reflecting how this region that was once a bastion of Christianity is now almost entirely Muslim



BIBLE READING

[Revelation 3:7-13](#)



KEY IDEAS

Who Christ is, what Christ knows

Once again, we begin with a description of Christ. He is described as “holy and true” and the one who “holds the key of David” (an image from [Isa 22:22](#)) - either the key to the door of salvation (for Christ as Davidic Messiah alone has authority to determine who enters kingdom, not the Jewish synagogue); or, the door of opportunity that Jesus was keeping open despite all opposition. He is in control, not Philadelphia’s many gods; and he knows all that the church has been faithfully doing, despite their weakness (v 8). He knows that they feel they have “little strength”, wearied as they are by attacks from “the synagogue of Satan” (v 9) - unbelieving Jews who, by their opposition to the church, were doing Satan’s work for him. And yet, they have kept his word and not denied his name (v 8b).

Christ’s provocation and promise

He wants them to be prepared - for two things. First, prepared to take advantage of the “open

door” (v 8) that he has set in front of them. Yes, an open door despite all the opposition! It’s still all too easy for the Church to play it safe or keep its head down when it faces resistance or opposition to its message and values; but Jesus doesn’t want us playing it safe. He wants us to walk through the doors of opportunity, of which there are always many, for he holds the key.

The second thing he wants them prepared for is his return. “I am coming soon,” he says (v 11); and in light of that, he calls on them to hold on. And when he does return, he promises, first, that he will make them “a pillar in the temple of my God” (v 12) - a powerful image in a city plagued by earthquakes, where pillars and temples had often fallen; second, he promises, too, that they will receive new names: the name of God and of his city (v 12c) and Christ’s own ‘new name’ (v12) - an echo of how Philadelphia had taken on Caesar’s name after its rebuilding; third, that they will never need to leave the new Jerusalem, like the Philadelphia’s citizens had so often to do during the many earthquakes they had experienced.

Christ’s protection of the Church

Opportunity doesn’t mean there won’t be opposition; but Jesus promises to keep them “from the hour of trial” that is coming (v 10). The Greek word for ‘from’ can also mean ‘through’, and this seems to fit the context better. In other words, Jesus is saying that he will protect them, not from opposition and persecution, but through opposition and persecution.

This protection is not a reference to what many Christians today call ‘the rapture’ (a doctrine dating back only to the mid-19th century) which says Christians will be taken to heaven to escape the bad stuff of the End Times. They needed reassurance now, not for centuries away! It’s also worth noting that the repeated New Testament teaching is that it is “through many hardships” that we enter God’s kingdom ([Acts 14:22](#)), not by avoiding them.



1. How do you see opposition of various kinds - as an obstacle, or an opportunity?
2. The church in Philadelphia was ‘playing it safe’, not taking the opportunity of the ‘open door’ ahead of them. Are there open doors that God would have you step through at this time?
3. How can we begin to see Christ’s return become a motivation for mission and thus see the Church become unstoppable once again?



For a behind-the-scenes glimpse into what was involved to create this podcast series listen to Mike and David recounting their experiences!

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