

Good Church, Bad Church (Part 6) – Rev 3:9-13

Rev 3:9-13. We're nearing the *end* of our mini-series, where Jesus addresses 7 first century churches, representative of *all* churches, to commend them for their *good* qualities and warn them about their bad ones. And last week, we started looking at the church in Philadelphia. Who kept Jesus' word. That's what he said at the end of v8 – *You have kept my word and have not denied my name.*

Leading us to the conclusion that . . .

A good church believes and does what Jesus says (v8)

In the Bible. And they do so . . .

- **To take advantage of open doors**

The doors of heaven, doors of opportunity or ministry, and doors of outreach . . .

- **Despite the pressure to deny him**

And . . .

- **Despite their weakness**

They believe and do what Jesus says. I trust the Lord used that to impress his will on your heart, and that you've followed through on your commitments.

➤ But that was just the first characteristic; from v7-8. The second comes from v9-10.

Where Jesus says . . .

[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. [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. (ESV)

The second characteristic is this:

A good church is promised great favor (v9-10)

In the future. V9 – *I will* [in the future] *make those of the synagogue of Satan . . . come and bow down before your feet.* It's the second time Jesus uses that phrase, *synagogue of Satan*, and it's about as strong as it gets. Referring to self-deceived or self-promoting Jews, who thought they were good with God, and part of his people, by virtue of their ethnicity. Their Jewishness.

"We're God's chosen people," their thinking went. "Israelites according to the flesh. With the genealogies and lineage to prove it. And circumcision to show it. We're Jews and you're not. We're in and you're out." That was their thinking.

Except just the *opposite* was true. Because Jesus said in v9 – They *say that they are Jews and are not*. They *weren't* part of God's people. Why? Because national identity, religious heritage, and circumcision doesn't cut it. Those aren't the *requirements* for inclusion in the *Israel of God* as Paul says it (Gal 6:16). **(Rom 2:28-29a)**

For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. [29] But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit. To be a part of God's people, means having your *sin* cut away, not your *skin*.

➤ So they *weren't* true Jews. They *say* so, Jesus said in v9; *but lie*. Whether self-deceived or fully knowledgeable, it was a lie. **(Rom 9:6b-8)**

For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel [the Bible says], [7] *and not*

all are children of Abraham [Jews] because they are his offspring . . . It is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God [the people of God], *but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.* The promise of God to save and bless those who believe in Jesus. And *only* those who believe. *They* are the children of God. *They* are his people. The church.

It's a promise of great favor.

- **The favor of being God's people. (Rom 9:8)**

Lineage doesn't matter, circumcision doesn't matter, cultural identity doesn't matter; only faith in Jesus. *It is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham*, Gal 3:7 says.

But the Jews in Philadelphia said otherwise. Lying as they did so. Just like Satan. And probably full of accusations like Satan. Essentially doing his dirty work, whether they knew it or not. Hence the label, *synagogue of Satan*.

➤ So Jesus makes a promise. *Behold* [v9b], *I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you.* In other words, they will *honor* you one day. And know the truth that it's *you* I love. It's *you* I treasure. It's *you* who are mine. Those of *faith* in me.

It was a promise of great favor. First spoken all the way back in **Is 60:14**. Speaking of the future glory of his people, God says – *The sons of those who afflicted you shall come bending low to you, and all who despised you shall bow down at your feet.* (14a)

725 years before Christ, God promised his people that those who didn't know him, those who persecuted them, would eventually come to them, and bow to them. As in honor them and follow them.

And a hundred years *after* Christ, after his birth, Jesus reiterates it here in Rev 3. Clarifying in no uncertain terms, who his people *are*, and who's doing the bowing.

And sure enough, it says in Rev 20, that we will rule and reign with Christ in the Millennium. A time of unprecedented peace and prosperity after his return, when unbelievers will honor our authority and follow our lead. Jew and Gentile alike.

It's a promise of great favor.

- **The favor of victory over opposition (9)**

Victory over those who oppose *God*, and oppose his people; the church. *I will make them come and bow down before your feet* (9b). That's victory. And while we experience it *now* from time to time, we'll experience it later, *all* the time. No longer asking, "How *long* oh Lord? How long will the wicked *prosper*?" But declaring, "How great! How great is our *victory*!" There will be a day.

➤ In the meantime, we get the short end of the stick sometimes. We suffer, we lose, and we hurt. And we will all the more as the Day of the Lord approaches.

But not without his presence, not without his people, and not without his promises. Especially his promise of protection. V10 – *Because you have kept my word about patient endurance* [to patiently persevere], *I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth* [to judge them; unbelievers]. It's a

promise of protection.

A good church is promised . . .

• **The favor of protection in The Great Tribulation (10)**

The Great Tribulation, because that's what *the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world* refers to. All the judgments in chapters 6-19. A time of increasing peril, right before the return of Christ.

And believers, those who hold fast, need not worry. V10 – *Because you have kept my word about patient endurance* [because you've *persevered*; held fast; kept the faith], *I will keep you from the hour of trial*. We need not worry.

➤ The question is, what does "keep you from" mean? Does it mean as some advocate, that we will be taken *off* the earth? In a secret rapture? Kept *from the hour of trial* by being *removed* during The Great Tribulation? Or does it mean that we will be *protected* from the hour of trial? Saved *within* the tribulation?

I think it's the latter. We're promised the favor of *protection* in The Great Tribulation, **not removal from it**. And while there are lots of reasons for that, I want to focus on one. Later on, between chapters 5 and 6, I'll take a few weeks to do an end times overview, and cover it more comprehensively. But for now, I want to focus on the meaning of the phrase itself. *Keep you from* (10).

➤ Considered by itself, or with a preconceived *notion* of the end times, you might think it means "taken out of;" removed from. Like in 7th grade, when my mom "kept me from" square dancing. She pulled me *out* of that P.E. class. And I didn't mind. She "kept me from" the suffering of holding hands with girls I didn't want to touch. Thank you, Jesus. Taken by itself, it could mean "taken out of."

But it can also mean, "protected within." Like if she had given me pair of gloves. Or if I only had to watch. I would have been "kept" from the suffering that way as well.

The point being, considered by itself, the phrase can mean either "removed from" or "protected from."

➤ But when you consider how it's used *elsewhere* in the Bible, the meaning becomes clear. Because it's a very unique phrase in the original Greek, used only one other *time* in the New Testament with this sentence structure. Where we are kept by God, from something external. And it just so happens that the other instance is *also* a statement by Jesus. To the same person; John. Giving even *more* weight to the meaning here in Rev 3.

The verse is **Jn 17:15**. Where Jesus is in the middle of his prayer, right before his arrest and crucifixion. Speaking to God he says – *I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one*. "Keep them from" is the same phrase, used in the same way, as Rev 3:10. And the meaning in Jn 17 is crystal clear: protect them. *I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you [protect] them from the evil one* [in the *midst* of the world]. Same words and same structure.

So it's likely that Jesus intends the same *meaning* in Rev 3. We won't be *removed* from the hour of trial coming on the world, **but protected from it**. That's *one* question.

➤ Another, is what that protection *entails* in The Great Tribulation. And while it might be physical, it's *always* spiritual. Sometimes enabling us to persevere and live, despite the suffering; and sometimes allowing us to die and rest. Like the martyrs of **Rev 6:10-11**. *Killed* during The Great Tribulation.

They were each given a white robe [it says] *and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been*. It's another indicator that we won't be extracted *out* of The Great Tribulation, but protected within it. Spiritually so.

Some of God's people will *die* in The Great Tribulation, and receive the immediate protection of heaven. Like Jesus said in Mt 10 – *They can kill the body but not the soul* (v28). Others, will suffer like the world, but persevere and live. Spiritually *and* physically protected.

Either way, we're sealed; and it's great favor. The favor of victory, and the favor of protection.

All of which leads to the *third* characteristic, of a glorious future.

A good church has a glorious future (v12)

It's a common theme in these messages. V12. I'll come back to v11. *The one who conquers* [he says], *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*.

A good church, comprised of those conquer evil by keeping Jesus' word, has . . .

• **A future of permanent worship**

A glorious future. *The one who conquers* [v12], *I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it*. Not that he's going to turn you into marble, but make you a permanent part of his *temple*; the place of his presence and worship. Like the pillars of old in *ancient* temples. Some of them still standing today. Our place and participation in worship is going to be permanent. Like some of the families in *colonial* times, who had their names on *pews*. They had a permanent place of worship.

But at the *end* of time, we'll never leave. *Never shall he go out of God's temple*. Never shall we *stop* worshipping. Never shall we *cease* to be in God's presence. It's the answer to David's prayer on our behalf, all the way back in Ps 27:4 – *One thing I have asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple*.

Those who conquer have a glorious future of permanent worship. A glorious future of living every moment for God's glory. And while that may not mean much now, in times of tribulation it's everything. Do you remember how much you longed to be in worship during the early days of the pandemic? How much more during The Great Tribulation?

Second, the one who conquers has . . .

• **A future of heavenly citizenship**

V12 – *I will write on him the name of my God* [I'll come back to that], *and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven*. To have the name of a city written on us, is a way of saying that we will be a *part* of it; a

citizen. In this case, a citizen of *the New Jerusalem*. Our final place of residence on the new earth. Depicted in Rev 21 as a place of indescribable beauty and grandeur.

That in and of itself should increase our anticipation, but there's nothing like having your home destroyed here to make you *yearn* for it. Like Philadelphia was destroyed with earthquakes. And Ukraine is destroyed with war. And the *world* in The Great Tribulation.

We don't desire our heavenly citizenship *now* so much, because we have it so good. And forget that we're strangers passing through. But there will be day. When a glorious future of heaven on earth, is everything. And praise God it's ours.

And last, we can look forward to . . .

• **A future of divine identity**

That's the idea of having the names of God written on us. We're *labeled* with a divine identity. No longer just flesh and blood, but glorified and perfect; divinely so. V12b – *I will write on him* [the one who conquers] *the name of my God . . . and my own new name* [Jesus says]. The first is Yahweh, God's name; and the second we don't know. The new name of Jesus. Like it says in Rev 19:12 – [Jesus] *has a name written* [on him] *that no one knows but himself*.

Meaning there's some aspect of his nature that he hasn't fully revealed. Because names in the Bible are descriptors of a person's nature. And while we're identified with Jesus now, someday, when he returns, we're going to be *like* him (Phil 3:20-21). Labeled with his *complete* nature. And the Father's too. A divine identity, for all eternity. That's glorious future.

➤ And the key to it all, is v11. Where Jesus starts by saying – *I am coming soon*. Soon, as in without delay. An expression of hope, to say that our trial and tribulation won't last forever. So hold fast. *Hold fast what you have* [Jesus says; hold *fast* to your faith], *so that no one may seize your crown* (11b). No one may steal your victory. No one may take your future. That's the key. Hold fast.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. (13)

Prayer – Father, your goodness toward us is stunning. From the favor of victory and protection, to a future of worship and blessing. Fill us with hope and find us faithful.

You Are Loved