

The Church that Jesus Loves

Revelation 3:7-13

Twenty-four years ago today I was ordained and installed as the Pastor of Harvest OPC – a small, lovely congregation of about 80 people. My vision from the beginning was very simple. I wanted the church to be a church that Jesus would commend. At the end of the day, it doesn't really matter what other people think about Harvest Church. It doesn't even matter what WE think about Harvest Church. All that really matters is what Jesus thinks of Harvest Church.

Last week we saw that it is possible to be a lively church with a great reputation among men, and yet be spiritually dead. Jesus had nothing good to say to the church in Sardis. He wasn't impressed with their reputation.

So what **does** impress Jesus? What gets his attention? What moves his heart? Jesus clearly loves this church in Philadelphia. He has no rebuke for them – only praise. The vast majority of the letter is taken up with promises to them, promises of what he will do for them and give to them on the last day and for eternity. So, what was their secret? What are the things Jesus finds attractive and praiseworthy in a church? Those are the things that we want to highlight and prioritize! Those are the things we want to embrace and pursue and pray for.

The blessing of this letter is that we are told, specifically, the things Jesus loves to see in a church. There are three things Jesus mentions about the church in Philadelphia; things which delight his heart and things which he loves to praise and promises to bless.

I. The Traits Jesus Loves

A. They Were Weak

Rev. 3:8 *I know your works...I know that you have but little power...*

In stark contrast to the seemingly successful and evidently capable church of Sardis, the church in Philadelphia had *micro dunamis*, or "little power." When Jesus says, "I know that you have but little power" the sense is that they know it, too. He isn't condemning them for their weakness; he is acknowledging what they already knew, what they freely confessed.

There is something about weakness and dependency that is extremely appealing to the Lord.

The two "strongest" churches get only rebukes (Sardis and Laodicea).

The two "weakest" churches get only praise (Smyrna and Philadelphia).

When the disciples were striving to be "the greatest" Jesus took a little child and sat him on his knee and said, "Unless you become like this little child, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Jesus LOVES dependence.

James 4:6 *God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.*

Jesus loves those who say, "Lord, I am weak. I am helpless. Please rescue me."

I've heard in the past few weeks that two men who participate in the James Fellowship say that they've been in the church all their life, but feel like they've just been converted. How? They admitted their weakness. They humbled themselves and asked for help. Whatever Harvest Church will accomplish for the glory of God in the years ahead, it will only be truly for God if it happens through an embrace of our weakness and a reliance on and prayerful embracing of his strength.

B. They Were Faithful

3:8 *...You have kept my word...*

Jesus mentions this in verse 10 as well:

Rev. 3:10 *Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial...*

In the context of weakness, they clung to and kept Jesus' Word. Sardis had forgotten what they had received and heard. Not this church. They were devoted to the word of Jesus. They clung to the gospel. They were being transformed by the renewing of their mind as they studied God's living, life-changing word and held fast to his truth.

The church that Jesus loves takes this word with utter seriousness as the rule for faith and life. He loves the church that lives on this word; that studies this word in order to be molded by these truths and empowered by this faith.

G.K. Beale makes the interesting observation that verse 10 is better translated, "You kept the word of my patient endurance." In other words, the "word" that this church kept was specifically the word about Jesus – about his life, his death, his patient endurance, and his victory for sinners. I like that. Our message to the world isn't simply that we believe the Bible is true. It is more specifically that we believe Jesus is true! Our story isn't about our orthodoxy, our story is about him!

Someone sent me an email this week with this observation and question:

"I am deeply compelled to share Jesus with my neighbors – and I am doing so. The biggest demonic voice that rises above all others is this: how can you, with integrity and with no shame or ducking of your head or lowering your eyes, say with joy, hope, and absolute certainty that Jesus is the only Way, Truth, and Life when you don't have it together yourself? How can He be the Answer when you struggle with not having complete victory? Continued trials. New struggles. Unholy desires. Etc.

I think the answer is found in the question. I can say with utter integrity and without ducking my head that I am a great sinner in need of a great Savior. If you want evidence that man cannot possibly save himself, you're looking at it. I can say with Paul, "I have not obtained all this." So often, the good that I would, I do not and the evil that I would not, that I do. Wretched man that I am. But thanks be to God who gives the victory in Jesus Christ. Our story is about him.

C. They Did Not Deny His Name

In the face of opposition, derision, and persecution, this church did not deny Jesus as the one name given under heaven whereby we must be saved. All the world around them asked was that they acknowledge Jesus as one god among many; that they remove the exclusivity of Christ as the only Lord, the only Way, the only Truth, the only Life. But they would not.

There many ways of denying the name of Jesus.

Someone was recounting to me that they were recently at a funeral of a professed Christian in a formerly reformed church. And the thing that struck them was the absence of the name of Jesus. The pastor talked of God, love, and hope – but not Jesus.

We can deny the name of Jesus by refusing to evangelize, just failing to speak of him for fear of what people will think or say.

We can deny the name of Jesus by entertaining ourselves with movies and shows that take his name in vain. Do you even wince when Jesus is used as a curse word?

The church that Jesus loves will be a church that boasts in the name of Jesus.

The church that Jesus loves will not be ashamed of his name in the midst of a mocking world.

The church that Jesus loves will be carrying that name into the world, testifying of that name before the world.

Once again, this is where I am praying for the Lord to open doors for us to engage our community for Christ. I am ashamed of how easily I fail to speak for Christ out in the world. I

am convinced that the single most important area of growth for us, in order to be a faithful church which Christ commends, is the area of evangelism.

II. The Motivations Jesus Gives

A. Assurance of Glory

Have you ever been locked out of a place you dearly wanted to enter? Maybe you locked yourself out of your car or your house, and you really wanted to get inside. And when someone comes and opens that door for you, you are deeply thankful! An open door is a tremendous blessing, but a closed door spells despair. This is infinitely true when it comes to the door to heaven.

Rev. 3:8 *I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut.*

Jesus often uses the imagery of an open door in the context of entering into the kingdom of heaven – or being excluded from it.

Luke 13:24-25 *Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, "Lord, open to us," then he will answer you, "I do not know where you come from."*

So, when Jesus says, "I have set before you and open door," it means that Jesus is assuring them that they have entrance into the kingdom of God. I think that's why Jesus reminds them he "has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens." The sovereign Lord and King has opened the doors of heaven for them – and they will never be closed.

This understanding is supported by the OT text Jesus quotes here. In Isaiah 22, we read of a wicked man named Shebna who was the steward of the king's palace. But God removed him and replaced him with a man named Eliakim, saying to him:

Is. 22:22 *And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.*

Jesus is the great steward of God's house. He holds the key that opens and closes the gate into the eternal city, into the king's palace. The only way into the presence of God is through him, and by his authority and power. And Jesus is assuring these believers that this is what he has done for them.

This is a magnificent promise. Particularly in light of the fact that the door will be closed to many, even many professing Christians. The thought is too awful to imagine. But Jesus comes to this little church in Philadelphia and says, "I've opened the door for you and it will

never be closed." I want to be that Christian. I want to be that church! Doesn't that matter more than anything?

B. Assurance of Victory

Rev. 3:9 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.

In light of recent events in our own denomination, I think it's helpful to point out that when Jesus speaks like this of the Jews, he isn't being anti-Semitic – he's being anti-sin (Kevin DeYoung). He's not calling the Jews in that city names. He is identifying the spiritual reality behind their opposition to Christ and his church.

But the main point, the thing to see is the promise of victory and vindication. The church of Jesus Christ will one day be vindicated before the world as the people loved by God. "They will learn that I love you." The imagery of "bowing before your feet" is taken from Isaiah 45 and 60:14:

Is. 60:14 The sons of those who afflicted you shall come bending low to you, and all who despised you shall bow down at your feet; they shall call you the City of the LORD, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

What an encouragement to this little body of believers. They are so small in the eyes of the world. They looked so weak and pathetic compared to the power of Rome, the wisdom of the Greeks, the majestic temples of the pagans, the power and tradition of the Jews. No wonder the world mocked them. But Jesus wants them to know that they are more than conquerors and victors in him. And one day all the world would see it. One day, all those who have afflicted the church will bow and acknowledge the glory of the church, that we are "the City of the Lord." We are loved by him.

When Jesus comes again, I want to go stand by the saints who were the least and lowliest. I'd like to watch as redeemed slaves and servants and slum dwellers from all history past are exalted as the sons and daughters of God, and robed with the glory of Jesus. But I don't want to simply watch them – I want to be in that number. Don't you?

C. Assurance of Safety

In verse 10 Jesus promises them divine, spiritual protection:

Rev. 3:10 I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.

Jesus promises an “hour of trial” – a time of crisis and suffering, that is coming on “those dwelling on earth.” Beale points out that in the book of Revelation, that phrase “those dwelling on earth” is a technical term referring to unbelievers. God will judge this world. But that judgement will not bring spiritual harm to his children. He will “keep them” – a technical term for our Saviors loving, Shepherding, hand.

When the wrath of God is poured out on the world, I want to be kept by Jesus and protected from spiritual harm. Don't you?

D. Assurance of Eternal Intimacy with God

Rev. 3:12a *The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it...*

Jesus promises this little church that they will be made a “pillar in the temple of my God.” In other words, they will be his dwelling place – forever.

Rev. 3:12b *...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.*

Notice the reoccurring use of “my” 4 times. Jesus is saying, “All that is mine, I give to you. The name of my God. The name of the city of my God...which comes from my God...and my own new name. All that is mine is yours.”

Do you want that?? Can you think of anything more significant? Anything more valuable, worthy, glorious? This is what Jesus promised to this church in order to motivate them to continue!

2 Peter 1:3–4 *His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature...*

What will empower us? The joy of his promises! Access, vindication, protection, and intimacy.

What will empower us to move forward in mission when the world closes its doors in our face? The joyful confidence that Jesus has opened the only door that eternally matters.

What will empower us to move forward in mission when we are mocked and ridiculed? The promise that one day God himself will vindicate us and claim us publicly as his own. The only

way we are going to be able to joyfully stand the angry judgements of men is to remember the smiling judgment of God.

Let the promises of Jesus empower you for mission! When naming the name of Christ looks like it will cost you things – reputation, promotion, property – delight in the promise of Jesus that you will suffer no spiritual harm. And he delights in those who honor his name! And all the best riches of Christ are ours. He will give us what is his – his name, his God, his presence forever. These are the promises that will empower us to **be** the church. And what this world desperately needs is the church.

David Wells: “The moment of the Church’s greatest influence—and, in fact, its greatest...have not been those when the church reached for worldly power, when it adapted to its culture, (or sought to be relevant), but when it sought to be authentic. The church has been most influential in those moments when its contrition reached down deeply into its soul, when in its known weakness it cried out to God from the depths, when it sought to live by his truth and on His terms, when it sought to proclaim that truth in the world, when it was willing to pay the price of having that kind of truth, when it was willing to demand of itself that it live by that truth, when it sought above all else God in his grace and glory. At such moments, it has soared and out of its own inherent weakness found extraordinary strength and power. When all of these things have been present, then the Church has been the Church.” (*Above All Earthly Powers*)