

3,10,22 Rev. 3 vs. 7 to 13, Philadelphia

This may be the most important letter we study, simply because we need to know what living the Christian life is really meant to be – what it looks like in any generation.

To really understand the heart of the Philadelphian believers, we need to take a few minutes to look at something we haven't touched on yet – “prophetic ministry”.

There is something related to our spiritual survival in an age of extreme deception that we need consider for a few minutes.

We are all familiar with prophetic ministry as being predictive of future events. But that's only half the story and many of the prophets throughout the Old and New Testaments were *not* ‘future predictors’, but *all* of them were engaged in prophetic ministry.

So, we're going to focus on what prophetic ministry is *apart from* being predictive and what that would look like at our time in history.

What the prophets of the Old Testament did was to move into action during times of apostasy and try to bring God's people back to God's original intention for them which had been lost.

Some predicted the future, but all of them interpreted the spiritual condition of God's people and challenged them to repent and return from where they had fallen.

This type of prophesying could also be called “spiritual interpretation”. It's the interpretation of everything from a spiritual standpoint. It's bringing in the spiritual implication of things to the people and helping them understand what they have been blinded to.

If you read through the major and minor prophets of Israel, you'll see that this was the primary work they were doing.

But the same has been true for the last 2000 years in the Church Age, we just don't think of those who did this work as “prophets”, but they were.

In 1 Cor. 14:1-4 we see Paul's explanation of the value and function of this gift in the church;

“Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy . . . for he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men . . . he who prophesies edifies the church.”

The words “edification” and “exhortation” refer to building up and challenging the church.

We see *predictive* prophetic ministry in passages like Acts 11:27-28;

“In those days some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them named Agabus stood up and predicted through the Spirit that a great famine would sweep across the whole world: (This happened under Claudius Caesar).”

But *exhortative* prophetic ministry was even more common and we've seen the Lord engage in this type of ministry to His people in nearly every letter we've studied in Rev. 2 & 3.

In one of Spark's books, he writes this concerning this last generation;

“I am quite sure that those who have any knowledge whatever of the times, spiritually, will agree with me when I say that the crying need of our time is for a voice of interpretation. There never was a time when there existed so extensively the need for the ministry of explanation. One does not want to make extravagant statements or to be extreme in one's utterances, but I do not think it would be either extravagant or extreme to say that the world today is bankrupt of real ministry in this sense - a voice that interprets the mind of God to His people. It may exist in some small degree here and there, but in no very large way is that ministry being fulfilled. So often our hearts groan and cry out, that the mind of God about the present situation could be brought through, in the first place to the recognition of His people, and then through His people to others beyond. There is a great need for an interpretative voice in our time.”

Here's another writing on this from a similar angle;

“It is usually a reactionary thing. We usually find that the prophets arose as a reaction from God to the course and drift of things among His people; a call back, a re-declaration, a re-pronouncement of God's mind, a bringing into clear view again of the thoughts of God. The prophets stood in the midst of the stream - usually a fast-rushing stream - like a rock; the course of things broke over them. They challenged and resisted that course, and their presence in the midst of the stream represented God's mind against the prevailing course of things. In the Old Testament, the prophet usually came at a time when things were spiritually bad and anything but according to the Divine mind; the state was evil, things were confused, mixed, chaotic; there was much deception and falsehood, and often things very much worse than that. Here is the thing to which their work relates - the original and ultimate purpose of God in and through His people; and when you have said that, you have got right to the heart of things.”

We don't really call these people prophets today; we just call them judgmental and annoying. But their ministry is vital to life of the church in a time of spiritual declension; which this time is.

Here's another example. I've spent a lot of time in our studies showing the difference between an academic understanding of the Bible and a spiritual understanding. We can study Ephesians, for example, and analyze it and outline the church and the Body of Christ and remain blind when it comes to really understanding what those terms represent.

Then one day, whether through a teacher or prophet or even just directly in personal study, God does something deep within us and we see the church, we see the Body of Christ for the first time – and now we see Ephesians.

Those are two worlds; one was truth, technically accurate - even fascinating, but something was missing and we may have felt that.

If someone asked, we could have stated the truth of all that was in Ephesians, but we didn't know what was in that truth – we knew, but we didn't really know.

Prophets never stopped their work among God's people just because there were things that were relatively commendable; things were comparatively good. The

prophets weren't 'comparative' – they were singular, because God's purpose was singular; it wasn't relative.

We could use Jeremiah to illustrate this, there came a time when a king seemed to recover things, and he had a celebration of the Passover, and the crowds came. Jerusalem was full of energy and it was obviously a good thing.

But Jeremiah sensed something was still not right. It became apparent later that this celebration was just an outward event, meaning that the hearts of God's people hadn't changed, the high places weren't taken down.

So, Jeremiah's original prophecy against Judah had to stand. He couldn't go along with a partial or apparent recovery. He was inwardly forced to hold true to God's full purpose.

A prophet can't accept as final what is only comparatively good. He can be grateful for any change he sees, but he can't settle into that while what the Lord is after is still unreached. Prophetic ministry involves complete faithfulness to the thoughts of God. He can't accept anything less or different than what the Lord has shown him.

For us, it's not about Moses, it's about bringing the church to a full, complete understanding of God's purpose in Christ and His specific call on this generation.

The advantage of being a part of prophetic ministry is knowing what you are supposed to do because God has shown you what's needed most at your time in history; the disadvantage is that you will be rejected by nearly everyone you minister to; which is another thing we see as being universally characteristic of the prophets in the Bible.

And those prophets were far from perfect, we all are, but because of His call on them and because of where their hearts were in relation to Him, He sovereignly overruled their mistakes and used them to teach them something more about Him and His ways. He doesn't allow their mistakes to derail them.

The Lord desires that each one of us get to the place where we can honestly say, "I have seen what the Lord wants; I know what's He's after." That allows us to not only to pursue that personally, it also enables us to avoid deception, because then we can see the things that are not what He's after. That becomes clear also.

You've probably also noticed when you read the prophets that God's preparation of them for this ministry was severe. He stripped everything away from them; both things of the world and things of religion, so they would have nothing left but Him.

It was Job-like. The Lord allows the enemy to touch everything from health to circumstances to relationships; whatever we take for granted or hold on to, has to go under the cross to make way for a full dependence on the Lord for everything.

Just as a side note: In Eph. 3:16 Paul says, "I ask that out of the riches of His glory He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner man."

It's definitely not in the "outer man" (body and soul) – that's where weakness is allowed to reign supreme. But while the outer man perishes, inner man is renewed. We may be extremely weak in the outer man and still see new things all the time in the spirit.

So, the preparing for prophetic ministry was not only painful, it brought about extreme loneliness; like Elijah thinking he was the only one left who understood, or Jeremiah who was told up front that literally no one would listen to him.

(Jer. 7:27) "When you tell them all these things; they will not listen to you. When you call to them, they will not answer."

I'm sure we've all experienced that to some extent. But it's to be expected when you are trying to communicate something people won't hear.

I found this unique approach to the passage in Matt. 11:12 (I say "unique" not because I think it's wrong, but because I'd never heard it before). Here's the passage;

"And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force."

And this is the author's commentary I found on this verse;

"We must desperately mean business, and come to the place where we say: 'Lord, I am set upon all that you mean in Christ. I am set upon that, and I am not going to allow other people's prejudices or suspicions or criticisms get in the way; I am not going to allow any man-made system to hinder me; I am

going right on with You for all Your purpose. I am going to do violence to everything that would get in the way.'

“How easily many lives are side-tracked, simply because they are not desperate enough! They are caught in things which limit - things which may be good, that may have something of God in them, but which none the less are limiting things, and do not represent a wide-open way to all God's purpose. The only way for us to come into all that the Lord means - not only into what we have seen but into all that He has purposed - is to be men who say, 'By God's grace, nothing and no one, however good, is going to stand in my way; I am going on with God.' Have that position with the Lord, and you will find that God meets you on that ground.”

As disciples of Christ and strangers and pilgrims in this world, we are supposed to seek those things which are above, not those things of the earth; looking not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; focused on that which is eternal, not that which is temporal; pursuing God's purpose to finalize the spiritual formation of Christ in His Body; not the purpose of Christian patriots to regain Trump's America. Empires rise and fall; America is no exception. It's already under judgment, so the marches, protests and prayers won't accomplish anything but distraction from what the Lord wants for His church. We are eternal beings, and we need to begin to live fully in the reality of that.

Ok, we'll end with that – now you have an idea of what Paul had in his mind when he wrote in 1 Cor. 14:3, “. . . he who prophesies . . . speaks to men.”

Now, let's read through our passage in Rev. 3:7-13

“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: 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, and 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 am coming

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

One result of the move of God's Spirit in Philadelphia was missionary outreach (as we saw in vs. 8, "I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it."); but Philadelphia marks what was primarily a "church" revival - bringing in fresh life to God's own people.

As we have seen, there are basically seven classifications of churches in these first chapters of Revelation:

"Ephesus" – Zealous for religious activity, but drifting away from "First Love"

"Smyrna" – Kept humble and faithful through intense persecution

"Pergamum" – The beginning of idolatry and immorality

"Thyatira" – Full scale idolatry, legalism and spiritual blackout

"Sardis" - Dead formalism

"Philadelphia" - Renewed life; with genuine spiritual vitality

"Laodicea" – Lazy, arrogant, indifferent and self-satisfied

And as we've also seen, all of the churches in Rev. 2 & 3 are characterized by their names:

Ephesus means "desirable"; the church on the edge of intimacy, desired but not possessed

Smyrna comes from "Myrrh"; a spice that, when crushed, gives off a sweet fragrance

Pergamos = "marriage" or "union"; in this case, united to the political world system

Thyatira = "continual sacrifice"; the repeated sacrifice of Christ in the Catholic Mass; the denial of His all-sufficient death for us

Sardis = "Remnant" or "those having escaped"; God's reaction to Thyatira in pulling His people from the dark ages of the legalism and idolatry of Romanism

Philadelphia = In the Greek, "phileo" means "brotherly love"

Laodicea = "The rights or opinions of the people – the rule of the laity"

These are the primary characteristics of each church and of each of the historical segments the church was in over the last 2000 years.

When God brought new life to the Philadelphian season of the church, that life was expressed in four ways;

1. Holding on to the Word of Christ (first part of vs. 8)
2. Not denying His Name - by life as well as by testimony (last part of vs. 8)
3. Experiential knowledge of His love formed in the saints – and that love expressed for each other
4. Staying faithful in obedience to the "Word of His patience" (vs. 10)

All of these express genuine spiritual life. And if you combine them with Smyrna, what you end up with is *patient, suffering love*.

That should sound familiar. Remember that in Rom. 8:29 Paul tells us that the work of the Holy Spirit in the Christian is to conform him to the image of Christ, and the primary characteristics of our Lord were – patient, suffering love.

So, in Philadelphia we see the corporate likeness of a patient, suffering, loving Savior, Who was forming and expressing His own Life in the surrendered churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia.

(2 Cor. 4:10-11, 7) "We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifest in our body . . . we have this treasure in earthen vessels."

In the last part of vs. 8 we see this phrase,

"For you have a little strength . . ."

This is a short statement, but it's extremely important, because all that God accomplished in and through Philadelphia, He did with a group of Christians with "little strength".

I want to read something that shows what "little strength" looks like on a very personal level. This is a prayer of A.W. Tozer, and it's pretty long, so stay with me – it's worth hearing because it helps us understand what "little strength" looks like in an overcomer.

“Lord, I have heard Your voice and was afraid. You have called me to an awesome task in a perilous hour. You are about to shake all nations and the earth and also heaven, that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. O Lord, You have stooped to honor me to be Your servant. No man takes this honor upon himself save he that is called of God. You have ordained me, Your messenger, to them that are stubborn of heart and hard of hearing. They have rejected You, the Master, and it is not to be expected that they will receive me, the servant.”

“I shall not waste time deploring my weakness nor my unfittedness for the work. The responsibility is not mine, but Yours. You have said, ‘I knew You – I ordained You – I set you apart, and You have also said, ‘You shall go to all that I shall send You, and whatsoever I command You, You shall speak.’ Who am I to argue with You or to call into question Your sovereign choice? The decision is not mine but Yours. So be it, Lord. Your will, not mine, be done.”

“Well do I know, God of the prophets and the apostles, that as long as I honor You, You will honor me. Help me therefore to take this solemn vow to honor You in all my future life and labors, whether by gain or by loss, by life or by death, and then to keep that vow unbroken while I live.”

“It is time, O God, for You to work, for the enemy has entered into Your pastures and the sheep are torn and scattered. And false shepherds abound who deny the danger and laugh at the perils which surround Your flock. The sheep are deceived by these hirelings and follow them with touching loyalty while the wolf closes in to kill and destroy. I beseech You, give me sharp eyes to detect the presence of the enemy; give me understanding to see and courage to report what I see faithfully. Make my voice so like Your own that even the sick sheep will recognize it and follow You.”

“Lord Jesus, I come to You for spiritual preparation. Lay Your hand upon me. Anoint me with the oil of the New Testament prophet. Forbid that I should become a religious scribe and thus lose my prophetic calling. Save me from the curse that lies dark across the modern clergy, the curse of compromise, of imitation, of professionalism. Save me from the error of judging a church by its size, its popularity or the amount of its yearly offering. Help me to remember that I am a prophet – not a promoter, not a religious manager,

but a prophet. Let me never become a slave to crowds. Heal my soul of carnal ambitions and deliver me from the itch for publicity. Save me from bondage to things. Let me not waste my days puttering around the house. Lay Your terror upon me, O God, and drive me to the place of prayer where I may wrestle with principalities and powers and the rulers of the darkness of this world. Deliver me from overeating and late sleeping. Teach me self-discipline that I may be a good soldier of Jesus Christ.”

“I accept hard work and small rewards in this life. I ask for no easy place. If others seek the smoother path, I shall try to take the hard way without judging them too harshly. I shall expect opposition and try to take it quietly when it comes. Teach me to use whatever I receive in such manner that will not injure my soul nor diminish my spiritual power. And if, in Your permissive providence, honor should come to me from Your church, let me not forget in that hour that I am unworthy of the least of Your mercies, and that if men knew me as intimately as I know myself, they would withhold their honors or bestow them upon others more worthy to receive them.”

“And now, O Lord of heaven and earth, I consecrate my remaining days to You; let them be many or few, as You will. Let me stand before the great or minister to the poor and lowly; that choice is not mine, and I would not influence it if I could. I am Your servant to do Your will, and that will is sweeter to me than position or riches or fame, and I choose it above all things on earth or in heaven.”

“Though I am chosen of You and honored by holy calling, let me never forget that I am but a man of dust and ashes, a man with all the natural faults and passions that plague the race of men. I pray You, therefore, my Lord and Redeemer, save me from myself and from all the injuries I may do to myself while trying to be a blessing to others. Fill me with Your power by the Holy Spirit, and I will go in Your strength and tell of Your righteousness, not mine. I will spread abroad the message of redeeming love while strength endures.”

I guess, by way of application, the question we have to ask ourselves is this: Going forward will be much harder than going back. Is enduring the hardship of determined service and commitment to the Lord, and hearing Him say, ‘well done,

my good and faithful servant' when we stand before Him, worth losing out on a multitude of personal comforts and pleasures in this life?

That's a question no one can answer for us – it's very personal. In some ways settling this in our hearts will be the most 'alone' time any of us will ever have.

Now, let's look at some of the challenges Philadelphia faced; keep in mind that genuine love must have truth and righteousness as foundations, or it is a cheap imitation – like 'ecumenical' love that is willing to compromise, to sacrifice truth, in order not to offend anyone.

(vs. 9) "I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews but are not, but instead are liars; I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and they will acknowledge that you are the ones I love."

Whether anything like this has ever happened in your life personally, it hasn't happened globally yet. There is coming a time when those who hate the truth will be forced to see their own hypocrisy and to acknowledge that we are the true followers of Christ – the ones God loves.

One of the meanings of the word 'agapao' is "to take pleasure in" – which is what the Lord feels for the Philadelphians. He does not 'take pleasure in' the synagogue of Satan.

Here's Walter Scott's explanation of this 'synagogue';

"We have only to read the New Testament and contrast its teachings with Protestantism as a whole, and then ask: Have we not in our midst and around us, a huge system of something like Judaism in its principles, traditions, practices, and character? Judaism here meets the Lord's withering condemnation. Popularity, numbers, wealth, and influence are on their side. Philadelphian saints are few, feeble, and of no account. Confronted on every hand with a spurious character of Christianity, which adapts itself to every variety of taste and temperament, the special danger is that the separate position would be surrendered, that an easier path be sought at the expense of a deviation from truth and holiness. A large and increasing number in the professing Church is here termed 'the synagogue of Satan.' What is it if not that? There never was a moment when divine love is so needed. The hypocrite says 'Union is strength', the Philadelphian

says, 'Union *in obedience* is strength'. But the relative positions of those composing 'the synagogue of Satan' and the Philadelphian Church are soon to be reversed. The former are to be humbled; the latter exalted. But, more, these Church pretenders shall know that those whom they had despised are special objects of divine love. They 'shall know that I have loved thee'."

Now, vs. 10-12,

"Because you kept My command to persevere, I will keep you from the hour of testing that will come upon the whole world to test those who belong to this world. I am coming quickly. Hold on to what you have so that no one will take away your crown. All who overcome will become pillars in the Temple of my God and they will never have to leave it. And I will write my God's Name on them and they will be citizens in the city of My God – the new Jerusalem that comes down from heaven from my God. And they will have My new Name inscribed upon them."

First, the rapture is promised. He does *not* say He will keep them from the testing in the sense of protection or safety *during* the Tribulation; but from the "hour" or the "time" of testing.

When that "time" begins, we will be gone!

Here's an excellent explanation of this timing issue;

"It is exemption from the period of time that is promised. By implication, this deliverance will coincide with Christ's return mentioned in the very next verse: 'I will come soon' (3:11). Believers on earth will meet the Lord in the air and thus escape the hour of trial . . . One cannot make good sense out of Rev. 3:10 otherwise. What it guarantees is protection *away from* (lit. *out from*) the scene of the 'hour of trial' while that hour is in progress. This effect of placing the faithful in a position of safety presupposes that they will have been removed to another location at the period's beginning."

Verse 11 begins with a phrase that is mistranslated in several versions of the Bible. It doesn't read, "I come soon"; it should read, "I come quickly or swiftly". When He comes, it will be "in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. 15:52).

This verse also reinforces the promise of reward (in this case a crown), to those who stay true to the end of this life. I know we've talked about this before, but every time we see 'crowns' offered to faithful believers who endure hardship for His sake in this life, it's a promise of sharing the throne of Christ in His kingdom.

(2 Tim. 2:12) "If we endure, we will reign with him . . ."

We will look at this more next week in the offer to the overcomer in Laodicea.

vs. 12 offers the overcomer a unique and powerful position in God's temple (pillars are the strength of a structure).

"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 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."

In Rev. 21:10, 22 we see what this is referring to;

"And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God . . . I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple."

The overcomer is granted the privilege to both know and to display the glory of Christ's new Name. As this site describes it;

"To be a pillar is a sign of special reward with a permanent position of honor in the millennium and eternal state. Pillars stood for stability, ornamentation, and service. Second, he will never be removed from this place of preeminence in the eternal temple. The overcomer has a fixed eternal place of honor in the sanctuary of God. He will not go out from it."

This is the time, at the consummation of all that God had planned from eternity past, when the fullness of God's glory will be seen by all creation in the church.

(Eph. 1:23; 3:20-21) "The Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all . . . Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above

all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory *in* the Church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.”

We will spend more time on this when we get to Rev. 21.

The measure to which Philadelphia (and anyone who follows their example) attains to the likeness of Christ, in simplicity, suffering, purity and faithfulness, will be reflected in them and through them in a unique way throughout eternity - to the praise and glory of their Savior Who made this destiny possible for them by His sacrifice on the Cross.