

You've Got Mail - Philadelphia

Scripture: Revelation 3: 7-13

Date: October 25, 2020

INTRODUCTION

In the 1990's a cheesy romantic comedy titled *You've Got Mail* underscored the importance of connecting / communicating. My family was blessed with my mother and her mother often writing cards, notes and letters to us. It was reinforced that communication is key to community / family

In the book of Revelation - Jesus is writing letters to his churches- through John on the island of Patmos. He's writing to encourage them / to affirm them. The timing of the letters is crucial as in the late 90's AD there have been – and still are - times of trials and tribulations. There have been natural disasters (earthquakes) and there have been persecution by the Romans and by the Jews of the early Christian church.

Each church received its own letter – although they were likely sent as a group – and they contained a Greeting, a Commendation / Compliment, a Critique / Criticism and a Calling to endure.

ADDRESSED TO PHILADELPHIA

Letters – then and now – are usually addressed to the recipient. The one that is expected to receive the letter and read it. In today's culture when we think of Philadelphia we think of Cream Cheese or we think of the City of Brotherly Love in Pennsylvania.

In Asia Minor – now known as Turkey – it was a small, relatively young city less than 200 years old. It was built by King Attalus who had a strong relationship with his brother – hence the city of brotherly love. However, in 17 A.D. it was devastated by an earthquake in 17 A.D. but rebuilt using funding from Rome. It was primarily agricultural in nature with many vineyards so much so that one of the primary Greek gods worshipped was Dionysus (Greek God of wine).

Philadelphia was a central point of travel & access within the Roman / Greek empire to points further east – sometimes called the missionary hub spreading Roman / Greek ideals. Within the Roman city there was a strong and fanatical Jewish community that was similar to nearby Smyrna – they were very opposed to new Christian sect.

SENT BY JESUS CHRIST

The letter written by Jesus begins with a greeting of description. Jesus begins with an announcement of who He is and what He can do for the church. It begins with a simple description that He is holy and true. In the midst of a culture – then and now – surrounded by false gods Jesus remains a power – a constant foundation. In the midst of a culture – then and now – tempted to disregard God Jesus remains a presence. In the midst of a culture – then and now – struggling to find a permanence in the midst of changing perspectives, truths etc. – Jesus remains a permanence

Jesus is also described as the holder of the keys of David. This is a reference to Isaiah 22 where Eliakim was given keys to the kingdom which is a context to all the riches and valuables and strength of the kingdom of God.

Jesus offers them the image of an open door. A door that He alone holds open. A door that He has made open by His death on the cross and by His resurrection from the grave. A door that no one else can open or close because HE holds the keys.

The letter begins with an image of Jesus that is a reminder that He is the light to the world and that He is the Lord to the church. An image of the One who walks amongst the lampstands from Chapter 1 reinforcing the connection Jesus has with His churches. He walks amongst them – aware of them.

The letter is not some form letter but rather a letter that is a forum of the life of the church. A forum that shows that Jesus is invested in the wellbeing of the church. The letter speaks to the church - the church in the city of brotherly love and the letter speaks with a godly love from the ONE who IS love.

Jesus is communicating / revealing Himself, His calling and His commendation in order to affirm the church, in order to encourage the church and in order to call the church.

CONTENT OF THE LETTER

Jesus speaks to the church without critique and Philadelphia is one of two churches that Jesus doesn't have fault with. Jesus speaks to their community with compliment even as He recognized their context. A context of hard times and hardships. We're not given much details here - yet life is apparently not easy in Philadelphia for the church

LITTLE STRENGTH

Jesus refers to the church having only a little strength and some say little strengths is a reference to the size of the church. That the little refers to the few members of the church. Others see it as a reference to the limited effectiveness of the church. That their faith in fact is weak and the persecutions they've face have taken a toll on them.

Perhaps though – given the comments about the synagogue of satan – the church of Christ in Philadelphia – is worn down / battered. It has little strength to keep on keeping on with the natural disasters, with the economic fallout, with the spiritual struggles and with the political and social persecution.

It's hard right now for the church.

Jesus offers them the strength through His open door. A door that He holds open. He offers them a safe route with His strength – with His peace.

Jesus also holds out an image of the church becoming a pillar in temple of heaven. A pillar – a part that holds the structure up but the images of a pillar in Philadelphia is a

bigger matter. In the archeology of the city there are some massive pillars. Something of significance, strength, support. The church in Philadelphia would have understood this illustration as representing permanence, power, protection

KEPT JESUS' WORD / NAME OF JESUS ----- NAME OF JESUS

The church in Philadelphia is commended for its focus on keeping the truth of Jesus alive in their hearts and deeds. Jesus sees their deeds AND their hearts and compliments them. Issues that plagues Ephesus and Sardis are not present in Philadelphia.

They have borne the name of Jesus and loved Him as their God and King. They have borne the name of their city – brotherly love – and loved their neighbours as themselves.

As they have kept Jesus' word and truth He promises to them that they will be – in the world yet to come – identified with a new name. His new name as Lord and King, the new name of the city of Jerusalem. A new name of of identity – purpose – power

ENDURE PATIENTLY – CROWN

The church in Ephesus is called to endure patiently. The NIV translation suggests a focus on patiently waiting. The ESV + NSRV translations suggest a focus on enduring patiently. The NET translation speaks of enduring with a steadfastness or a resiliency.

Regardless – there is a call by Jesus through the open door to be empowered, to be strengthened so that they may survive. Jesus offers the image of the open door – not just for the world yet to come but also for the world here and now

That they would – if they hang on – receive a crown. There is a sense of endurance – perseverance because the troubles they face will continue on. There is a reference to a greater trouble yet to come and that they will be spared that tribulation, that persecution. But – they are called to continue onward – in faith and in life.

The crown is a symbol of authority – power – responsibility. Jesus affirms this when He indicates that one day – all those who mocked, rejected and persecuted the church would come before them and acknowledge Jesus' claim on them. The church would not have an authority of their own but Jesus' authority given to them. An authority in this world and in the world yet to come

APPLICATION

EARS TO HEAR

My mother kept many forms of correspondence. Things she wrote and things others wrote to her. She lived the understanding that communications like phone calls, emails and even snail mail were all important to her and her family. Connected through communication.

In this world of Covid 19, racial unrest, economic uncertainty – we too feel pressure to keep Jesus' name and truth at the forefront of our lives. We are battered and beaten by the circumstances of life and our faith struggles to endure – much less endure steadfastly.

By God's grace Jesus – the Christ – continues to reveal Himself. Revealed through the words of scripture, through the power of prayer, through our worship, fellowship and service of Him and His kingdom.

It is that presence, that power and that promise which will allow us to become a pillar in the temple of God – strong and supporting. It is that presence, that power and that promise that will enable us to carry the name of Jesus upon us and to be seated in the New Jerusalem. It is that presence, that power and that promise that will enable us to wear the crown of glory and authority as His children – in this world and in the world yet to come!

AMEN