

June 25, 2023 by Steve Brandon



# Keep My Word

## Revelation 3:7-13

1. "I Have the Key" (verse 7)
2. "You Kept My Word" (verse 8)
3. "I Will Keep You" (verses 9-10)
4. "I Will Claim You" (verses 11-13)

Kent and Barbara Hughes wrote a book entitled, "Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome." <sup>[1]</sup> It's a book aimed at pastors, who often fall into thinking that their ministries need to be "successful," that is, big and large and having a great impact upon the world. Kent Hughes is the retired pastor of College Church in Wheaton, a solid church in Wheaton that has made its impact throughout the world. Though his ministry was very successful in Wheaton, it was not always. He had a ministry that wasn't successful. In that book, he describes the church that he tried to plant, but it failed. Throughout the book, Kent and Barbary Hughes pound the theme that success in ministry is faithfulness, not numbers.

I must confess this morning, that I often fall into the "Success Syndrome" One of my own constant wrestling as a pastor has been the size of our church. We have been in existence for more than 20 years, and we have remained about the same size for most of those years. anywhere between 80-120 people. People have come. People have gone. We have remained constant. We have remained a small church. Now, on the American scene, we are not a small church. Half of the churches in the United States have fewer than 65 people in them. That makes us above average in size. Yet, full confession, there has always been something in me, that has longed for our church to be larger than it is, to have more resources, and to be able to make a bigger impact for the kingdom of Christ.

I understand the benefits of a larger church, one with multiple staff. As one pastor friend of mine I know said, "When you add staff to your church, you don't add to your ministry, you multiply your ministry." A larger church with multiple staff can do things that we, as a church with a solo pastor, just can't do. Crowds attract crowds. It's often discouraging to me to see people leave our small church, to join the big church in town which has a lot going for it already.

Now, don't get me wrong. I do understand it's not all is good with a large church. One Lifeway Research project revealed, "As churches grow into [the larger] category, there is a decline among churchgoers in per capita giving, willingness to volunteer, and a lower overall level of participation within the congregation. This lends credence to the stereotype that some attendees of larger churches are looking for a place to spectate but not serve." <sup>[2]</sup>

I understand this. I also understand the blessings that we experience as an average-sized church. We are a generous congregation. We are a congregation where a high percentage of people are serving in the church in one way or another. Furthermore, there are things that we can be and do that a large church simply cannot do. But, I'm constantly looking for encouragement along these lines.

I had breakfast yesterday morning with a retired pastor. During our conversation, he said, "I pastored quite a few churches. But my most enjoyable days of being a pastor, was in the small church that I pastored for 14 years." Those sorts of statements encourage me greatly. To realize that we, at Rock Valley Bible Church, may not be the biggest church in town, but the ministry that we have experienced, has been sweet indeed.

However much I may have been encouraged by this pastor's comments, the greatest encouragement that I can receive, comes from the pages of Scripture, when Jesus shows us how we ought to think about our average sized church. Because, this is what we see in the church of Philadelphia. We see a church that has "little power" (Revelation 3:8). That is, it is small. it has limited resources. It has limited influence in the world. Yet, this little church, is strongly commended by Jesus than any of the other churches mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3.

Jesus speaks only good about this church. Jesus says, "You have kept my word and have not denied my name" (verse 8). Jesus says, "I have loved you" (verse 9). Jesus says, "You have kept my word about patient endurance" (verse 10). And as a result, Jesus makes deeper promises to this church than to any other church mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3. Jesus says, "I will make [your enemies] come and bow down before your feet" (verse 9). Jesus says, "I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world" (verse 10). Jesus says to those who overcome, "No one will seize your crown" (verse 11). "I will make you a pillar in the temple. You will never go out of the temple. I will write on you the name of my God. I will write on you the name of the city of my God. I will write on you my own new name" (verse 12). These all indicate the abundant blessing of God upon this small, but faithful church.

People say, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." And when it comes to the church, the builder of the church is the best one to evaluate our church. And with the church in Philadelphia, we find out that Jesus isn't much concerned with the size of the church at all. He is mostly concerned about our faithfulness to him and to the gospel. And this ought to come as great encouragement to all of our hearts. We may not be the biggest church in town, But Jesus says, "I won't judge you on the size of your church." I will judge you based upon your faithfulness, your faithfulness to me.

The title of my message this morning is, "Keep My Word." This is the core of what made this little church in Philadelphia so loved by Jesus.

They "Kept His Word" (verse 10). And for us, a normal church, with "little power" we want to do what the church in Philadelphia did. we went to "Keep His Word." So, let's read our text:

Revelation 3:7-13

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: "The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens. "I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. 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. 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. I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. The one who conquers, 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. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Again, I remind you of our map. When John wrote this, he was a prisoner on the island of Patmos. he wrote this letter to a real church that existed in his day and was located in Asia minor, which is modern-day Turkey. Over the past five weeks, we have looked at the letters he wrote to Ephesus and Smyrna and Pergamum and Thyatira and Sardis. And now, he writes to the angel of the church in Philadelphia, essentially writing to the church. Here is the description of Jesus that begins the letter:

Revelation 3:7

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: 'The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

By way of outline, for my first point, I'm pulling out the key statement in verse 7. Jesus says,

## **1. "I Have the Key" (verse 7)**

Now, consistent with all of the other letters to the churches, this comes from the description of Jesus in chapter 1. When Jesus appeared to John, who fell at his feet, Jesus said, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, And I have the keys of Death and Hades" (Revelation 1:17-18). Jesus conquered death. He has the keys to overcome death. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live" (John 11:25).

This is the good news we proclaim! Trust in Jesus and you will have the everlasting life that he promises. Jesus has the keys to overcome Death and Hades. because he overcame Death and Hades by raising from the dead! Oh, church family, believe in Jesus, live forever! Jesus has the keys! But that's not the key that Jesus has here in Revelation. This is "the key of David."

Have you ever seen those janitor guys who have all of those keys hanging off his belt? That's what Jesus is. He has all sorts of keys! And here in the letter to Philadelphia, Jesus is said to have "the key of David." This key is an allusion to the picture given in Isaiah 22, in which Isaiah is describing the transfer of power, from an unfaithful man named Shebna, to a faithful man named Eliakim. Eliakim is given a robe and sash and authority to rule and reign (Isaiah 22:21). Isaiah says this of him, "he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. 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. And I will fasten him like a peg in a secure place, and he will become a throne of honor to his father's house" (Isaiah 22:21-22).

In other words, the LORD is saying that Eliakim will have the power in Judah. He has the key. Nobody comes in or out apart from him and his administration (verse 22). He will dwell secure (verse 23). He will care for those who dwell in Jerusalem and Judah, like a father would (verse 21). And when it comes to Jesus, he says, "I Have the Key, I am of the line of David. I have been given the keys to his kingdom (the Messianic kingdom) I have this governmental power that controls the nation. "I control who gets into the kingdom. I control who gets out of the kingdom. Nobody opens or shuts apart from me."

I had a great illustration of this last week when I went into the county jail for the Spiritual Impact Weekend. In order to get into the jail, there was high security. First all, there were the metal detectors and the security guards that we needed to pass through. Next, we needed to pass through a security door, which could only be opened by those with passes. And on our way into the housing units, we had to pass through through "sally doors." These are series of two doors, which are electronically controlled. They are never opened at the same time. You cannot open them with a badge. They are controlled by those who sit at the desk in the mission control center. As you come to them, those in the control center see you. and they open the door. You then, enter into this chamber and the door closes behind you. Only when that door is shut will the other door open, to allow you to pass through the door. It's a security feature. These doors merely took us into the housing units. We then boarded the elevator and went to the fourth floor. Where there were eight different pods. And in order to get into a pod where the inmates are, we had to pass through another set of "sally doors." As we approached them, the security guard in central control saw that we were there. They opened the first set of doors. We entered into the corridor. And the door closed behind us. Only then did the door do the pod open up for us to enter into the pod.

Jesus has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens. Jesus is in the central control. He can open the Sally Doors. He determines who comes in and out. You say "in and out of what?" In and out of the kingdom. The promises made at the end of this letter all pertain to the kingdom of God.

Verse 11 speaks of the heavenly crown which all believers will receive. Verse 12 speaks about being in the temple of God, in the New Jerusalem that comes down from heaven. We will read about this in Revelation 21, which tells of the glories of the heavenly city, where God will dwell with man once again in the restoration of the creation (Rev. 21:3), where "God himself will be with [his people] as their God" (Revelation 21:3).

The only way through this door, comes through the one who has the keys. And that's Jesus. In verse 7, Jesus said,

Revelation 3:7

"The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

Jesus is "the holy one" and "the true one." In his holiness, Jesus has the power to operate the doors. In his truth, Jesus is the only way into the kingdom. As Jesus says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:3). And this is how Jesus opens his letter to the church in Philadelphia. Next, Jesus commends the church by saying,

## 2. "You Kept My Word" (verse 8)

Revelation 3:8

I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

This is the commendation to the church in Philadelphia. Now, what is unique about this commendation is that there is nothing negative in these words to the church in Philadelphia, unlike the letters to the most of the other churches. Ephesus was told that they had abandoned their first love (2:4). Smyrna was told not to fear (2:10). Pergamum and Thyatira were both told that they tolerated false teaching in their congregations (2:14-15; 2:20). Sardis was told that they were dead (3:1). Laodicea was told that they were lukewarm (3:15). But none of that comes here. Jesus is totally positive when it comes to evaluating the church in Philadelphia.

To the church in Philadelphia, Jesus begins first by acknowledging their "works."

Revelation 3:8

I know your works.

Jesus says this about every church, because he walks among the seven golden lampstands, which are the churches (Revelation 1:12, 20). He knows all about the church in Philadelphia. He knows all about our church. He knows all about every church. To the church in Philadelphia, he continues on.

Revelation 3:8

Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut.

Again, this goes back to Jesus having the keys. The door is open wide for those in Philadelphia to enter in. In John 10, Jesus describes himself as that door. "I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture" (John 10:9). It's the loving embrace of Jesus. His arms are open wide to all who would turn from their sin and trust in him! He is worthy of our trust. Again, in John 10, in that context when Jesus described himself as "the door." He also speaks about being the good shepherd, who leads us into the abundant life. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). "My sheep hear my voice and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:28). And for those in Philadelphia, this was most certainly true! He is the open door, through which all of his sheep enter, and find safety. This comes, not to the big and powerful with a great reputation, like those in Sardis. This comes, not to the rich and comfortable church, like those in Laodicea. This comes, to the church with "little power."

Revelation 3:8

I know that you have but little power.

We don't know all that this means. I picture a little child in a super-man costume. He has all of the symbol of power, but really, as a child, he has very little power. This is a good picture of what this means. But let's let some commentators speak. Simon Kistemaker said this: "these Christians were so insignificant that they could not even be regarded as meaningful" (Kistemaker, p. 159) [\[3\]](#). George Eldon Ladd said this: "Apparently this church was small, poor, and uninfluential" (p. 60) [\[4\]](#). Grant Osbourne said this: "The church lacked size and stature in the community and was looked down upon and persecuted. They had 'little authority' or 'influence.'" [\[5\]](#).

In describing Philadelphia, Jesus is describing us at Rock Valley Bible Church. When evaluating Philadelphia, Jesus doesn't look for size or influence. He looks to the very things that Philadelphia excelled in. He says, in verse 8, "you have kept my word and have not denied my name."

The application comes straight to us. We should strive for these two actions: To keep the words of Jesus. And not deny his name. These two actions are two sides of the same coin. The first side is the positive action and obedience to the gospel: keeping the words of Jesus. The second side is the negative side of the same coin: not denying his name, but honoring the Lord Jesus in all that we do.

These are the two actions for us to strive after: Obedience to his word! Faithfulness to his name!

The first action is the basis of the title of my message this morning: "Keep His Word." That is, obey the Lord! Do what he says! Submit to him and follow in his ways. This is part of the great commission. This is what it means to "make disciples." "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20). This is our aim! This is what we ought to strive after! To be disciples of Jesus, followers after him! Submitting to the Lord! Following after him in obedience! and doing the work of making disciples, who will do the same.

I find this tremendously encouraging. Because at the end of the day (literally, at the end of time), this is fundamentally what Jesus is looking for. He is looking for those who have followed after him and kept his word! It's not the size of our church that matters. It's not the number of new converts or baptisms that we have every year! It's our faithfulness to Jesus. And we can do this. By the power of Christ we can do this. By the power of Christ we can uphold his name. So, church family, let's make this our ambition and our heart! to keep his word! Let's move on to my third point.

### 3. "I Will Keep You" (verses 9-10)

That's the core of what Jesus says in verses 9 and 10.

#### Revelation 3:9-10

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. 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.

I trust that you can see the core, right there in verse 10.

#### Revelation 3:10

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.

Verse 9 speaks about being kept from the evils of the "synagogue of Satan." We have seen this "synagogue" before. In Revelation 2:9, in speaking with the church in Smyrna, Jesus said, "I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan." Now, obviously, these synagogues are not the same. One is in Smyrna along the coast. The other is in Philadelphia, inland, about 100 miles due east.

These "synagogues of Satan" certainly had the same beliefs. They believed what the Jews believed: they rejected Jesus. They also went forth and persecuted Christians. But what made them particularly stenchful to Jesus is that "they say that they are Jews and are not, but lie." That is, they didn't even follow in the footsteps of the faith of Abraham! They were unfaithful witnesses to the name of God. Certainly, their persecution of those in Philadelphia was fierce.

To this, those in Philadelphia were given the assurance that Jesus would make it right in the end. Jesus said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." And he will repay with your ultimate vindication.

#### Revelation 3:9

Behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you.

In the end, those who oppose us will see that we have indeed, been right all along. they will learn that indeed, God's love has been upon us! That our faith is real. That God returns his love for our faith! That the fruit that the Lord has worked in our lives is his doing! And those who have persecuted us, and mocked us for our faith, will bow down before our feet. That's the promise here in verse 9.

#### Revelation 3:9

Behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you.

Paul talked about this time in Romans 8:19, "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God." When those loved by God are manifest for the world to see! Oh, what a time that will be! No longer will we be misunderstood. No longer will we be mocked for following Jesus. No longer will they think we are fools for holding fast the name of Jesus! But all will be made clear! Jesus says, "I will Keep You." Look at verse 10.

#### Revelation 3:10

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.

What a promise this is to the church in Philadelphia, and to us! When we keep the word of Christ, patiently enduring the trials of this life. patiently enduring the ridicule of others. patiently enduring those who don't believe, God will keep us from the hour to trial.

There are many who take this verse to mean that God will rapture us all out of this world before the time of tribulation breaks out! They say, "God is going to remove us from the hour of trial." But that's not what verse 10 means.

First of all, this was written to the church in Philadelphia. He promised to keep them from "the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world" in their time! not in some long-distant, two-thousand-years-later time. But second, and more important, this phrase, "keep you from the hour of trial" doesn't mean "removal." It means "protection through." I say this, because Jesus used this same phrase in his high priestly prayer in John 17. When he was praying for his earthly disciples, he prayed this:

#### John 17:11, 14-17

"And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. ... I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth;

your word is truth."

In this prayer of Jesus, he pleads for his "Holy Father" to keep his disciples "in your name" (verse 11). He says, "I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one" (verse 15). Likewise, here in Revelation 3:10, the promise of Jesus isn't to take the church "out of" the hour of trial by taking them "out of the world." Rather, the promise is to preserve them through the hour of trial.

The prayer of Jesus is answered by Jesus, himself in the promise of Jesus. He promises those in Philadelphia

Revelation 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.

This is the promise throughout the entire Bible, not that God removes us from trials, but that God sustains us within our trials! He gives us the strength to persevere through them. When we face health struggles, he sustains our spirit. When we face financial hardships, he will provide our every need. When we face the temptations of sin, he will provide the way of escape through trusting in Jesus. When you face ridicule from unbelievers, he will provide for you the strength to hold fast.

For those in Philadelphia, they were facing persecution from this "synagogue of Satan" (verse 9). Jesus promises to sustain them. Jesus promises to keep them.

#### **4. "I Will Claim You" (verses 11-13)**

Let's begin with verse 11.

Revelation 3:11

I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.

Jesus has a crown that is awaiting those who patiently endure! We saw this crown mentioned when Jesus spoke to the church in Smyrna. He said, "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). When Jesus gives us the crown, he is claiming us as his own! He is saying, "Well done, well done, good and faithful one!" "You are my child!" "You are my heir!" "You will reign on the earth!" In verse 12, Jesus continues with his claim.

Revelation 3:12

The one who conquers, 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.

This is symbolic, apocalyptic language. But if, like the church in Philadelphia, we overcome, and hold fast the name of Jesus, and keep his word as he commanded, then we will become a pillar in the temple! We are actually honored as those who will be a support in the temple. As a pillar, we will never go out of the temple. It's hard for pillars to move. This implies that we will never go out of the blessings of God! We will forever be where he is.

Then, we see Jesus taking out pen, and he begins to write on our bodies. Look at what he writes:

Revelation 3:12

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.

This is the first time in the book of Revelation that we see things being written on people. But it will happen on some other occasions. "Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads" (Revelation 14:1). This is apocalyptic literature. This is what John saw. John saw people with names on their foreheads. Whether we will actually have names on our foreheads, I doubt it. Somehow we're marked, or identified, that's the key here.

We will be identified as being part of God as opposed to chapter 13, when the beast is writing the mark 666. That's the improper mark. Somehow people are going to be marked for the kingdom of God and some for the kingdom of Satan. We see that also in Revelation 22:4, "...They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads." The name of Christ on our foreheads. Again it's apocalyptic, that's what he sees, so whether that's reality or not, we don't know.

We are also going to see the new Jerusalem written on us. The new Jerusalem is talked about in Revelation 21. The whole city of New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven from God, who prepared us a bride adorned for her husband. Jerusalem is coming down as the place where we will forever dwell. The Bible starts in the garden and ends in the city. This perfect Jerusalem. And the great thing about this city is God is there! "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:3-4).

Later in the chapter it's described to have golden streets and gates of pearls. Again that's what John saw, so whether it's what's actually happening there we do not know. But it's symbolic of this glorious city, this glorious place that we will live with God.

Then we have this new name of Jesus. We will be identified and marked with Christ in heaven, forever. That's what verse 12 is all about. It's about Jesus claiming us as his own!

Then the final call in verse 13 is what we've been doing, like every other letter ends, "He who has an ear let him hear." Do you have an ear?

Are you listening to what he says to the seven churches? Are you listening to what he says to the church in Philadelphia? If so, then you should be encouraged! Encouraged that though we at Rock Valley Bible Church have but little power, think about how God looks upon us as we keep His word. As we follow faithfully along in His ways as His followers. He blesses us immensely, with a blessing that doesn't come to any other churches.

The depth of the secure entrance to His kingdom is clear. He's got the keys, He's going to bring us in, mark us, and no one is going to enter a part from Him. Through Him, in the kingdom, what a glorious place to be. The promise is to the church.

I pray and hope that we would have a proper perspective of ministry. May we not be so sucked into a success syndrome that we compromise so that we might be big and successful. We will continue on and be faithful, and love and serve the Lord our King, and get the blessings as He comes and claims us as His own.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on June 25, 2023 by Steve Brandon.  
For more information see [www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org](http://www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org).

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[1] Kent and Barbara Hughes, *Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 1987).

[2] <https://research.lifeway.com/2021/10/20/small-churches-continue-growing-but-in-number-not-size/>

[3] Simon Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2001), 159.

[4] George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 60.

[5] Grant Osborne, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 189.