**Greeting, Scripture & Title, Prayer**

I am getting ready to share with you some of the most encouraging words in all of scripture and my question to you as I share them is this: do you believe these words, this truth? Of course, I know you affirm them, that you believe them in your head, but do you live your life in full confidence of this glorious reality: ***If God be for you, who can be against you?***

Most of us live our lives riding the roller coaster of human acceptance or rejection, and the only way we know how to protect ourselves from being hurt by what other people say about us or do to us, is to say in response: “we don’t care” or “whatever”! We build a hard shell against those who threaten our sense of self-worth or value or significance. Somebody doesn’t like you? Say these words to them or inwardly to yourself about them: “I don’t care what you think!” Doesn’t that just feed the flesh?!

But here is what you have learned from the previous five letters we have received from the Lord, and we say this humbly: the only person you really need to care what they think about you is what Jesus’ thinks about you.

* Last week, Pastor Darin introduced you to church at Sardis, a church with a great reputation with people but not a great reputation with Jesus
* Next week, you will visit the church at Laodicea, a church that’s feels good about herself & her success, but Jesus finds them a bit nauseating & sees their so-called success as utter failure
* You have looked at 5 letters so far & today is the 6th. We could wrongly conclude that the Lord is hard to please; he is not. The Eph church was simply more focused on being learned than loving. The church at Pergamum had some who held to dangerous doctrine, putting the church at risk. Out of love, Jesus could not tolerate that. The church at Thyatira had some who tolerated sexual immorality & idolatry; this could not be. The church at Sardis had an outward vibrancy, but an inner deadness, an energetic formality without true spirituality, i.e. good externals but no spiritual internals.
* So, let’s be clear: Christ is for you, Oakwood. Our God has an urgent word for you in each of these 7 churches, and yes 5 of them needed correction for sinful problems. But it is not just in sin that we need transformation, we also need formation in faithfulness, because this world is hostile to Christ’s faithful ones; the Devil hates the faithful. So, the instrument Christ uses for them, the grace God intends for the faithful is the **grace of encouragement**. And this is exactly what Jesus prescribes for the church at Philadelphia.

When you go to the doctor’s office and you go in the back to the see the doctor, you will often notice degrees on the wall for the doctors: …

* When I see them, I gain a little comfort (wouldn’t mind seeing GPA too!)
* If their MD was from Coursera or the Master’s Class, or they said they watched a bunch of YouTube videos on abdominal surgery, I would worry!
* In some cases, certifiability = credibility, the more critical the service, the higher the cert.
* **In our text today**, Jesus gives his certification for everything he’s going to say and why his voice should drown out all other voices (**v.7**)
  + **The Holy One** – A proper name for God which is often used in the OT, often connects with God’s protective power over his people
  + **The true one** – Christ is saying he is the faithful & true Messiah. The church in Philadelphia is probably dealing with accusations from a local Jewish synagogue, probably saying that Christians are the real people of God. Jesus is saying he is the one who determines who is real & who is not
  + **The key of David, who opens, and no one will shut, who shuts, and no one opens.** This is a direct quote from **Isa.22:22 when Eliakim is made the steward over the royal house of King Hezekiah**, Jesus is saying he runs the house of God; he determines who comes in and who does not. Religious tradition has no influence!
* And he encourages them in **v8** w/these words: **I know your works** (I know who you are!)
  + Unlike the other letters, we can hear the Lord’s smile in these words. As we learn more about what’s going on in the text, Jesus is essentially saying, I know what others are saying about y0u, don’t listen to them, listen to what I’m about to say.
  + Saints, one secret to a victorious Christian life is not looking at all the faces & hearing all the voices around you.
  + And not being led by the internal voice & convictions of your own heart
  + You must raise your sight above the sightline of this world and the echo of your own heart & hear the words of **the Holy One**, **the true one**, **the one in charge of God’s house**. I am not saying ignore godly counsel, or that you should distrust your own instincts, but you must learn to discern Christ’s voice above all, which is only audible to you within your faithful surrender!

Let’s go back to our text, here we see Jesus is the actor, the church at Philadelphia is the beneficiary of what Jesus does. In this passage we see 4 things Jesus has done or promises he will do for this church, and therefore what has done for or promises you, in Christ:

1. He has **given** them **the kingdom**
2. He will **vindicate** them
3. He will **protect** them
4. He is **coming back** for them
5. **He has given them the kingdom (v.8) [read it]**

Tho we haven’t arrived at v.9 yet, it sets the context & tone of the entire letter: those who claim to be God’s people have rejected this church, while God has affirmed them

* Saints, it is unlikely that you [or we] are going to be able to faithfully follow Jesus in this world and not be rejected by someone on spiritual or religious grounds. If you’re going to be faithful, you are going to need to be faithful over someone’s rejection and objection to you, over their dismissal of your service to Christ, and their charge that you’re illegitimate, spiritually off, or not aligned w/the gospel.
* Jesus says 2 things to this church in v.8 that we really need to get into our hearts:

1. He, the only one with the power to open the door to the kingdom, has opened that door to them; they are in, no matter what others have said
2. Though they have little power, they have kept Christ’s word and not denied him

* This little church had no influence and no real defense against the charges laid against them. The people in the city don’t think much of them. The people in the synagogue d/not respect the church or their leaders, the synagogue leaders were probably more learned than the church’s pastors, the church probably had no real answer to the charges; all they had, and all they needed was Jesus! Despite their smallness and weakness, they were faithful!
* Jesus makes clear, you don’t need to win debates or provide elaborate answers to stay faithful. There is infinitely more power in the person and presence of Christ than all our defenses of him. Apologetics is helpful, but we need more to be faithful!

1. **He will vindicate them (v.9)**

Jesus says to them in so many words in v.9, don’t worry about them, I got this! Let me handle them. Look at v.9…

* Firstly, “synagogue of Satan” in v.9 connects to the same phrase in **2:9** in Smyrna, which helps us to see two important aspects of spiritual warfare
  + Satan is **mainly attacking the faithful** (Smyrna, the faithful in Pergamum, & here)
  + Satan’s reach is global; he attacks faithful Christians & faithful churches any & everywhere. Please understand that you have demonic opposition, Oakwood has demonic opposition. Churches need to be extensive about the spirit life and spiritual warfare! It is a major part of the environment of our mission!
* A quick aside: Satan and his angels partner with **unsuspecting** **people** and human institutions to do their destructive work:
  + This synagogue thinks they are doing God’s work, but they are doing the Devil’s
  + Spiritual warfare almost always plays out through human agency… People doing wicked things and opposing God’s people are in partnership w/Satan
  + This is why the devils & wicked people share the exact same fate in Rev.20
  + And why here, the vindication this church gets also vindicates Christ against Satan
* I don’t have time to unpack this more, but let’s make this clear: the vindication Christ has in view is not in the present, but **eschatological** or when Christ comes back
  + In our flesh, we want immediate vindication like Moses got when Aaron and Miriam opposed him because his wife was Black, and Miriam became leprous
  + But Christ promises us vindication when it matters most: Before God, the angels, and possibly before all the saints as well. Why long for vindication in social media when Christ promises cosmic vindication?!
* Note one more thing, saints: Jesus doesn’t vindicate them by saying they were right but by the church seeing that he loves them! It’s not a doctrinal vindication, but a personal vindication. It’s not their beliefs that are vindicated, but who they are!

1. **He will protect them (v.10) [read it]**

My friends, before we peel back this deeply moving verse, we need to see and feel the significance of something called “divine reciprocity” [**slide**], i.e. that the God of the universe **reacts and responds to what we do**:

* **Our prayers affect him**, they move him, he often acts **because** we have prayed
* **Our repentance affects him** & touches his heart, it is his character to forgive but he does so ONLY when we repent, he turns from his righteous wrath **when** we repent
* **Our faithfulness affects God** & moves him; I love when God says to Abraham after he was willing to sacrifice Isaac: because you have not withheld your son Isaac…
* **Our actions reach the heart of God**, moving him to act in powerful ways. Here Jesus says, because you have stood w/me (v.10), I will stand w/you; I have your back!
* Because of their faithfulness, he promises to keep them from the hour of trial
  + What is that? Is he promising to rapture them before the Tribulation? 😊
  + I don’t think so, Jesus is not saying that he is going to **remove them** from this testing but that he is going to **protect them** from it, since the testing is God’s wrath poured out on the earth, not the church. That wrath is spelled out in Rev.
  + 6:4,8,15,18
  + 9:4, only harm unbelievers
* In other words, though the whole world will be in panic, not you. Not my faithful ones, he says. **Psalm 91:7-8** sums our situation perfectly:

*7A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. 8You will only look with your eyes   and see the recompense of the wicked.*

1. **He is coming back for them (v.11) [read it]**

* Jesus is coming back soon. We don’t know when in **historical terms**, but we know it is very soon in **personal terms**. If Christ tarries from the earth another 5K years, that’s not a wait you will have to experience on the earth, you’ll be with him, longing for his return in his presence!
* But Jesus makes it clear, it is not enough to simply wait saints, you must “hold on” because there are those who are trying to seize or snatch your crown!
  + Crown is the victor’s crown…the enemy wants to rob you of it!
  + It’s the crown Paul spoke of to **Timothy in 2 Tim 4**, that is stored up for him, the crown of righteousness, which the Lord will give **to all who long for his appearing**. There it is!
  + Saints, the Christian life is portrayed as a marathon, but not a marathon of works, but of faith. Actively trusting in Christ, being conformed to the character of Christ, pursuing the work of Christ!

**Conclusion: v.12,** His promise is that you will be a pillar in His Temple, the glory of Christ’s eternal reign is grounded on the grace he given and is working out in your faithfulness.