

[In]Significant: The Church at Philadelphia

Revelation 3:7-13

MPS Jesus calls His Church to a life of true significance by holding fast to His Name in obedience and witness, to win the world and receive our eternal reward.

OBJ Every person can understand true Significance as determined by the Lord Jesus by Five Aspects

READ 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.

*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. 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. 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. ¹¹ I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. 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. ¹³ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’ **Revelation 3:7-13***

Philadelphia was the youngest of all the seven cities. Though not a thriving metropolis, it was marked by its own unique qualities as an ancient city. Spread further down across the plain of Hermus into a valley near a volcano, its significance was determined by a large grape growing industry and its geographical location. Philadelphia was known as “the gateway to the East” because of its “strategic location at the juncture of trade routes”, which made it “a city of commercial importance.”¹ Philadelphia was “intended it to be a centre of missionary activity for the Hellenistic way of life”², to advance the spread of Greek culture.³ The geographical attribute that provided for its economic thriving was also the cause of its instability. History records that Philadelphia was destroyed several times by earthquakes, but most notably in AD 17 along with Sardis. This is important because it is one reason the population was more spread out onto farmland, instead of in city centers.⁴ Religiously, it held several pagan temples, but was the center for worship of Dionysius, patron god of arts and theatre. As the city continued to be impacted by earthquakes through the centuries, “there are no ancient ruins to be seen today except some walls and arches from the large basilica of St. John, built in 600 AD.”⁵ The modern city of Alasehir still sits on the site and is known for its fresh fruit market. But maybe of greatest significance, it has continued as a center of Orthodox faith.

TRANS For our study, it is imperative that we take note of what Jesus knew about the church in Philadelphia.

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.’”

Jesus says that He has set before the church at Philadelphia an open door that cannot be shut. He recognizes the church’s little power but notes their faithfulness in obedience and witness. Like the church at Smyrna, Jesus finds nothing against the church at Philadelphia, even though what they are known for seems like no high compliment. Of everything that is wrong with the churches, there is something that is right. And the One who is holy and true is identifying it to call His people to it!

¹ Robert H. Mounce, [The Book of Revelation](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 98.

² Leon Morris, [Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 80.

³ Robert H. Mounce, [The Book of Revelation](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 99.

⁴ Ian Paul, [Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary](#), ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 104. Paul mentions the influence of geography that spread the people out, and how that further impacted them by Roman edicts.

⁵ Ian Paul, [Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary](#), ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 105.



The Greek word for “little” means small or weak but denotes the reality of insignificant because of this. The reality in the world seems to be that the church is insignificant. But what is true is not determined by what the world perceives it. Another reason the church may seem powerless is not only its earthly reality, but its divine commissioning. “Open door” represents “opportunity”, and references both eternity in Jesus’ Kingdom, and subsequently the church’s missionary task to make disciples of all people to the end of the age. ^{Matthew 28:19-20} It can be overwhelming when you consider the size of the context and the scope of the commission, and when it feels like you are losing the battle at home and being defeated in the larger culture war. But Jesus says something very different. [Jesus identifies significance for His Kingdom by truth and holiness.](#)

TRANS [What determines that something is “significant”? What makes a church or Christian significant?](#)

[Jesus calls His Church to a life of true significance by holding fast to His Name in obedience and witness, to win the world and receive our eternal reward.](#)

Jesus celebrates as most significant the church of seeming insignificance in the world. And it is this church to which He opened a door that cannot be shut. Jesus entrusts the commission of His Kingdom to the church of insignificance in the world. And he is not embarrassed or ashamed, but calls them to remain faithful for all that He has purposed to do through them! [The One who is holy and true and holds the keys to the Kingdom calls His people to true significance!](#)

OBJ [Four Aspects of True Significance as determined by King Jesus.](#)

1. [Faithfulness in obedience and witness.](#) .8

Jesus says that TRUE significance is NOT what you are capable of doing FOR Him, but what you do with Him. This is what faithfulness to Jesus looks like and means for us. Little power in this world that remains faithful to Jesus summons His eternal, divine power. Even though no one was impressed by the church at Philadelphia, Jesus was. Therefore, significance is really determined by who matters most to you, who you choose to adhere your life to when it matters most.

Jesus put the church in Philadelphia. [How do we know this?](#) Because He is the Head and cornerstone of the church, not the people. If He didn’t want it there it would not be there, BUT – it is. And Jesus is neither discouraged by nor shamed of the “smallness” of the church, whether in size, prominence, or resource and ability. We know this because Jesus says, “I have set before you an open door”. This is a door opened with the “key of David” that He holds, the key that accesses God’s Kingdom. The prophet Isaiah foretells (22:22) that the steward of God’s kingdom will be the One that determines who gains access and who is denied entry into the Kingdom. [This “open door” is first, and foremost, the church in Philadelphia’s promise of eternity with God because they have remained faithful to the One who holds the keys.](#)

We need to hear and heed this message, Church. Of ALL we can do for Jesus and the Kingdom in this world – including all our cumulative doing and activity, serving, giving, fellowship, and even study and ministry, nothing makes us *more significant* to God than faithful obedience to His Word and witness to His Name. Our significance IN God’s Kingdom will be determined by these two factors, and will be the decisive factors that determine whether everything else we were involved in even mattered for the Kingdom. This doesn’t mean we don’t DO those other things. This DOES mean that we never do ALL the other things as a substitute for the MAIN thing, faithfulness in obedience and witness. The church’s significance, our size, power, and ultimately our seeming influence, for the Kingdom will never be measured on our doing for God, but our trusting to obey and follow God – so that Christ can do IN and THROUGH us what He alone can and promises to do. [True significance is determined by faithfulness to Jesus Christ, both to obey His Word and declare the witness of His Name.](#)

TRANS [And how could we possibly understand significance without addressing success.](#)

2. [Success Redefined](#) .9

Jesus says the church at Philadelphia redefines success. Jesus says that those who antagonize the church now, who are from the synagogue of Satan, will come and bow down before their feet and see His love set on them. All will see on them what which everyone so desperately desires, the greatest and truest love of all; Jesus’ love is set on them! [No one envys the church at Philadelphia, but everyone will want to be like them!](#)



There may be many different metrics to determine success, but Jesus speaks of the kind that lasts for eternity. Jesus redefines success from the world's understanding. The church in Philadelphia will be successful NOT because of what they accomplish, but because of what Jesus has done for them and is doing through them. Jesus says that the "great antagonist" now is already a defeated foe and will one day bow down at the feet of His church. Those who follow Satan live in defeat. Those who follow Jesus live in His victory. The war is over. What will be has been determined. Our success is determined NOT by our doing, but by His Done! Christians live not in our own ability to win, but in the reality that Jesus has already won. [When we live from Jesus' victory, we live by a new definition of success.](#)

Remember that "door" Jesus opened? It's not merely a door to hope in for one day, but a real opportunity to live in today by our new definition of success. Philadelphia was purposed as a missionary city, but it was the church that was commissioned by the King of all Kingdoms to go forth into their city, and from there into all the world to make disciples of all nations. [The new definition of success for the church at Philadelphia rested in Jesus' plan for them; the "open door" of promised hope was their opportunity for evangelization.](#)

Christians are not in a fight to win against nor over the world; we fight to win the world. Success is not measured by conquering, but by remaining faithful to our missionary labor, obeying God's Word and testifying to the glory of Jesus' Name to all people, *"and whoever captures souls is wise."* Proverbs 11:30 states. Christians do not fight for success because we are not warring for victory. We already have our victory in Jesus. We wage war FROM His victory, and this radically changes what success means for us. [Christian, significance will always be determined by your view of success; whether you live for a victory that you can win, or from the victory Jesus has won to set His love on you, so you can tell the whole world about Him!](#)

TRANS While the war has been won and the Evil One wages attacks we must endure, we will not have to endure God's trial. Therefore, we can patiently endure.

3. Patient Endurance .10

Though the church of Philadelphia was ignored and antagonized by the world, they are recognized by God! Their obedience has not only been in simple actions, but also in sustained endurance. The strength to endure came from the same Word that they obeyed. This is significant because it tells us that their patient endurance did not simply come from within them; it was not something that they conjured up from within themselves, nor was it was not something they produced by gritting their teeth and bearing it. NO! The power to patiently endure, not losing their joy or hope or love, came from the One whose Word they obeyed. [The power of God's Word that empowers obedience cultivates perseverance unto endurance.](#)

Do you want to know what significance is? Significance is the one who endures through every test and trial. The patient endurance of the Philadelphia church captured the attention of the One who conquers, who promised to spare them from the "hour of trial". So often we make significance about the difficulty of the trial or test so that we only want to get to the end of it. But God says significance is this, that He is with you empowering you by His Word to endure patiently, and that you will not be undone by it. Whatever you are going through right now, you must know that Jesus knows; He sees you, He cares, and He loves you. And you will not be forgotten nor forsaken by Him. By His strength, you will patiently endure. You have not, and you will not suffer anything that can overcome Jesus' power to sustain you. Christian, whatever you are facing, whatever you or going through, you can endure because He will keep you by His Word. [True significance is revealed by patient endurance empowered by Jesus' Word.](#)

4. Focus on our Eternal Hope .11-12

Finally, Jesus tells the church, *"I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have so that no one may seize your crown."* Then he makes a promise of unimaginable glory, that their presence with Him will be one of complete opposite from their worldly status. Where they are weak in the world, they will be the pillars of heaven in eternity. Where they are despised and rejected, they will display for all names of highest glory in eternity. And where what is in the world in which they now live will be destroyed. (No ruins of the city, because destroyed by natural disasters.) Their place in the temple of God will be established eternity.



Focusing on the eternal reward for the Christian is always of greater significance. We refuse to be allured by any immediate reward of riches, satisfaction, pleasure, power or otherwise, when it causes us to lose focus on our eternal reward, because what Jesus promises (ie guarantees) to us is of greater significance, and that determines true significance now! All of these of this world will crumble in time. But our eternal hope in Christ will never fade. [Focusing on our hope in Christ for eternity means holding fast now.](#)

[Where is your focus, Christian? Are you consumed by all the world, its promise and its problems?](#) Temporary reward and temporary problems have deceived and consumed many. [Christians live for eternity by holding to our hope in the One who holds us. His promise is greater than all the reward of this world and lasts for eternity.](#)

[Jesus calls His Church to a life of true significance by holding fast to His Name in obedience and witness, to win the world and receive our eternal reward.](#)

Christian, flex your weakness in complete dependence upon Jesus – for the power of the Almighty is coming to bring victory and glory! True significance in life is determined by Jesus because He is the Holy and True One, who holds the key of David.

