

Bible Studies for Life: July 11

Faithful in all things • Revelation 3:7-13

By Clay Anthony



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There is little to wonder why we refer to St. Louis as the Gateway City. The Expedition of Discovery in 1804 – 1806, led by Lewis and Clark, departed from that city in order to explore the land newly purchased from France. Anyone visiting the city today quickly notices that the skyline is filled with a massive arch built to commemorate that part of American history. From St. Louis, America began to grow westward and the arch stands as a symbol of the openness of our country to settlers.

Being a gateway city is not a new geographical invention. Jesus' message to the churches of Asia Minor is partly addressed to such a church in the ancient world. Philadelphia was a congregation, like Smyrna, that did not receive a word of criticism from Jesus, but rather encouragement.

What made this city a gateway city was its location being a near half-way point for travelers crossing Asia Minor between Palestine and Italy. This designation did not mean Philadelphia was large and important on any scale. What mattered most to Jesus was that this small, seemingly insignificant church was doing precisely what mattered most

with the Gospel – giving it away.

Unlike the other churches He had already addressed, Jesus did not find these people slumbering, serving with wrong motives, or tolerating false teachers. This little church seemed to be getting the work of the church right and for that, Jesus commends them in three telling ways:

Opportunity (v. 7). Just as we view St. Louis as the historic gateway to our then-new nation, Philadelphia was reminded that Jesus, the Holy One, was able to hold open the door that their church represented. Again, geographically speaking, Philadelphia was receiving visitors from Jerusalem (where the Gospel originated) headed towards the capitol of Rome (from whence the Gospel would spread far and wide).

This church had a great opportunity before them to not allow the Gospel to stop at their doorstep. Through hospitality and teaching, evangelizing the then-known world would literally leap forward from this congregation's front door. This is a gateway that is controlled only by Jesus Himself.

Protection (vv. 8-10). Again, the idea of gateway cannot be missed in these verses, plus the fact that Jesus Himself, acting as gatekeeper, has promised a level of protection to this congregation. Philadelphia could also be known as the "little church that could." They were doing exactly what Jesus had asked of them. They kept His word and had not denied His name.

Yes, Jesus admitted that this church was small and weak but He knew their works were effective. His name was being spread and souls were coming to repentance. Anyone who stood against their work was in actuality standing opposed to His work.

This is quite a promise, to hear Jesus would keep believers safe from future trials. Please note that future trials do not negate the fact that present day believers still face trials. What Jesus is promising here is better than a temporary

restraining order from evil. He is promising His church eternal security that is untouchable. A congregation protected by Jesus simply because they obeyed Jesus is a model for present day churches to follow.

Provision (vv. 11-13). When Lewis and Clark left St. Louis, they had provisions supplied by the U.S. government. They were tasked by the ones backing their expedition. The believers in Philadelphia received the same concept using the Gospel. How could a small, fledging church, just off the beaten path, be expected to fulfill the Great Commission?

In short, they were not expected to do anything alone. They had all of heaven's resources at their side in order to accomplish their task. This small church understood that their seating capacity was not nearly as important as their sending capacity. When we are promised provisions, the supporters making the promise are merely telling us what we can expect from them.

Note twice in v. 12 that Jesus says what He will do. In both uses, Jesus promises to hold up the firm believer for all time as one who kept the faith and truly belonged to God.

Jesus has nothing negative to impart to this particular church. That being said, they would have been wise to take note of what they indeed were doing rightly and then keep on taking those actions. Faithful in all things is a small task that any modern church can afford to take on.

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