31 year old Internet entrepreneur Danny Lewin had already packed more adventure and rich experiences into his life than the vast majority of people. Born in Denver, Lewin moved to Israel with his family in 1984 at the age of 14. The move happened totally against his will. His father, Charles, had become an ardent Zionist and relocated his family out of his religious conviction that he wanted his family back in the ancient Jewish homeland. During his first few months in Israel Danny struggled to learn the language and make friends. Instead of rebelling, however, Lewin turned to his two greatest assets—he physical strength and superior intellect. Sailing through his classes at a Jerusalem technology school and spending all his spare time at a local gym, Lewin fought to fit in with the tough sabras, and in time he succeeded. By age 18 he was signing up for military service in the Israeli Defense Forces, where he joined the ranks of the country’s most elite counterterrorism unit, Sayeret Mat’kal.

He spent three years training to combat terrorism on top-secret missions. After rising to the rank of captain, Lewin returned to graduate school to pursue his interest in math and computer science. At MIT Lewin came up with an idea for his master’s thesis that he believed had the potential to speed up the delivery of content on the Internet. By 1998, he and his mentor, MIT professor Tom Leighton, had created a company, Akamai that is still responsible today for more than 30 percent of the world’s Internet traffic, keeping giants like iTunes and Facebook running smoothly.

As Danny kissed his wife and kids goodbye just after dawn he had no idea this would be the last time he did so. Danny drove to Boston Logan airport where he was scheduled to take a cross country flight to Los Angeles for a business meeting for Akamai.

Danny was one of 81 passengers, nine crewmembers, and two pilots that were on American Airlines Flight 11 that fateful September morning when it took off just before 8 a.m. The plane headed due west and held the course for 16 minutes until it passed the town of Worcester (MASS). Then instead of taking a southerly turn, it swung to the north and failed to climb to its assigned cruising altitude. Around this time, a bloody hijacking began onboard. Five terrorists, all of them wielding box cutters and knives, commandeered the plane and steered it into New York airspace. At 8:46 a.m., the Boeing 767 slammed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center.

Flight 11 was the first of four planes to be hijacked the day of the attacks, killing everyone on board and hundreds more when it caused the collapse of the North Tower. But before any of the horror unfolded that day, a little-known act of heroism is likely to have taken place on Flight 11 when the Israeli-American Lewin rose from his seat and engaged in a struggle with one of the terrorists to try to thwart the hijacking. During the struggle Lewin was killed, making him the very first victim of the 9/11 attacks.

Based on dozens of interviews with those who spoke with two of the plane’s flight attendants during the hijacking, the 9/11 commission determined that one of the terrorists, al-Suqami, most likely killed Lewin by slashing his throat from behind as he attempted, single-handedly, to
try to stop the hijacking. The time of his death was reported to be somewhere between 8:15 and 8:20 a.m.

How do you obtain security in the midst of an insecure world? September 11 reminds us that personal security can be an illusion. It definitely was to thousands of people who woke up on that morning with anticipation of another normal work day. None of us are guaranteed tomorrow, let alone this next week, month, year or decade. Yet in the midst of an insecure world we will see that as believers in Jesus Christ you and I can still enjoy incredible security whatever we may face in this life.

As we continue our series on Christ’s messages to the seven churches we come today to the church of Philadelphia. To help you understand why Jesus may have framed His message to this church the way He did it’s helpful to understand the historical background of Philadelphia.

The city of Philadelphia is covered by the modern Turkish city of Alaşehir (the “city of God”) situated less than thirty miles ESE of Sardis. Philadelphia, located on a major trade and communications route, linked Europe to Asia. It also occupied a strategic location for the spread of the Greek language in an Oriental land. This strongly fortified place held the key to the door through which all east-west trade and commerce passed. With an economy based on agriculture and industry, Philadelphia enjoyed considerable prosperity at times. The city of Brotherly Love’s one major drawback was that it was subject to severe earthquakes.

- Subject to earthquakes

Philadelphia lies near a substantial fault line that caused many of its inhabitants to seek protection in the open air when earthquake activity was intense. The Greek geographer Strabo, a few years after the great earthquake of A.D. 17, wrote “And Philadelphia . . . has not even its walls secure, but they are daily shaken and split in some degree. The people continually pay attention to earth-tremors and plan their buildings with this factor in mind.” He also observes: “The walls never cease being cracked, and different parts of the city are constantly suffering damage. That is why the actual town has few inhabitants, but the majority live as farmers in the countryside, as they have fertile land.” The earthquake that destroyed Laodicea less than fifty miles away in A.D. 60 apparently affected Philadelphia as well. It appears that under the reign of the emperor Vespasian (A.D. 69-79) the city may have been given aid after another devastating earthquake. The present day town of Alaşehir continues to experience major earthquakes. In the past year the city has experienced nine earthquakes with the largest being 4.5.

Another item that is relevant to Christ’s message to the church at Philadelphia is that the city was given a new name at various times.

- Given new name: Neo-Caesarea (“new city of Caesar”); Flavia

For instance, because the city was rebuilt by the emperor Tiberius [Roman emperor A.D. 14-37] after the great earthquake of A.D. 17 it was renamed for a time Neo-Caesarea. Later under Vespasian the city took the imperial epithet ‘Flavia.’ The cost of repairing the often shaken city though caused the emperor to tax heavily the citizens. This contributed to the financial hardship for many during these times.

Philadelphia was remarkable for its many temples and religious festivals. Because it was located in a vine-growing district, the worship of Dionysus was its chief pagan cult. This “son of Zeus”
god was also known as Bacchus, the god of wine. He was hailed as the god who brought joy and benefit to people. Great festivals were held in his honor, with an emphasis on fertility and lewd drunken debaucheries took place, all in the name of worship.

One final pertinent background note is that as the Lord addresses the church in Philadelphia c. A.D. 95 the city has apparently been seriously affected economically.

- Economic hardship

This economic hardship was due to an edict, issued in A.D. 92 by the Roman Emperor Domitian that required at least half the vineyards in the provinces to be cut down and no new ones planted. While Domitian apparently issued this decree to encourage corn production to provide for the eastern armies, the volcanic soil around Philadelphia, ideal for vines, was not necessarily as suitable for corn. Furthermore, the compulsory cutting down of vineyards removed the one regular source of revenue the city had. Even when replanting was allowed it would require years for the vines to mature, so their destruction could mean lasting ruin. By issuing this edict Domitian violated an unwritten law of Eastern warfare, namely to spare these crops (cf. Deut. 20:19-20). Domitian’s action transgressed this principle and represented the ultimate savagery of a foe. The economy of the city, probably already precarious after its other sufferings, was even more so after this decree.

Thus they are at least three pertinent items of Philadelphia’s historical background that help to explain why Christ framed His message to this church as he did.

- Believers experiencing an unsettled life

First, the church members could have experienced an unsettled life, in the sense that at times they may well have had to live outside their city for their own safety due to the unsettled conditions caused by the frequent earthquakes in the region. This insecurity is in addition to the persecution they experienced as believers in a pagan culture.

- Believers experiencing hardship because of unfaithful leaders

Second, the concept of Philadelphia as a new city with a new name to honor the divine emperor whose patronage had restored its fortunes is used by the Lord as, by implication, His character is contrasted with that of Domitian. Christ will show Himself to this church as the One who is reliable and true. Christ’s faithfulness stands in contrast to the unfaithful leaders.

- Believers hurting economically

Third, since the community as a whole was hurting economically this was probably multiplied for the believers there.

Do you ever face times where your life seems unsettled? Do you ever face hardship because of unfaithful leaders over you? Have you ever faced economic insecurity?

How does Jesus address a church whose world is being rocked with insecurity? How can you obtain and maintain security in the midst of your own insecure world? What truths does Christ give that can provide security to you when your own world is rocked with insecurity?

Listen to Christ’s message to this church being rocked with insecurity. Turn with me in your Bibles or electronic devices to Revelation 3:7-13. “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, ‘These things says He who is holy, He who is true, “He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens”:’ “I know your works. See, I have set
before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. 9 Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. 10 Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. 11 Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. 12 He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. 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 out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name. 13 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”’ (Revelation 3:7-13 NKJV).

How can you obtain and maintain security in the midst of your own insecure world? Jesus provides reassurance to us in at least three ways. The first way Jesus reassures us is by reminding us: Your security rests in Me. I am trustworthy. How can you obtain and maintain security when you face an uncertain or precarious future?

**Look up! Understand your security is found in Jesus Christ alone.**

Notice the reassurance Christ provides as He describes Himself to these faithful believers living in a dangerously unstable environment. Jesus states in effect “These prophetic statements declares the Holy One, the Genuine (Dependable) One, the One who possesses the key of David” (Rev 3:7). First, Christ reassures us in our insecurity that He is “the Holy One.” This title “the Holy One” was familiar to the Jews as a title for the Messiah. Though Christ was opposed and rejected by the synagogue of Satan (cf. Rev 3:9), i.e., the unbelieving Jews, Christ reminds us in our weakness and need that He has been especially set apart by God.

Christ alone met the requirements that a holy God demands to redeem all those who put their faith in Him. He will restore the inheritance we forfeited when our first parents disobeyed Him. Christ paid the redemption price by shedding His blood on the cross. He has thereby freed us from our sins (cf. Rev 1:5). He has made us subjects of His kingdom and given us direct priestly access to God (cf. Rev 1:6). And when we come to Revelation chapters four and five we will see Christ has also obtained the right to take tenant possession of the earth, and that we will rule with Him.

In the midst of your insecurity remember the security Christ provides for you. Christ, the All-Sufficient One is there for you!

Second, Christ also presents Himself as “the True One.” Christ presents Himself as the One who can be trusted to carry out His messianic task to completion. Because Jesus is the genuine Messiah he can be relied upon to keep His promises.

When it seems like those around you are letting you down, remember that your ultimate security lies in Jesus. Jesus, as God’s Messiah, is the Dependable One. He’s telling you and me: As you face an uncertain future keep your trust in Me! I will provide!

Third, Jesus presents Himself as the One who possesses the key of David. In other words, as the only true Messiah Jesus provides and controls access to God’s eternal kingdom (cf. Isa 22:22). The “key of David” is a metaphorical expression indicating complete control over the royal
household. On Christ’s shoulders will rest all the powers of government (cf. Isa. 9:6), the one who opens and no one shuts, and the one who shuts and no one opens.  

This description of Christ as possessing “the key of David” compliments the earlier description of Christ found in Revelation 1:18. Christ revealed Himself as the One who holds “the keys of death and Hades.” In other words, Christ has the authority to consign people to death permanently or to release them from.

The unbelieving Jews, whose hostility is prominent in this message, denied that Jesus was the Messiah. They claimed that they alone, not Jesus’ followers, had access to the kingdom of David. Jesus emphasizes in His opening words of this message that the opposite is true. He is the genuine Messiah. Jesus opens the door to His own and closes it to the self-styled “children of the kingdom” who reject Him.

Jesus’ description of Himself helps us look at the bigger picture. Jesus challenges us to lift our eyes to Him, and gain an eternal perspective. Christ is the one that allows people to become part of God’s kingdom, and He is also the one that excludes those who do not rightfully belong; that is, those who have not put their faith in Christ alone for their salvation.

Jesus reminds us that He has been set apart for the completion of God’s salvation program and He will complete it. Look up to Him for the help you need!

All of us at times can become discouraged because of our circumstances. I once was talking to a man who was in the end stage of renal failure. He had been on dialysis but felt that any further treatment was a waste of the time of those caring for him as well as a waste of his time. The joys of this life were in the past. The burdens and trials of this life overwhelmed him.

Several years before he had lost his youngest daughter in an accident when someone had pulled out in front of her while she was on a motorcycle. I listened compassionately to his story. I didn’t try to convince him to continue treatment. But I did encourage this discouraged believer to LOOK UP!

I shared that sometimes I think that perhaps God takes away the joys of this life as near the end of our lives so that we are more ready to embrace the eternal joys of heaven to come. I encouraged this dear brother to FINISH WELL for the sake of his family! I encouraged him to display his faith to his family in these final days of his life. I encouraged him to keep praying faithfully for his family.

I reminded him of Paul’s testimony in 2 Cor 4:16-17, “Therefore we do not despair, but even if our physical body is wearing away, our inner person is being renewed day by day. For our momentary, light suffering is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison because we are not looking at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen. For what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal” (2 Cor 4:16-18 NET). My goal in all of this was to gently help this dear brother get his eyes back upon Christ, and to gain an eternal perspective in the midst of what appeared to be his final days on this earth.

Have circumstances exposed your vulnerability? Do you feel insecure? Perhaps the need is financial; perhaps your need is emotional or physical. Christ’s message to us in our insecurity is: Look up to Me! I am the all-Sufficient One. I will meet your needs.
Jesus Christ can be counted on to complete God’s salvation program, including the work He has begun in you and me. Christ will complete God’s salvation program in fulfillment of His Word because He is the genuine Messiah.

After presenting Himself as the true Messiah who alone determines who is part of God’s eternal kingdom, Christ challenges us: Be faithful to Me. A second way to experience security in an insecure world is this:

**Be Faithful! Demonstrate patient endurance in the face of opposition.**

Be faithful. Follow Christ’s example of patient endurance in the face of opposition. Remain faithful in the midst of your trials because Christ promises those who do a sure entrance into the messianic kingdom. Your faithfulness to Christ helps give reassurance of your faith in Christ (cf. 2 Peter 1:5-11).

Christ says in effect to this church facing great external pressure: “I know your works; that you possess insignificant external resources, yet you have kept my word and have not renounced my name” (cf. Rev 3:8). Christ says: You have been faithful in following my example and command to demonstrate patient endurance in the face of opposition. . . . I am coming soon; keep maintaining your endurance and faithfulness to Me. Be faithful so that no one might take your crown” (cf. Rev 3:8-11).

The members of the church at Philadelphia esteemed the riches of Christ of more value than even the physical necessities of life. What about your value system? Have you set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits at God’s right hand? Do the eternal values of heaven fill your thoughts? Or do you think only about things down here on earth? God wants to use the insecurities you face to deepen your faith and help you in your development of an eternal perspective. “Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things (Col 3:1b-2 NIV).

Now note Christ’s Knowledge about the People in the Church of Philadelphia. Christ states (in Rev 3:8): I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name” (Rev 3:8 NKJV). Christ is aware of what we do. He knows our works. In this case, He saw the faith these believers demonstrated by their actions. We are saved by grace through faith, not of works, but we are saved to do good works.

Christ promises a sure entrance into the messianic kingdom to His faithful people. “I know your works—Look! I have placed before you a door having been opened, which no one is able to shut —that you possess insignificant resources,” and yet you have kept my word and have not renounced my name (cf. Rev 3:8). Because of the extremity of this church’s situation Jesus takes the unusual step of giving this church a word of encouragement before He even finishes His acknowledgment of their works. Christ reassures a church whose members are remaining faithful to Him in the midst of their trials and temptations. He promises an entrance into God’s messianic kingdom has been provided for them. When Christ states: “See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it” (Rev 3:8a NKJV), He is promising these faithful believers entrance into God’s messianic kingdom.

Christ knows the pressures you face. Jesus says to you, “I know your works.” Jesus knows about the physical hardships you face. This apparently small, struggling church had little external
resources to draw upon. Some relief from their physical hardships may have been offered if these believers at Philadelphia had renounced Christ. The members of this church however, remained obedient and faithful to Christ. Christ also knows if we remain obedient to His Word and faithful to Him in the midst of our trials and temptations.

[ILL] In a Communist prison, a man by the name of Nikolai Khamara was arrested for robbery and imprisoned for ten years. He was not a Christian, but he became one while he was in jail. Khamara watched the Christians and wondered what kind of beings they were. They were men, but something other than men. They could show joy when suffering. They could sing in very dark hours. When they had a piece of bread they shared it with someone who had none. Mornings and evenings they would fold their hands, and their faces began to shine. They would speak to someone whom Khamara could not see.

One day two of the Christians sat down with Khamara and asked him, “What is your story?” Kharama told them his sad story and finished by saying, “I am a lost man.” One of the Christians with a smile, asked Khamara, “What is the value of a ten rouble note when I have lost it?” Khamara did not understand the question. “Ten rubles are ten rubles. You have lost them but the one who has found them is very happy.”

“You have replied well,” said the Christian. “I will ask one more question. Somebody loses a gold ring. What is the value of that gold ring when it is lost?”

“What a foolish question! A gold ring is a gold ring. You have lost it but somebody else will have it.”

“Now, tell me, what is the value of a lost man? A lost man, even one who is a thief or an adulterer or a murderer, has the whole value of a man. He is of such value that the Son of God forsook heaven for him and died on the cross to save him.” Khamara understood.

The Christian said to the robber, “God loves you.” Every one of you is valuable to God. In the whole Bible, you will not find that Jesus ever asked anyone what sins he had committed. He was with drunkards, robbers, and prostitutes, and never asked anyone how many sins they committed. When he met people who had committed great sins, he told them, “Be of good cheer. Your sins are forgiven.” I also tell you that your sins are forgiven because Jesus died for you. You have only to believe.

Khamara became a Christian. He finished his term and was freed. He then joined the underground church in Russia. In the former Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc countries, there was a secret church, as there is in China, North Korea, and some of the former Soviet Republics today. They cannot gather as we can in the West. Those who wish to preach the gospel do it secretly.

Khamara—who had been a robber, a man with “no conscience”—was a simple member of this secret church. One day the pastor of Khamara’s church was arrested. The authorities beat and tortured him hoping he would divulge secrets of the church. They hoped he would tell them the names of the church members, and how Gospels were printed secretly. He was tortured, but he told them nothing. If he had, thousands would have been arrested. Then the captain of the investigation, after he had beaten the pastor, said, “We will not torture you anymore. We have another method.” They arrested Nikolai Khamara. They brought him before the pastor and told him, “If you do not tell all the secrets, we will torture Khamara in front of you.”
The pastor could not endure someone suffering for him. He asked Khamara, “What should I do? Khamara said to him, “Be faithful to Christ and do not betray him. I am happy to suffer for the name of Christ.” Then they gouged out Khamara’s eyes. When they approached Khamara’s eyes with a knife, the pastor could not bear it. He cried to Khamara, “How can I look at this? You will remain blind!”

Khamara replied, “When my eyes are taken away from me, I will see more beauty than I see with these eyes. I will see the Savior. You remain faithful to Christ to the end.”

Then the interrogators said to the pastor, “If you do not betray your church, we will cut out Khamara’s tongue.”

In despair the pastor cried, “What should I do?” Khamara’s last words were “Praise the Lord Jesus Christ. I have said the highest words that can be said. And if you wish, you can cut out my tongue.” Khamara died a martyr’s death.

How can you maintain security in the midst of an insecure world? Look up to Christ for the strength and help you need. And BE FAITHFUL. Follow Christ’s example and command given in the Scripture to patient endurance in the face of opposition. And third:

**Look forward! Anticipate the eternal rewards Christ promises to those who remain faithful to Him.**

The truth of Christ’s coming provides motivation for us to be faithful to Christ. Look forward! Anticipate the eternal rewards Christ promises to those who remain faithful to Him. Look at the rewards Christ promises to His faithful followers.

- Access into God’s Kingdom (3:8). First Christ promises access into God’s Messianic Kingdom. The open door in this context speaks of entrance into God’s Messianic Kingdom.
- Honor from some Jews (3:9). Second, Christ promises honor from some Jews whose eyes are presently blinded to the Messiah. Christ promises to give some of the former persecutors of the church to the faithful church as converts. Some of these Jews will acknowledge their mistake in denying Christians a place in the kingdom.

A principle we often see several times in the New Testament is that a proper response to persecution often results in some of the persecutors eventually becoming believers themselves. (Examples: the Centurion at the cross; one of the two thieves crucified next to Christ; the apostle Paul (Acts 7:55-8:1; 9:1-31); the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:23-24, 27-29); many of the palace guard who guarded Paul in Rome (Phil. 1:12-14). As we live out the lifestyle of Jesus under the authority of God’s Word the Lord opens doors of ministry even among those who are hostile and unreceptive to our message.

This promised conversion of some of the Jews anticipates the future salvation of some from Israel just prior to the Lord’s second coming. When this future salvation takes place the people of Israel will have an entirely different attitude toward the church as Christ’s bride because they will by then have turned to Christ themselves. The church should anticipate respectful treatment from those Jews who turn to the Lord in the future.

While you can expect rejection by an unbelieving world you can have the delight of knowing that you are loved by Christ Himself.
• Love from Jesus Christ (3:9) Christ promises His love (Rev 3:9; cf. 1:5; 3:19). He states, “Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you” (Rev 3:9 NKJV).

• Protection away from hour of trial to come upon the whole earth (3:10) Christ promises protection at a place away from the period of misery to come upon the whole earth prior to Christ’s return to set up His kingdom on earth.²² In Rev 3:10 we read, “Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth” (Rev 3:10).

What’s the hour of trial; this hour of testing to come upon the whole world? I think we can say quite confidently that it’s the Tribulation. First, Christ states that this hour of trial will come upon the whole world—and it seems to be looking at the whole inhabited world. Secondly, the Greek word (peirasmos) used for “trial” (NKJV) here implies this. One German scholar [Seesemann, in the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament] writing about this word notes that it refers here in this passage “not so much the temptation of the individual; it is rather the total eschatological terror and tribulation of the last time.”²³ And Christ’s promise is that we will be kept from that. Christ promises to protect the church at a place away from the period of misery to come upon the whole earth. This period of trial directed against those in rebellion against God in the whole earth, not just in Philadelphia, implies that the church will be removed from the earth prior to this outpouring of divine wrath. Christ’s words, “I will come soon” [or “come quickly”] in the next verse (Rev 3:11) also confirm that this period of affliction and calamity to come upon the earth’s inhabitants is the time known to the Jews as the “Messianic woes,” foretold in the visions beginning in Revelation 4 as coming upon the world before the coming of Christ.²⁴ The trials of this period are designed to test those dwelling on the earth to expose them as the kind of people who are so adamantly opposed to God that they will never repent, no matter what is done to them (cf. Rev 9:20; 11:13; 16:11). Through that exposure, God will demonstrate that these people deserve His eternal judgment.²⁵

It is important to note that Christ promises to keep this church, which had proven itself as true followers of Him, from the hour of testing, not just the testing itself.²⁶ The widened scope of this promise meant that the Philadelphia Christians would triumph over the contempt and intrigues of their immediate Jewish foes, but also over the wider pagan opponents. Now this universal tribulation time period that Jesus speaks of will immediately precede His coming to earth in power and great glory (cf. Matt. 24:29-30). Since the generation to whom John wrote these words has long since passed away, these faithful believers in Philadelphia clearly represent not just the other six churches of Asia, but also all believers throughout this present church age.

The timing of “the hour of trial’s” arrival is said to be “about to come.” Thus, it is a period conceived of as about to happen at any moment. It was nearing daily and was something that could not be deferred much longer. The Scriptures indicate that Christ’s imminent coming will involve the removal of the church saints from the earth by rapture (John 14:2-3; 1 Cor 15:51-52; 1 Thess 4:13-18). The next two Sunday nights we’ll be looking at this in more detail.
After Christ promises to keep us from the hour of testing that is about to come on the whole world to test those who live on the earth, Christ reassures us, “I am coming soon” (Rev 3:11). So another promise Christ gives us is the expectation of His soon return to deliver us.

- **Expectation of Christ’s soon return to deliver us (3:11)**

Living with the expectation of Christ’s soon return to deliver us from our difficult circumstances serves as a motivation for our faithful obedience to Christ. Christ’s promise to come soon is intended to provide encouragement and comfort for us who seek to faithfully follow Him.

[ILL] On March 11, 1942 General Douglas MacArthur stood with the Pacific surf lapping at the cuffs of his trousers and made a promise to the Philippine people: “I will return.” In 1944 MacArthur kept his promise and liberated the Philippines. Those events are a part of history. Nearly two thousand years ago, our Lord Jesus left the shores of this planet. He made a promise to return. His promise is a part of our history and His return is our future hope.

Christ’s promise to come soon holds open the possibility that His coming will happen before this generation passes, but does not guarantee it. This kind of anticipation supplies motivation for us to persevere. Christ’s promise to come soon is the key note of Revelation (cf. Rev 1:7-8; 22:7, 12, 20).

In view of the Lord’s promise to return soon, a question logically occurs to us: “How then should we live? What should our lives be like as we expectantly wait for the Lord’s return?” To this, Jesus, replies: “Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.” As times get harder, it becomes increasingly more difficult to be a Christian. As the world becomes more hostile to Jesus and the people who bear His name—as it casts off Christian values and plunges headlong toward moral and spiritual destruction—there will be increasing pressures on us to compromise. We will find ourselves tempted to let go of what we have, to lose our grip on God’s Word, to deny the Lord’s name, to yield to worldly desires and ambitions.

Amid these temptations the Lord says, “Hold on to what you have. Don’t allow the desires for status, for prestige, for material possessions, for wealth, for self-gratification to become central in your thinking. Don’t let anyone take your crown.” Living in anticipation of Christ’s return helps to motivate us to remain faithful to Christ in the face of opposition. Christ expects us to remain faithful to Him at all costs. “Keep hold of what you have.”

Your own steadfastness in the face of opposition from God’s opponents is an assurance of your future victory with Christ. “I am coming soon; keep hold of what you have in order that no one might take your crown.” Your steadfastness to Christ is an assurance of your protection from a future spiritual catastrophe.

- **Assurance of protection from a future spiritual catastrophe (3:11)**

Anticipation of Christ’s soon return calls for us to hold fast to the progress we’ve already made in the Christian life. Continue to display endurance and faithfulness to Christ in the face of opposition, even at the cost of material possessions. In v. 11 Jesus commands “Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown” (Rev 3:11b NKJV). Christ calls us to steadfastness in our Christian faith, lest our lack of faithfulness reveal that our faith was not genuine; that we be found to be those who confessed Christ with our lips but denied Him by our actions (cf. Matt 7:21-22).
Finally, Jesus also promises faithful believers who have persevered in their faith in spite of the trials of this life: continuance and security in God’s presence as His own for all eternity.

- Continuance and security in God’s presence as His own for all eternity (3:12)

Now in v. 12 we see Christ’s promise to the overcomer, to the one who keeps on holding fast. “He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. 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 out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name” (Rev 3:12 NKJV). In contrast to the insecurity you and I face in this world, Jesus promises us, who have put our faith in Him ETERNAL SECURITY WITH HIM IN THE NEW JERUSALEM! So:

- Look up! Understand your security is found in Jesus Christ alone.
- Be Faithful! Demonstrate patient endurance in the face of opposition.
- Look forward! Anticipate the eternal rewards that Christ promises to those who remain faithful to Him.

[ILL] The Japanese warlord Hideyoshi who ruled all of Japan in the latter half of the sixteenth century, commissioned a massive statue or Buddha for a shrine in the city of Kyoto. It took five years and thousands of laborers to construct the statue and the great temple that housed it. In 1596, just a few months after the statue and temple were completed a powerful earthquake toppled the structure. Great chunks of stone rained down upon the impassive Buddha, grinding the statue into fragments, chips, and dust. As soon as the ground had ceased its rumbling Hideyoshi ran to the temple, only to find it in ruins. Enraged, he snatched a bow and arrow from a nearby soldier and shot the arrow at the broken statue. “Curse you!” the warlord screamed to his fallen god. “I spent millions to build you! Couldn’t you even look after your own temple?!”

The people of Philadelphia knew what it was to be shaken by an earthquake. As we discussed earlier, the city had been leveled by a massive quake in A.D. 17, and the rubble continued to be shaken by severe aftershocks for years afterward. Every time one of these massive aftershocks struck, the people were forced to flee the city and run into the countryside.

But in verse 12, Jesus promises the Philadelphia believers a temple that will not be shaken and from which they will never have to flee. “Him who overcomes,” says the Lord, “I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it.”

A pillar is a symbol of strength and permanence. Our Lord promises you that if you overcome, if you hold on to what you have in Christ, being faithful to Him, you will be given a position of strength and permanence in the life to come. You will be a pillar of strength in the imperishable, unshakeable temple of God. You will have a stable relationship with God and an absolute assurance (verified three times) of eternal life.

What a profoundly reassuring promise to us. Jesus promises in effect: “When you labor for me, you will be planted firmly in a stable place, the dwelling place of God, and you will never have to flee from that place.” What a picture of security, serenity, and strength.

The security of the overcomer in God’s presence is further highlighted by the promise that “he will not go outside any longer.” The status of the overcomer is the exact opposite of those who are refused entrance into the city.
The overcomer is given an absolute assurance of eternal life by the promise of his reception of a threefold name. This three-fold occurrence of “name” amounts to a threefold assurance of his identity with God. Jesus promises first, “And I will write upon him the name of my God.” To have “the name of God” is equivalent to belonging to God, being endowed with divine power. This sets the overcomer in utter contrast with the assumption of his present Jewish persecutors.

Second, Jesus states, “I will write upon him . . . the name of the city of my God—which is the new Jerusalem that comes down out of heaven from my God.” To have “the name of the city of My God,” meant the right of citizenship in the new Jerusalem. This is “the new Jerusalem” that descends from God after the white throne judgment and the creation of the new heavens and the new earth (cf. 21:10 ff.).

Third, Jesus promises, “I will write upon him . . . my new name.” Christ’s “new name” symbolizes the full revelation of His character promised to the overcomer at Christ’s second advent. When Christ comes we as believers in Him, we will not only appreciate fully who Christ is, but we will also bear His new name with Him.

So Christ commands us: “Let the one having an ear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches” (3:13). Keep looking up to Christ for the stability you need, and keep living in anticipation of His return.

Christ is coming and He could be coming soon. Are you ready?

First of all, are you saved? Second, are you serving the Lord? These are practical, important, pivotal questions. It’s not enough to listen you have to respond. You must decide if you will believe. But understand if you are guilty of unbelief, you’re going to pay the price that the Bible outlines for those who will not believe and accept what God has revealed in His Word. So may God speak to our hearts. May you be sure if the Lord came, you’d be ready.

Our Father, how wonderful it is to be saved, to know we’re saved, and to be anticipating with joy that Christ is coming, perhaps even today. Thank you for this reminder today from your Word that Christ is coming and we are in His presence forever and ever. Speak to anyone today to whom this may be something they have not understood, something they have not heard before, or been confused about. Somehow lead him or her to the place where they will know they are saved by faith in Christ and that they are living for Christ every day until He comes. For we ask in Christ’s name. Amen.

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5 Cf. Kyriakodis, ibid.

6 It would have been hardly possible to have visited an ancient city and to have remained any length of time without seeing Dionysus and his ever-present companions, the Satyrs, Silens, and Maenads, which were male and female figures, half-clad, carrying musical instruments, wearing ivy wreaths, and having animal features. See Oxford Classical Dictionary, s.v. “Satyrs and Sileni” and “Maenads,” pp. 636, 956.
Wild, frenzied dancing and uncontrolled ravings took place in connection with the wine drinking, and the music of flutes, cymbals, drums, or tambourines. The purpose of this intoxication was to have Dionysus enter the worshiper and fill the worshiper with enthusiasm. After having gone through the experience of a frenzied Dionysian orgy, one evidently felt a sort of release from the pressures and stress of the daily drudgery of life.


Ibid., 265, n. 25.


“ ... "the time" ... "the hour" ... "the hour of testing" ... "the testing."” Cf. J. N. Oswalt, *Isaiah* (NICOT), 1:422.


This phrase the “key of David is taken from Isaiah 22:15-25 where the Lord tells Shebna, the chief of staff of Hezekiah’s royal household that he is to be removed from office and replaced by Eliakim son of Hilkiah. (Apparently Shebna had dishonestly used the power of his position to enrich himself.) Concerning Eliakim the Lord says, “I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open” (Isa 22:22 NIV). This language from Isaiah 22 is used to present Christ as the Davidic Messiah with absolute power to give entrance and to exclude from the Kingdom of God. “It may be an intentional contrast with the practice of the local synagogue in excommunicating Christian Jews.” Cf. Mounce, ibid., 116.


Rev 13:10; 14:12; also references to Christ’s own endurance in 2 Thess 3:5; Heb 12:3.

*Dunamis* may refer here the externals of power.


Christ says he gives (present tense) some from the synagogue of Satan [i.e., Jews who, while rejecting Christ, worshiped in the synagogue and claimed to be the true Israel. Cf. John 8:31ff.; Rom 2:28-29.


While the Jews expected the Gentiles to come and do homage to them in the Messianic kingdom (cf. Isa. 60:14-15), Christ says that His faithful church will receive homage from those Jews who turn in repentance to Him. While the false Jews scoffed at the claim of the Philadelphian Christians that they were the objects of the true God’s love that will change when Israel repents. “Look! I give some from the synagogue of Satan, those who themselves claim to be Jews, and are not but are lying; look! I will make them come and they will bow down before your feet, and they shall know that I myself have loved you” (Rev 3:9).

Rev 3:10; cf. 1 Thess 1:10; 4:13-18; 5:9 and context; with Rev 4-19; Isa 2:10-22; Joel 2:31; Dan 12:1-2; Zeph 1:14-18; Matt 24:4-31; Mark 13:14, 19; 2 Thess 2:1-12; Rev 7:14; 14:7.


Cf. Isa 2:10-21; Dan 12:1-2; Joel 2:31; Zeph 1:14-18; Matt 24:4-31; Mark 13:14, 19; 2 Thess 2:1-12; Rev 7:14; 14:7.


As Renald Showers notes: “This is an important distinction. The word translated ‘hour’ (hora) means ‘the time when something took place, is taking place, or will take place.’ Thus, Christ promised to keep these church saints from the time period characterized by the testing Christ had in mind. If the Lord had meant that He would keep them from just the testing itself, He could have made that very clear by omitting the words ‘the hour’ and simply saying, ‘I will keep you from the testing.’ “An additional indication that Christ is promising to keep the church saints from the hour or time period of testing by separating them from it is indicated by the meaning of the preposition translated ‘from’ (ek) in the expression ‘from the hour.’ This preposition often carries the sense of separation from a person or thing. The Greek lexicon by Arndt and Gingrich give it this meaning in Revelation 3:10. Ibid., 4.
Christ emphasizes His soon return both at the beginning and end of the book of Revelation (cf. Rev 1:1, 3-4, 8; 22:7, 12, 20).


This promise to the overcomer draws heavily upon the picture of the eternal state in Revelation 21-22.

Ibid., 90-91. Because the person is likened to a pillar, temple must be metaphorical also. Hence, this promise is not inconsistent with the later statement that there is no temple in the heavenly Jerusalem (Rev. 21:22). The Jerusalem that comes down from heaven is all temple, and Christ’s victorious ones are its living stones and pillars.

When Jesus says the one who overcomes He will make a pillar in the temple of His God, He’s saying, “I will make Him an influential person of great significance (cf. Peter, James, and John [Gal 2:9] in Christ’s future millennial kingdom.” Christ promises His faithful followers: You will be with me forever, you will have My character. You will be secure. You will never have to leave the New Jerusalem.

Ibid., 91.

Cf. John Walvoord, “The Rapture: The Next Event on God’s Calendar,” in The Road to Armageddon, 43-44.

Ibid., 44.