

Questions From Jesus To Faith Community Church  
*Are You Overcome or Overcoming?*

As most of you know I've been off on a medical leave for several weeks as I've tried to deal with a tick born infection called Bartonella. Some of the side effects include sleeplessness and severe anxiety. I've been on antibiotics and other meds for 5 months, and while I'm sleeping more the anxiety is still severe.

Whenever you have any illness or psychological thing going on after a while you begin to feel like there's no end to what you're experiencing. If you're not careful that can lead to a sense of hopelessness and despair.

I'm being completely honest with you this morning and tell you that that's where I've been on a number of occasions these past months. I think that's important for you to know because sometimes we can view the pastor as kind of super-spiritual or even super-human.

The danger is that if that's your view of me you'll be tempted to discount a lot of what I have to say from up here.

Think about this. Did you ever hear someone speak and think to yourself, "That's fine for him or her but not for me? They're different. They're more spiritual."

"Walking with God just comes naturally for them so when they talk about trusting God in adversity or having a close, personal walk with God that's them, that's not just plain ordinary, weak, sinful, lacking in faith, me?"

Ever felt that way? We probably all have. Well hopefully today I'll be able to share God's truth that lets you know we're all in this together.

We're in a series we're calling *Questions From Jesus To Faith Community Church*. We're trying to view this like Jesus shows up on Sunday and says, "Can I have a few minutes in the service. I'm concerned and I'd really like to talk with you about something."

The basis of what we've been looking is Jesus' message to the 7 churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3.

**Since we've taken a several week break I'd like to just refresh your memory here, so open your Bible to Revelation 1 page 1203**

The Book of Revelation is absolutely crucial to let us know the finality of all things. In the Book of Revelation we find out that God defeats Satan and evil, establishes a new creation, and blesses His people forever.

Now I'd like you to look at **Revelation 1:9-11** **Read**

The time is about 60 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The other disciples have been martyred and John is banished to a small Greek Island in the Aegean Sea called Patmos.

It's on this island that God gives a 90-year-old John a vision of how things are, how they shall be, and how it will all end.

And in chapter 1 God says, *What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia.*

What we have in chapters 2 & 3 is God's specific message to those 7 churches.

Now you might be saying, "Wait a minute. I'm not a member of some 1<sup>st</sup> century congregation in Asia Minor," or what we'd call Turkey today. What's this have to do with me?

First of all remember, *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable...* ( II Timothy 3:16) Anything in the Bible has benefit for us.

But now look at chapter 3 and verse 13. **Read 3:13**

This isn't just for these churches at that time. This is for anybody who's listening. This is for us. And so what we've been looking at is a series of questions from Jesus to Faith Community Church.

Today we're going to look at the 6th of those questions. Are You Overcome or Overcoming?

There's really no middle ground. We're either overcoming life's adversities or they're overcoming us. We might think that we're in neutral mode for a while, but it doesn't take long to realize if we're not moving forward, we're headed backward.

In this series we've looked at a lot of churches with problems. Today we get a chance to do something different. We're going to look at the church at Philadelphia and the exciting thing is, everything that the Lord says to this church is positive.

**Turn to Revelation 3:7 page 1205**

*I. The Key To The Success Of A Church Is The Person Of Jesus Christ*

Each of these 7 churches that the risen Christ addresses are in what's the country of Turkey today. Philadelphia is the only one that still has a viable Christian church. All the rest have literally been wiped off the map.

What we're going to see is that there isn't one negative criticism of this congregation. They were doing something right. The question is, what were they doing right and what can we learn from them?

### **Read verses 7-8**

In each of these cases Jesus introduces Himself in a particular way. The titles He uses are tailored to each specific congregation.

To the church at Philadelphia, which comes from *philos* which means "love," and *adelphos*, which means "brother," Jesus says, "Listen up guys. The one who is speaking is holy and true."

"You guys aren't strong, but I've put the open door before you. It's not about you. You just think it is. It's really all about Me."

Think about the adjectives Jesus uses to describe Himself; Holy and true. Most of us are clueless when it comes to concepts like holiness.

James MacDonald writes this about holiness. "Possibly you think of holiness as a list of rules to freeze freedom and crush your creativity. Maybe you've known some people who claim to be fired up about holiness but there's nothing appealing about their lifestyle or perspective on life."

"They live by black and white thinking that says, 'This is holy and that is not.' They're rule lovers who delight in pointing out who is not making the grade on their latest checklist of absolute rules for holiness."

I believe this is where we really get confused.

God doesn't mainly present His holiness as a horizontal prescription for human behavior. God defines holiness as the central, defining, fundamental essence of His character.

Here's where we tend to put the cart before the horse. Ask most Christians what's the essence of God's character and they'll say what? They'll say, "love."

Certainly God is love but if love were the essence of His character He'd usher us all into heaven without the bloody cross. Why would God send His Only Begotten Son to suffer the horrors of the cross if He was just about love.

The Bible says God's essence is holiness. The Bible uses the words holy and holiness over 600 times.

The first time is in Exodus 3:5 where God says to Moses, *Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.*

The fact is that God's holiness demands that unholiness be punished. That's why the Father laid on the Son the iniquity of us all.

It's because God provided the sacrifice that His love was unleashed on the planet. In essence God's love was held in restraint by His holiness.

In the Old Testament book of Isaiah God gives us a peek behind the curtain as He gives Isaiah a vision of the throne room of heaven.

Here's what it says: *In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!"*

*And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts." (Isaiah 6:1-5)*

Isaiah didn't run up to God and say, "Man, this is so exciting. I finally get to meet You in person. Give me a hug, Bro."

Isaiah was completely and totally undone. He came apart at the seams. It was like his whole being unraveled right there.

You don't high-five God when you meet Him. You fall on your face. That's what happened to the Apostle John in Revelation 1.

Why? Because God's main essence is love and mercy? No, because God's main essence is holiness.

Now follow this. Until we come to an understanding of God's holiness and our sinfulness we'll never begin to truly understand His love.

The very thing that separates us from God is the doorway to a relationship with God. He is holy, holy, holy. The whole earth is filled with His glory.

By the way, let me give you a little side note here. Sometimes I hear people complain about some of the current worship songs that they're too repetitive. Before you say that remember Isaiah 6.

Those 2 Seraphim respond back to one another in a never ending chorus of praise, *Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory! Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!*  
*Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!*

Next time you complain you better think that one through real carefully. God's the inventor of repetition! If you don't like it you just might not like eternity in His throne room!

But the point is God is holy.

Not only that, but Jesus introduces Himself as *He who is true*.

Did you know that there's something like 175,000 books published every year in the US. The Library of Congress has 32,000,000 print volumes.

That's a whole lot of words. Some are very relevant and some are completely irrelevant, but of all the people written about in those millions of volumes only one stands true for all of time. His name is Jesus, the One who said, *He that is true*.

The New Testament was originally written in Koine Greek, or the common Greek of the day. There are two words translated as "true" in the Greek text. They sound similar but there's a world of difference between the 2.

One is *alethes* and it means a true statement as opposed to a false statement. The other is *alethinos*. *Alethinos* is the word Jesus uses in Revelation 3:7. In other words He wasn't just saying, "I make true statements." (Although He does.) He was saying I am truth. When we're confronted with Jesus we're face to face with the only enduring, lasting, indisputable truth.

By using the title *He that is true* Jesus Christ is saying "If this church has truth it's because I'm the center of the church and I'm truth."

Now think about this. Jesus didn't say, "You guys are going great guns over there in Philly because you have a tremendous Christian Ed program."

He didn't say, "The reason I'm praising you is because your AWANA program is top quality. He didn't say your men's program or your ladies program, or your youth program is what's getting My attention.

They could have very well had the equivalent of all of those programs. We don't know. What we do know though is this. The church was holy because they had a holy Jesus. The church was grounded in truth because they had a true Jesus. The church at Philadelphia had an open door because Jesus opened it.

**Look at verse 8 again...** *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.*

"This isn't about how clever you are. This isn't about how long your list of rules is. This certainly isn't because you're strong. You're a bunch of weaklings. But you've kept your focus on Me."

Listen, if you loose sight of Jesus Christ you loose sight of holiness, you loose sight of strength, you loose sight of truth.

Please hear me well. If you don't get anything else from this message today grab onto this. The key to the success of Faith Community Church isn't programs and high tech AV equipment, and a slick pastor. The success of a church is totally wrapped up in Jesus.

Once we begin to loose sight of the Lord Jesus we fade in our ability to reflect His life to one another and to the world.

The captain has ordered the seatbelt sign to be lit so buckle yourself in because I want to shake things up a bit. Hopefully there won't be a mass exodus for the back door when I say this.

If you loose sight of Jesus Christ you loose the realities of holiness, truth and strength. I know that's true because for the last 5 months I've been there. This crazy Bartonella thing and the sleeplessness and the acute anxiety has repeatedly brought me to the place of despair.

God hasn't changed. His Word is truth. God hasn't failed me. I don't doubt His existence for a moment. But I've found it hard to keep my sites on Him. I've found it disturbingly easy to loose sight of truth and holiness.

Now if that's true of me I have to believe it's true of some of you sitting here today. You're having the same struggle.

Let me challenge you to hang in there.

*I. The Key To The Success Of A Church Is The Person Of Jesus Christ.* The key to the success of your own personal spiritual life is Jesus Christ. It's not the right Bible Study, It's not the right small group, it's not the right list of rules, It's Jesus. It's keeping Him real and sometimes that means going against everything you feel at the time.

*I. The Key To The Success Of A Church Is The Person Of Jesus Christ.*

*II. God Promises To Protect His Church From Divine Wrath, Not The Everyday Trials Of Life*

## **Read verse 9**

Although Philadelphia wasn't an ancient city it stood at one of the most strategic places in the first century world. It was located where the borders of 3 countries met; Mysia, Lydia, and Phrygia.

Because of it's position Philadelphia was the gateway to the east. In fact it was the gateway from one continent to another.

Interestingly, Philadelphia had been built specifically to be a missionary city. It was the youngest of the 7 cities of Revelation and was built in 140 BC by Attalus Philadelphus, the king of Pergamos.

His goal was a little different type of evangelism than we think of. Philadelphia was built to be a missionary of Hellenization to the wilds of Phrygia. That meant spreading the Greek language, culture, and way of life to the heathen.

Isn't it fascinating to see how man devises his plans but God turns them upside down and uses them His way. Jesus says, "I've opened a door for ministry. You couldn't do it because your weak.

But you could go through that door and share my good news of salvation because you *have kept My word, and have not denied My name.*

You know in Matthew 10:22 Jesus made one of those promises we usually don't claim. He said *And you shall be hated of all men for My sake.*

The church at Philadelphia took the flack and remained faithful. They didn't remain faithful because there were thousands of them. The Christians didn't remain faithful because they had some super spiritual power that the rest of us don't have,. They remained faithful because Jesus was so real to them that they couldn't do anything less.

Here's what was going on. There was a large Jewish community in Philadelphia. And even though Jesus, His disciples, and all the first Christians were Jewish, overall Judaism looked at Christianity as a perversion of the truth. Rather than seeing Jesus as a clear fulfillment of hundreds of Old Testament messianic prophecies they saw Him as an imposter.

Because of that they severely persecuted the church at Philadelphia. That's why Jesus calls them *those of the synagogue of Satan*. So He says eventually, *I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you*. But right now guys keep your eyes on me and just keep proclaiming the truth. The door's open. Keep walking through it.

God never said He'd protect us from the everyday trials of life. This whole anxiety/depression/confused thinking deal that I've been going through for 5 months has been extremely difficult. There have been those times at 3 AM when I feel out of control, and I wonder how I can keep living like this.

But listen, that but it hasn't made me doubt God. That hasn't made me get angry because He doesn't just straighten everything out instantaneously.

God's still God. He's still my sovereign Lord and Savior. My problem isn't doubting God. How could I doubt a God who sacrificed His one and only Son so that I could be saved. My problem had been sensing His closeness.

Some people in this room can identify exactly with what I'm talking about, right? Let me encourage you with this; if your having trouble sensing the closeness of God. If you know He's there but He feels a million miles away right now. He hasn't moved. He's right where He's always been,

*He's a friend who sticks closer than a brother.* Here's the biblical promise: *Be strong and of good courage, and do it; do not fear nor be dismayed, for the LORD God--my God--will be with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.* (I Chronicles 28:20)

Stuff in life is still going to happen. Hard, painful stuff is still going to happen. But here's the promise: **Read verse 10**

There's coming a day of divine wrath that going to be unlike anything this world has ever seen. The Bible calls that time the great tribulation.

The trouble we experience now aren't God's judgment in a direct sense,. They're the effects of living in a fallen world. They the effects of living in a world that's looking for ultimate redemption.



Listen to what the Bible says, *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us .For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.*

That's the way it is and will be until God makes all things new. But before He does He'll bring a time of trouble on this earth and believers aren't going to go here for that. As imperfect as we are we're still the Bride of Christ and God will not pour out His divine wrath of His holy, virgin bride.

Rather He promises *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.*

This is uber important for us to understand. *God promises to protect his church from divine wrath, not the everyday trials of life*

*I. The Key To The Success Of A Church Is The Person Of Jesus Christ*

*II. God Promises To Protect His Church From Divine Wrath, Not The Everyday Trials Of Life*

*III. Stability Comes Through Intimacy With Jesus*

## **Read verse 11-12**

Like other towns in the region, Philadelphia prospered through agriculture. The soil was suited to growing grapes. Wine was an important product, thus the city was a center of worship of Dionysus, god of wine and fertility. The flocks that grazed in the area supplied wool and hides for textiles and leather production. Philadelphia was easily defended but the surrounding district was disastrously earthquake prone. A massive earthquake in 17 AD completely ruined the city; the citizens lived in fear of aftershocks for years afterward.

When Jesus Christ said, *Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God.* (Revelation 3:11-12) The imagery to the Christians in Philadelphia would have been striking.

See Philadelphia had the nickname of "Little Athens" because of the magnificence of the temples and other public buildings that adorned it.

Temples were everywhere. Public buildings were numerous. And whenever they wanted to honor anybody famous like a politician or a statesman or a philosopher or a general they'd build him a pillar in one of these buildings. Having a pillar dedicated to you was a tremendous honor.

Of course the problem was pillars and earthquake zones don't always make a good mix. Not all pillars were permanent.

But here's God's promise to a faithful church. I'm going to make a pillar for each of you in the temple of God. You're not going to have some shaky deal that's going to collapse the first time the earth starts moving.

Here's the bottom line question for Faith Community Church this morning. Do you rock and shake with every move of life? Does every unsettling thing cause a crack in your foundation?

Stability comes from intimacy with Jesus. Remember that heavenly glimpse that so shook up Isaiah? Well there was something in the middle of all that awesomeness and smoke and shaking that should bring us an authentic sense of strength, confidence, and security.

There might have been a lot going on but do you remember where God was? Isaiah said, *I saw the Lord sitting on a throne*. Think about that. God was unmoved. God wasn't pacing the room going "Oh no, what am I going to do now?" The world's chaotic. I need to get a consulting firm in here. I need help!"

Listen, God was sitting because He was at complete peace. He wasn't shaken by the evils in this world. He wasn't caught off balance by the stupid stuff that I've said or done in my life, or you've in yours.

And He wasn't sitting because He was indifferent. He was seated on His throne because He was settled, secure, and ultimately in control.

### **Read verse 13**

That's the bottom line isn't it? That's been the bottom line through this whole series. Are you listening? Are you hearing what God says through the Bible or are you letting life drown out His message?

Let me challenge you to do something a little different today. Instead of letting the earthquakes of life topple you. Let the peace of God rule in your heart.

*He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?* (Romans 8:32) Not all things we think we want or need, but all things that God knows we need. Peace, stability, character, holiness.

**Video: Blessings**      Laura Story

We pray for blessings  
We pray for peace  
Comfort for family, protection while we sleep  
We pray for healing, for prosperity  
We pray for Your mighty hand to ease our suffering  
All the while, You hear each spoken need  
Yet love us way too much to give us lesser things

'Cause what if Your blessings come through raindrops  
What if Your healing comes through tears  
What if a thousand sleepless nights  
Are what it takes to know You're near  
What if trials of this life are Your mercies in disguise

We pray for wisdom  
Your voice to hear  
And we cry in anger when we cannot feel You near  
We doubt Your goodness, we doubt Your love  
As if every promise from Your Word is not enough  
All the while, You hear each desperate plea  
And long that we'd have faith to believe

'Cause what if Your blessings come through raindrops  
What if Your healing comes through tears  
What if a thousand sleepless nights  
Are what it takes to know You're near  
And what if trials of this life are Your mercies in disguise

When friends betray us  
When darkness seems to win  
We know that pain reminds this heart  
That this is not, this is not our home  
It's not our home

'Cause what if Your blessings come through raindrops  
What if Your healing comes through tears  
And what if a thousand sleepless nights  
Are what it takes to know You're near  
What if my greatest disappointments  
Or the aching of this life  
Is the revealing of a greater thirst this world can't satisfy  
And what if trials of this life

The rain, the storms, the hardest nights  
Are Your mercies in disguise