

## NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

October 21, 2018

Out Of Little Strength Grows Great Endurance – Dear Church

Joel Schmidgall

All right, how are we doing today? Good to see you guys. We continue our Dear Church series; we're walking through the seven letters to the seven different churches in Revelation chapter two and three. And today we come to the church at Philadelphia, and I know some of you guys are excited today because God is finally addressing those Eagles fans, right? But bad news, it's a different Philadelphia. Okay? We're not going to the rocky steps or the liberty bell or cheese steaks with or without onion. In fact, we're going to modern day Turkey and it's 20 miles south east of Sardis where we were last week and it was founded by the king of Pergamum, a guy named Attalus II. And he was an interesting guy who actually garnered some nicknames along the way and so Attalus II Rome came along and they tried to twist his arm against his brother and they wanted to turn him against his brother and so they're doing all these tactics, but he wouldn't give in, he was loyal. He was enduring in his relationship with his brother and so he was given this nickname Philadelphus and it means the lover of the brother or brotherly love. And so he gets this nickname and then he names the city that as well. And so it's almost what is to come of what we're going to read about in the church.

Now, a couple of interesting things around Philadelphia; it was built on the planes right near volcanoes that were not active anymore and so you had all the ash that it spewed into these areas and it became very fertile soil. And so you had these beautiful grapes that would grow and so it was wine country and they worshiped the god of wine there. And they had temples all over the place, they call it little Athens. And so as a believer, as a follower of Christ, it was very hard to follow Christ without being persecuted or without suffering or hardship occurring in your life. And then you had the earthquakes because of these extinct volcanoes. And so a lot of people wouldn't even live in city limits because the walls were constantly crashing in and so you had this fear and it was a very dangerous place to live for the believer, whether it was the earthquakes or the persecution or the suffering. This is the context this is the circumstances that we're stepping into as we see the letter written to these, to the church at Philadelphia, but they endured. And this is the first church that is not exhorted, but they're just encouraged. I get to talk about that today. Okay? And we're going to go there. We're going to go verse by verse, okay? Just through this scripture, it's found in Revelation chapter three. And we're going to start in verse seven. We're just going to walk through it together today and I'll start us off...

<sup>7</sup> *"To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:*

*These are the words of him who is holy and true, (Now this is identifying God as the author of this scripture, of this letter, and it continues on) who holds the keys of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.*

So it's a reference and it's the exact wording of Isaiah 22:22 and where it references this guy named Eliakim who was given the keys of David. He was given the keys to David's house to all the treasures of the kingdom. He was given access to everything within the kingdom of Israel

and so it's a foreshadowing of Christ to come because Christ is given access to all of the kingdom. He has the keys to heaven and to Earth, and that's why Jesus says, I am the way, the truth and the life, no Man comes to the father except through me.

Doesn't that passage just hit you after a worship set like this? How about this? When God doesn't make a way that I was praying for, but Jesus says, I'm not just going to make your way, no, I am the way, the truth and the life. And so when things on our path doesn't go according to plan, Jesus says, no, no, no, it's not about you, your plans will be thrown off, I'm sorry. Life happens on the way to our plans, right? But Jesus says, I am the way, come into me in all circumstances. And the scripture continues on.

<sup>8</sup> *I know your deeds.*

Verse eight says. Remember what we talked about here in the past couple of weeks; we've talked about this idea that in Revelation, deeds and faith are interchangeable. They're synonymous with one another, and so if you have faith then your deeds will show that. That is the truth of the faith that is in your spirit. Now we think that, okay, I got faith, so yeah, I automatically have deeds, but that's not always the case. The last fire, what about when a fire happens around you, do you run away from it or do you run towards it?

September 19th, 3:29 PM, three blocks away from us at the Capper Senior Center a fire started and the Capper's Senior Center went up in flames and it was charred and 160 people were displaced, 160 seniors. And when that fire went up, you saw people running from the fire, you saw people running from the center, you saw people sitting idly by, not far away. And then you saw a different picture, didn't you? You saw a few of our neighbors doing the exact opposite and we're just going to take a look at at some video. Thanks to channel seven WJLS who provided this, but check out what a few of our neighbors did.

{ video }

[Marines running toward the fire]

[A marine speaking] She saw smoke coming from the building. We heard the call of the radio and we ran over here and to try to help the best way possible. And we knew there were people trapped so, we went floor to floor and tried to grab people any way possible. Just picked people up, threw them on our shoulders, carried them, and just tried to help get out. These are our neighbors, so we wanted to be there for them.

[Woman whose father was rescued from the building] Just want to say thank you so much guys. Without you, we would be stuck in that fire and I love my dad so much. He's an army vet. Yeah!

{ End of video }

It just dawned on me watching that, we prayed with that guy at the place on K Street. Remember that? And he went the Cappers. That's crazy.

You see this opposite picture of everybody running away from and then these men who have been trained mentally to do the opposite. It's not their personality. They have trained themselves to run towards the fire. Now listen, we have firefighters here and our firefighters responded right away, put that fire out; are we thankful for those who work in our...? So grateful and then we have our Marines as well who are neighbors, but it's not their job. It's not their duty. Strike that. It's not their job. It is their duty because they live with a different moral code. It's an internal code that is not a part of their personality, but it's a part of the duty that has been instilled within them.

So let me just ask us today, in the past month when a fire has arisen, which way have you gone from that? When's the last fire that you have actually run towards? When has your faith been put into action over the past month? Just take a little bit of inventory right now. How have you proved your faith through deed in this past month?

Verse eight,

*8" I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut."*

189 times the word door is mentioned in the scripture, 173 different verses and you see it all different ways. You see a door of deeper relationship in Revelation 3:20; we'll read about it next week. It says, I stand at the door and knock, right? And I will come in and dine with you. It's this; it's this deepening of intimacy with God. You see, door of salvation. Christ says I am the door. I am the gate. You come to the father through me through the door of salvation. There's a door of temptation or of sin. In Genesis, it talks about sin is crouching at the door. And then there's a door of opportunity, I think that's what this is here today. He opens the door and he waits. He allows, he prepares a path for us to step into. It's a way that God invites us to work alongside him with him, and it's the crossroads of chaos and opportunity. That's what this is.

What door has God opened for you today that you need to walk through? Maybe it's one of the doors that I just mentioned.

*8" I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and you have not denied my name."*

The more context you read, the more sense you get of tone in this scripture. So as we've read these previous five letters and it brings us to this point, you get such a strong sense of tone as you start to understand this and imagine a spiritual father speaking to strong and faithful, enduring yet beaten down church, a small group of people. Don't, you start to get a sense of tone, not just the words, but how it was delivered, the content of how it was given you can hear the pastoral tone, you can see the posture. Can I just try to practice this for a second? And, it's not just him speaking at us, but it's him stepping out. And here's, look at this beautiful lady Tammy in the front row and it's almost like the posture of getting down on the level, right? And this is getting weird now, right? I just realized in this moment, whoa, that's weird, stop it. But it's getting down on the same level and it's him speaking in this tone. Tammy, I see you. You are a strong woman who has been faithful. You have endured. You have given, you serve in our choir, you've served through finances and small groups in this church and you're ensuring, you're pushing, you're

working hard. God has given you a strong faith. I bet some days are hard though. I bet you've had a few days where you just feel like giving up, but you haven't. You have endured and pressed through. It's this pastoral tone, right of not just saying, oh, good job I'll pat you on the back, but him seeing and looking into the eyes of a church who has been faithful in the midst of horrible, of rough, of hardship of tough circumstances. I know that you have little strength. You okay, Tammy, you got picked on in the front row, alright. You're like what are you doing right now? Get away from me.

*I know so that you have little strength yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.*

I know a few of us can relate to this; you of little strength. Somebody here is tired. Somebody feels like you're out of gas today. Somebody here has been a working and praying with your child and whether he's little, medium or big and you've been praying and you just, you just haven't got the results that you want or need. Somebody here you're in a place of depression or on your way there because you just haven't found the place where who you are, your personality, or your giftings has come into fruition. Or maybe somebody here and you're at your job and you just, you're trying with everything you have, but it's like it's just not working and that person just keeps showing up and sucking the life out of me and I got nothing left. I'm sick of this. You're disappointed, somebody's frustrated, somebody's worn down, somebody is overwhelmed, somebody is done, nothing left. I got nothing left to give.

Of little strength, weakness, right? We see weakness as something that will hold us back, as circumstances that God will not use as an unusable state. Ray Stedman talks about the more literal version of this passage though, and it reads this way,

*"I've placed before you an open door that no one can shut you have a little power and have kept my word and have not denied my name."*

The sense is actually that God moves towards that of little strength. Jamieson's commentary says, being consciously weak herself, she is the fitter object for God's power to rest on so that God would have all the glory. We think of little as insignificance. Yet God sees little and he calls it substantial. The woman with the two mites; substantial. The boy comes with all he has is just a little bit of lunch; God says of great value. We see the church in Revelation. God says, that's where I want to move. He sees little strength, e sees weakness, and he says, that's where I want to go. That's a place where I can show up and manifest my power. That's somebody who needs my presence. That's somebody who needs me to come along and show myself. If you have little strength, what you don't realize is you are in the perfect place for God to show up, of little strength.

II Corinthians 12:9 *"My grace it is sufficient for you, my strength is made perfect in weakness. Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."*

What can come out of weakness? God's power can be made manifest in your weakness. Do you know that? That's number one. Number two, God can show up and speak to you and reveal things to you in your little strength, in your weakness, in that he will not reveal in other seasons.

It's terrible that sometimes I get excited about those who are going through hardships. Come to talk to me about the situation and I kind of get a little bit, oh, this is great because God is gonna show and use you and he's going to speak things to and you're not going to like it and it's going to be hard, but he's going to give you a gift of his revelation in your soul. It's because I have had an experience, anybody out there with me today? I have had an experience where I have had to wrestle with life. I have had to grapple with God and through the worst of circumstances, God has showed up in me and made himself manifest, and then as he revealed truth to me that has changed who I am.

We want easy though, don't we? We love easy. I want easy, but we don't follow Christ to get easy, and if you do, uh oh. We don't follow Christ to get easy. We follow Christ to get purpose, to bring meaning to the chaos all around us, to give purpose to every single action that we take. Some of the greatest moments of meaning in life come out of the hardest circumstances.

Verse eight ...*you have kept my word and have not denied my name.*

JR Woodward says me first is narcissism. Family first is nepotism. People group first is racism. Country first is nationalism. God's kingdom first that's christian. We set aside all our selfish endeavors and we step into Christ and we put his kingdom first.

Verse nine,

<sup>9</sup> *"I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars."*

We're getting real right here, aren't we?

*"I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you."*

Is it real or crazy? I don't know. But we see this scripture and we go back to Romans chapter two and it says...

*"He is not a Jew outwardly, he's a Jew inwardly, he has a circumcision of the heart. He does not seek the praises of men, but he seeks the praises of God."*

In other words, he's speaking to those Jews who... they're trying to look good. They're trying to look good on the outside or maybe they have a certain facade on, but on the inner most parts of their hearts, they're not there. And then in Romans 11, Paul calls out that the Gentiles will be a light, will actually bring salvation to those out. And so this is a moment where he's reaffirming the prophecy of old

Verse 10.

<sup>10</sup> *"Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth."*

<sup>11</sup> *"I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown."*

The church at Philadelphia is commended throughout the scripture and they're held up because of this phrase. I think it's bundled up in this phrase right here that you have patiently endured. We tend to think of patience and we tend to think of endurance as words of kind of passivity, right? It's like a passive activeness, kind of standing by and waiting for things to happen around you, but commentator William Barclay defines the Greek word 'hupomone' as having the quality to stand facing the storm, struggling against difficulty and opposition. It's an active spiritual resistance. Standing in the face of the storm is not passive. It's stepping into. It's leaning into. It's pressing forward. A parallel word in the Old Testament is this word qavah, and it means to tarry to wait patiently. And we find it in Isaiah 40:31. It's that scripture that we love to quote,

<sup>31</sup> *But those that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.*

Is this scripture just wishful thinking, right? I mean, does that happen for you? Do you run into like actually gets stronger? Do you go through adversity and you feel better? You feel strong and you're better than me maybe then. Like how does this happen? And I wrestled with this scripture because when I go through adversity, I don't know my legs get a little shaky. I get a little worn down. The literal translation of qavah; it's to bind together like a cord. So this is interesting. It's a word picture that we're given for this idea of of enduring or waiting patiently and it's not like a bundle of firewood where you'd take a cord and you wrap it around it. It's actually the binding of a cord so you have this thin little strand, this thin little string that is you, right? That thin little...it's breakable; you can pull it apart if you try very hard. But then you take that strand and then you take another strand and you take another and you start to wrap them and you start to braid these strands until you make a rope. And so you see what happens in the strength is as you add these things all together, it becomes strong. So your little strength becomes, through patient endurance it becomes something that is unbreakable. It doesn't change that if you take your little strand, you can break that thing, but when you are braided with the spirit of God, when you are braided with his community, when you are braided with his word, when you are braided with his promises, when you walk in the spirit, when you get on your knees, when you lift your hands up high and the spirit of the Lord comes upon you what was so weak all of a sudden becomes the resting place of the spirit of the Lord and you become unbreakable, unmovable. You become patiently enduring and that thing that is so hard, it cannot slap you down anymore because you have the spirit of God within you. You know that... Well, the phrase when somebody starts to lose it we say they become undone or they become unraveled, right? You're losing that ravel, you're losing the braidedness when you... and we see it in scripture, there's different examples of godly people of faith becoming unraveled. Elijah in I Kings 19, he says, "God, just take me now. He's done. You know what God does? He says, eat something. Hmm? Anybody heard that scripture? Moses in Numbers chapter 11 he says, God just kill me. He's done. He's overwhelmed. He's stressed. He's, sick of it. It's just, it's too much.

After World War II Ann Masten a resilience researcher and professor of child development at the University of Minnesota, she came across these kids or she worked with these kids that were incredibly traumatized, but she was amazed at their resiliency. And so a team of psychologist actually studied this group of kids and they couldn't believe how they came through adversity

and it actually led to Emmy E. Werner, producing what's considered the most important longitudinal study in the field of resilience research. Forty years, 700 different kids they study in Kauai, Hawaii and they followed them and they find a number of things. They see a third of the kids because they're dealing with kids who have lost their parents, disease, sickness all these things that we know lead to a rough life and instability in the future. Yet somehow a large amount of these kids find resiliency and come through this and the factors that they noted were having close community, a role model and a strong belief. So, community, a future or somebody showing you a future and belief. These are the things that held them. These are the braids that held them together. I wonder how you're doing today.

I wonder how you sitting in your seat are doing today. And on your way in we actually gave you something. You saw, I think most of you got one of these on the way in. I want to ask you to go ahead and pull them out and it's red, green and yellow. So we're gonna try this, okay, a little dangerous. We're going to try an exercise to actually see how we're doing today. And so I'm going to ask you a question or I'll ask you a bunch of questions and I'll just have you hold up a what you're feeling, how you process. And here's the thing red means you're in a bad place, you're not doing too well. Yellow means you're, you know, you're kind of in the middle, you're not doing horrible, but you're not doing great at the same time. And then green means you're in a good place. Okay? So these are three things. The last thing I would say is this is a no judgment zone. Okay? So it's not "oh, I knew Mrs. Jones, I could've told you that one, I mean. So, we're not going to judge, this is family, which maybe that doesn't sense. You're like, well, family, no judgment zone, how the...Ideal attempt at family here. So, go ahead and pull these out and and you just hold the one up that describes how you would answer this.

- So, currently, right now, rate your stress level, hold it up, and we're going to look around because we're seeing our community and what we feel, what we're experiencing right now.
- So rate, how you're invested in a relationship and community right now. Where are you at with that?
- Rate how well you're eating right now? {laughter} Okay?
- Rate your consistency of sleep and let's, you know, if you're a parent of young kids let's just take that into consideration, but how are you sleeping right now?
- Let's rate how consistent you are in pursuing God's purposes.
- Alright, how about rate your inner sense of peace?
- Alright, we're almost there. Rate your spiritual discipline rhythm.

Okay, so we look around and you get a sense of community, don't you? You see, we got a lot of people who are, who are kind of struggling. We're in that fight. We're going back and forth and you get a sense of who we are. Now, number one, that should help you self-identify a little bit more. Okay, I evaluate these different areas and I need to think about that a little bit more. I think it also helps us get a sense of what is among us and when you rub shoulders with somebody, let's pay attention to what's around us. Somebody is going through some stuff and they are right on the verge of going to the good or going to the bad side. Let's be aware as we minister and build relationship to one another; we have a calling to fellowship within this community.

Wayne Cordeiro said, “We don't forget that we are Christians. We forget that we are human, and that one oversight alone can debilitate our future.” We got to plug into our source regularly, the source who restores us, who renews us, who gives us new life, who replenishes us, who guides us, who leads us.

Acts 17:28 <sup>28</sup> *“in him we live, and move, and have our being;”*

A couple of quick challenges. Number one, prioritize spiritual disciplines. Wherever you are at today in answering those questions, prioritize spiritual disciplines, praying, reading the scriptures, meditating, fasting, these different disciplines, worship that we are given. And where are you in your prayer rhythm right now? How are you staying consistent in soaking in words of wisdom from the scripture? Maybe you need to take a Sunday to Sunday fast and cut something out to renew yourself in the Lord. I love our end of services when we have a time of reflection, it's that moment, that forced moment or rhythm that we give back to one another, to just hear from God, to center ourselves in him. Now, parents, you won't get that today and some of us you get to the end and I got to beat traffic so we jet out of here, but that moment is for us as a community to re-center ourselves in Christ, we have to have these moments throughout our week. And we can't trust ourselves to rate ourselves. Can we? We need the Holy Spirit to examine our hearts, to speak into us.

Second, balance eating, sleeping and exercise. And I'm just going to tell you, I say this and I'm like, I don't even like this one and I'm speaking to myself. If you drive yourselves too hard without replenishing your serotonin levels, what you do is you start to run on adrenaline. You can do that for a little bit, but if you continue to run on adrenaline over time it will eat away at you, it will break your body down. You have to feed yourself through; you have to replenish yourself through sleep. Now, I don't even like this, but, 10:00 PM through 2:00 AM is a prime time for that serotonin to come and it's a drip so it comes in slowly, right? And I'm just saying this because you got... I'm a 12 to 1:00 AM, that's about my to get to sleep. That's when I go to bed and so I feel convicted even saying this and is this even possible in DC, right? That's the pressure we feel, but we've got to find a way of rhythm. And one brief pat on the back because that's my rhythm, but this week I like 10:15 on Tuesday night, I went to bed at 10:15 PM. I was so proud of myself and I got a good night. It was one good night, okay. But we go to bed late, we get up early, we run it, I think it's because, I'm just processing this point now, I'm not pastoring I'm processing myself. I think it's because you know what, it's the one area of sacrifice that we, that I can make where it doesn't hurt anybody but me. So I can give more at work, I've can give enough at work, I can give enough to my family if I just give up sleep and I can make it, I can suck it up to the point, but at some point that comes back, doesn't it? Sometimes you pay a price, at some point you pay a price.

And that leads us into my third point, which I think helps, which is build a rhythm of checkpoints. So, instead of seeing this, because I don't know if you're annoyed at this exercise and if you are, I relate with you. We went through it this week; Pastor Josh took our staff through it this week. But don't see this as if you get a red or two reds as, okay, I'm failing right now, but see them more as gauges, okay? These questions are different gauges that you keep an eye on, like machinery, right? And so you can run your RPMs high in one of these areas for a season and that's okay, you guys. That's all right. Okay, right now I'm just gonna I don't have the time for



sleep or I can't get the exercise or whatever that is for you right now, but if you have checkpoints, you can be aware. So if you go 12 straight checkpoints without exercising and the whole year without exercising, you got a problem, don't you? You can go a season, but when it's over and over and over, you've got to change a rhythm, you have to change things up.

Which leads us to number four, which is critical as well. Commit to community. Community encourages us to do what we want to do, but we don't always do. What we know we need to do, but we don't always accomplish, we need community. It also reminds us that life is not about me. It's about us. That's the church. It's about 'we' instead of 'me'. Ecclesiastes 4:12 *"a cord of two strands is strong, but a cord of three strands is not quickly broken."* Back to that cord, that rope idea, right? And in the context it's talking about a spouse or a marriage, but I think what it can mean is that one strand me, you've got to add an element of community and then you add the Spirit of God and that's when you become strong. We need community.

And then fifth; stop speeding. Again, is this possible in DC? I mean stop signs make it, but we keep going don't we? But is it possible in DC to stop speeding? Lance Witt calls it an unhurried life. John Ortberg said, hurry is not about a disordered schedule, but a disordered heart. Again, I'm struggling, I'm preaching at me today. I'm always in a hurry to the next thing, it always feels like it. And when Nina and I were talking about like how do we... If you go season after season, and year after year of just living in the five years of hurried, what do you do? How do we change up that rhythm? God give us wisdom. We need community. We need checkpoints.

Hebrews 12:1 *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, (God's community) let us throw off everything that hinders and sin that so easily entangles. Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us"*

<sup>2</sup> *fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer (Some of you know it as the author or the initiator) and perfecter of our faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

<sup>3</sup> *Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

Are we asking God to perfect things that we have initiated, that we have pioneered? God says, I didn't author that, that was your thing, and now you're asking me to perfect where you went off kilter from my calling to you. <sup>3</sup> *Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

I was talking with a friend this week who a lot of years of struggle trying to have a little one in their marriage, and so I just asked them about this subject, how this idea of patiently enduring, how have you guys processed this idea? And he said this. He said, 'it's been a roller coaster, he said our emotions can betray us, but I've learned to lean on God in a different way when others are pregnant or have three and four kids, the enemy wants me to covet, but you have to take captive every thought. I've learned to be quiet in the Lord to let him speak to me instead of me speaking at him. I'm here to sit with you and God reveal to me what I don't see. I've actually found myself looking less at what I don't have and appreciate more what I do have. I've also

learned to appreciate the presence of God more; the gift of Christ and eternal hope has become my strength. I've learned to wait actively. That means to remain faithful, prayerful, but also to look into things like adoption or medicine and honestly to support others and just to make family. God has given us joy in different ways than our expectation and he gives the peace that passes understanding. We feel like we need to find or create peace in ourselves, but we can't. It only comes through abiding and the Holy Spirit, the peace in the midst of the storm, in the midst of a dream not yet. It only comes through him. I am most at peace when I have given God the time to work on my spirit.'

So, Lord, we give you time right now. We give you these next moments to work on our spirit. And God, I pray an encouraged over the body today. I pray for those of us here, who are tired, who are worn down. For those of us here who are frustrated because we can't seem to overcome a problem or an issue. I pray for those of us who our circumstances have just, they've tackled us. I pray today that in our souls we would be encouraged. I pray that your Holy Spirit would revalue who we are. I pray for the person who is walking with their head down today that you would lift up their head, lift up their eyes to the author and perfecter of their faith. They would find strength in community, that we would find strength in you, that you would minister to us in these moments here today. God, we give you our lives. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.