

Revelation 3:7 “To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. ⁸I 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 have not denied my name...

¹¹I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.

¹²Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name.

Dear Friends in Christ, especially you dear confirmands, Natalie and Jordan,

HOLD ON TO WHAT YOU HAVE!

Long ago, I was watching the news and for some forgotten reason the newscast went to a town in Illinois with 2,500 people. And those big city newscasters called it a “small town.” I thought, “2,500 isn’t a small town!” You see, I grew up in a town of 800 and in our whole county there was only one town with more than 2,500 people—and that just barely.

Well, our small town T-ball team would once a year go to a MLB game in the big city. And I, a small small-town boy, got my annual lesson on what to do with money when in the big city. My mom would tell me, “Be sure you put your money in your sock. They won’t look there.” My mom was right, the big city hoodlums never did find the money in my sock. Not sure what the hot dog vendor thought about me pulling 2 sweaty one-dollar bills out of my sock but the bad guys never got it. And that was the point!

I should have remembered my mom’s advice. Fifteen years later, one particular Sunday afternoon, I was in the same big city. Not on a T-ball tour, but as a Pizza Hut delivery driver. It wasn’t the nicest part of town. But it was a beautiful day: Late spring, a bit of warmth and cool in the air. I can remember how bright it was. Stepping away from a home delivery I could see cars driving down Sherman Boulevard across a block-wide open lot, the sun glinting off the chrome. Sunday afternoon, mind you! Stepping away from that home delivery two guys came up and said, “Where’s the money?” My small town roots came back to me. I had no clue what they were talking about. I’m thinking, “Money? Why are you asking about money? I collect the money, I don’t give it out.” But before I could complete the thought, they picked me up, threw me to the ground, reached in my pocket, took the money and ran. Yep. Should have listened to my mom. When in the big city, put your money in your sock. They’d have never found it there.

It wasn’t funny at the moment but I am glad I can look back on it with humor. But it isn’t funny, is it, when people take what is yours? It’s about more than the stuff. It is a violation of you as a person. This last week has seen a rash of smash-and-grab thefts in our area. And no one is laughing. It hurts people. They lose money and driver’s licenses. They lose key chains from long-lost friends, pictures of those closest who have passed. They now have the bother of replacing driver’s license and credit cards. And then there are irreplaceable things that are gone forever. But it is more than that. Your feeling of security is forever compromised. There is a sinking, anxious feeling in the heart that won’t go away for months or years, maybe even a lifetime. Something has been taken, and it is more than the stuff.

There is someone who is laughing, who thinks it is pretty funny. The thieves. They got what they wanted. Oh, I am pretty sure the laughs won’t last long. God has a way of working that out. But they

do think it is funny now. Which just makes you feel the loss more, loss of things and dignity.

I. Why You Need to Hold On to What You Have

And that, dear confirmands, is what *the devil* wants to do to you. He wants to take something precious from you. He wants to take Jesus away from you. He wants to take eternal life away from you. He probably even thinks that if he can steal your faith in Jesus, he will somehow make the joy of your believing grandpa and grandma who are with Jesus less because you won't be there. Satan hates you. He hates you so much that he is willing to give you what you want now so that he can make you suffer forever. Because he plays for the long game, he is willing to help each of us get what we want today, money, power, sex, video games, entertainment, popularity so that he will have us forever. Remember the White Witch in Narnia giving the Turkish delight to Edmund? Short term gain, long term loss.

But it isn't just Satan. There are also *people* who want to steal what you have. So-called friends who will tempt you into sinful behavior of every sort. There are even people whom you will trust, who will do the same. (And here I speak especially to you high school graduates. You will have teachers in the colleges and universities of our nation who will laugh with glee if they can reach, not into your pocket, but into your heart to steal the faith you have. Or, like the senseless brutes thieves so often are, if they can't smash and destroy your faith, at least they hope to wound it, to mangle it.)

And there is your own *sinful nature*, the enemy within, who wants to persuade you that God isn't all that important. The enemy within will try to persuade you that it is an unreasonable waste of time to attend God's house every week. I can tell you that this very next Sunday your sinful nature will tell you, "You should just sleep in today. You've been in church the last few Sundays. You've been in confirmation class for months on end. What does it matter?" Your sinful mind will tell you that God is really quite selfish in desiring that you give a percentage of your income to him. Your sinful mind is going to tell you that it is just plain dumb to forgive people who hurt you, that compromising with demanding people is unfair, that loving behavior toward unloving people is unprofitable.

Every time we go down those alleys of sin, whether in action or word or even in thought, we sin. It doesn't matter if Satan leads us there, or people, or our own desires. We sin. We do things that deserve God's punishment.

But there is someone who loves you even more than your enemies hate you. And because he loves you, Jesus urges you, "***Hold on to what you have! Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.***"

If Jesus is urging you to "***Hold on to what you have,***" you should be asking. "What am I supposed to hold onto?" Back in verse 8, Jesus said to these believers, "***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 have not denied my name.***" He says that they have little strength. They were not superheroes, but just ordinary people like us. People, who struggled with sin, who fell into sin, but who day after day come back to Jesus for forgiveness. People who admit, that because of their own sins they should be lost forever. People who in their sins still come back to God's word and confess Jesus as their Savior. Hold on to that faith, that assurance, that comfort. That is what Jesus means when he says to you, "***Hold on to what you have.***" Then, "***no one will take your crown.***"

That is the joy of being a Christian. In confirmation class you learned that you already have a crown of life. You know that the moment the Holy Spirit puts faith in your heart in Jesus as your personal Savior, at that moment you have eternal life! It is God's gift, freely given. The only thing that can take it away is if you let go of what you have, if you throw away God's gift to you.

That is why Jesus tells you, "***Hold on to what you have!***" Jesus is so concerned for you, that he wants you to not only begin your life with him, but also to end of your life with him, in faith. He wants

to welcome you into heaven. That's why he tells you, ***"Hold on to the faith you have!"***

II. Encouragement for Holding On to What You Have

But here is even better news, dear Confirmands: Jesus does not order you to hold on to what you have, he encourages you to do so. He encourages you with his promises in picture language.

In verse 8 Jesus made this promise: ***"See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut."*** Jesus has promised that you already have eternal life. There is no person, no tragedy, no poverty, no angel, no demon who can shut the door to heaven in your face. The only bad thing that can happen is if you walk away. Jesus has promised it. ***"Hold on to what you have!"***

Then he says, ***"I am coming quickly"*** Jesus will come to take you to himself. When Jesus comes again or when he calls you to him—and it may be today or it might be when you are 103—you will begin not 100 years with Jesus, but an eternity. The difficulties you now face are short term. The sins you desire, will only gladden you for a moment. But Jesus will come again with an un-aging reward in hand. ***"Hold on to what you have because Jesus is coming quickly!"***

Third, Jesus promises, ***"Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it."*** What is Jesus going to do to you? He says he is going to make you into a pillar! Obviously, Jesus is not going to turn you into stone. (The White Witch did that, not Aslan.) Jesus is talking in picture language. He tells us that in heaven we will never again feel distant from God. Like a pillar in the temple of God is always close to God, so you will be in heaven. You will never leave God's presence. You will never again be subject to sorrow or temptation. ***"Hold on to what you have because one day you will forever be in God's presence!"***

Finally, Jesus assures us, ***"I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God... and I will also write on him my new name."***

If God is going to put his name on you, you know what that means? God is not ashamed of you. In fact, he wants to take proud ownership of you!

I would guess that you have seen pictures of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC—the huge white marble building, with columns in front and a statue of that former president inside. On the outside of the memorial is something carved into the stone. Carved into the memorial are the names of states. And the first question you will have is this, "Which states? Only Northern States? After all, he commanded a war against half of the states." No. On the memorial are the names of all 36 states at the time of Lincoln's death; all of them. Whatever else someone might think about the whole affair, it was true to Lincoln's desire (though others had other desires), but Lincoln's desire, like a parent for a child, was to bring all the state back together again.

Kind of in reverse, Jesus here pictures for us, ***"Him who overcomes, I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God and also my new name."*** Like an artist who puts her name on a canvas, like a big leaguer who signs a game ball, God will put his name on you because he loves you, and wants you with him. God will not spray paint his name across you like graffiti, but it will be like how they inscribe names on rock on a presidential memorial. God will write his name on you, a name that says that you are God's, forever. However humble we may be in this world, God will be pleased to have you with him in heaven. In fact, when you enter heaven one day, the Lord God will smile to see you walking in.

Having heard Jesus' promises, Jordan and Natalie, on this day of your confirmation I charge you as Jesus himself has, ***"Hold on to what you have so that no one will take your crown!"*** Amen!