

3 John

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[0 : 00] Well, we arrived today at the finishing message of our spring in the letters of John, having now worked our way through 1st, 2nd, and now today, 3rd John.

When you return next week over Memorial Day weekend, then Brock Brockway, who is training for ministry, will be preaching from Ecclesiastes.

And then the week following, as we enter June, we'll start our summer series, and we will be back with the Israelites at the base of the mountain in the book of Exodus.

For those who have been with us for a while, this will be our third consecutive summer in Exodus. Which is fine by me. They were out there 40 years. We can leave them there over three summers.

But that's what we're going to do. That's the lay of the land before you. I want to tag this message, though, this morning. Oh, to be good like Gaius.

[1 : 15] I'm aware that that's a long tag. It has kind of an Anglo look on it.

It would take up significant paint and room on the brick. It might have to be shortened. Represented in the sense of good like Gaius.

Or Gaius the good. For indeed, the recipient of this letter was good. The terrain of the text that I want to lay down those thoughts on, follow a simple pattern.

In verses 2 through 4, there were good things said about him. In verses 5 through 10, you're going to see a good work done by him.

And then, finally, a good word is given to him. Good things said about him.

[2 : 31] The day that the elder, because that's the writer there in verse 1, set his pen to paper to write a letter to this man as an individual, was a day where this man, unusually, was in good spirits.

He was in good spirits when he picked up his pen to speak of this gentleman. Evidently, some of the brothers had stopped by his house after they had been on a journey, and they had good things to say about this man named Gaius.

You can read it there. Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you, and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul. For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth.

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. Good things were being said about him. A good testimony.

They testified to truth. Namely, that he was walking in the truth. And that made the elder incredibly grateful.

[3 : 54] I don't know if you know what the day-by-day look was for the elder, but he was in a tough patch. He was in a season of life that he didn't want to relive.

He had been part of a community of faith that had gone through an incredible, divisive moment, where many in his church began to move out of his home and set up a competing vision of Jesus and who he was and what he meant.

Indeed, if you connect it all the way back to the early Johannine literature in 1 John, if there's some connection between the communities, there were those who went out from us for they were not of us and they began to deceive people concerning them.

Indeed, last week we saw that those deceivers in 2 John were still at work, verse 7 of 2 John. And so this man had been laboring in the church and now the church was incredibly divided.

And at that moment, he gets some news from some of the brothers. Hey, we went out. We've come back. There's a brother over there by the name of Gaius.

[5 : 14] He's a good man. He's a good testimony. I've never experienced a church split. So I confess I come at this text with a degree of separation.

From what I know of them, they are very damaging events. I've seen it from a degree or two of separation. Once when I was young, led to Christ in a parachurch ministry, and then watched all the people that nurtured me in the faith go different ways.

I could never make sense of it. Still can't. I saw it early in ministry, after being in for a while, where all of a sudden colleagues that you'd labored with all of a sudden wouldn't talk to one another anymore.

Never knew how to make sense of it. I know what it's like to talk to pastors who are pastoring churches whose places have divided.

And I can only tell you that some of them nearly fall off the table over the weight of the difficulty and the strain of relationships. In all those situations, good people get hung out to dry.

[6 : 43] And many of them for years. In fact, it's difficult for many of them to walk back into an institutional church setting because the experience is so vivid, palpable, distasteful, that they wonder whether there's good things on the horizon.

There is a long relational wake of spiritual loss and chaos. I know that.

The elder was under all that. Which is why he's particularly eager to say good things about a person who lives somewhere else because he received his own friends and his own teaching.

I mean, you can catch the... I don't want to call it hyperbole, but you can catch his need to pen this note. Look how he refers to them. Beloved, verse 1.

Beloved, verse 2. Beloved, verse 5. Beloved, verse 11. And yet there's no indication that he really knew them all that well. But when he heard the word that he had been receptive to his own friends in the midst of a difficult season, he goes, I love that guy.

[8 : 11] Well, you might not know him that well, but I love him. He's my kind of guy because he received you. Look at the way he does this in verse 2. I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health as it goes well with your soul.

In other words, he's saying, man, I hope, I hope, I hope you're healthy. I hope you're feeling good about yourself. I hope your psyche's in order. I hope your life is good.

I hope you have pleasant seas ahead. Why? Because I've heard such good things about you. Even the word greatly there, you know.

Verse 3. I rejoice greatly. Not just rejoicing. I'm rejoicing greatly. I got great happiness. Verse 4. I have no greater joy. It does a pastor wonder to know that there are people that are walking according to the truth.

I look back in my own history as a pastor and I've seen the wake of relational divide one or two degrees of separation away. I've mentioned it to you. But then you also know of those who somehow in all that wheat and chaff that the Lord was getting something done with some folks along the way.

[9 : 36] Good things said about him. How about you? How about you?

How about you? Wow. Oh, to be good like Gaius. Oh, to have somebody say because they've heard of your life, boy, I hope you get some pleasant seas ahead.

Boy, I hear that you're still walking in the truth. But he moves from good things that were said about him to the good thing that was done by him.

This is really the center of the text. Five and following. He commends him on being a person who welcomed others into his home.

Particularly those travelers that the elder knew who had come back and made the report. I want to spend some time on this for a minute. Verse five and following.

[10 : 37] Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God.

Something about good, Gaius, was his hospitality. Hospitality is a Christian virtue. Everyone wants to practice hospitality according to the scriptures.

Elders aren't supposed to be an elder if they're not given to hospitality. Like how are you going to lead the church family if you're not going to let anyone behind the door of your own family?

I mean, it's a requirement. We know from all the scriptures that you're to be hospitable to even your enemies, to aliens, to sojourners.

So the nature of hospitality, of welcome and embrace, is a Christian virtue. What's interesting about this particular letter is the aspect of hospitality or the particularity of hospitality.

[11 : 52] Namely, he's welcoming those who had gone out for the name. There's a missionary component to this hospitality. Strangers even.

But not just strangers and people you didn't know. Strangers in regard to what they were on about for the gospel. In the context then, he's welcoming missionaries and provided for them in sending them on their way.

Do you see that phrase? Send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. That is a technical phrase in the New Testament regarding missionary support. You can find it in Acts 15.3, Romans 15.24, 1 Corinthians 16.6-11, Titus 3 and 13.

It's a particular kind of hospitality. It's to be practiced.

I thought of the Shunammite woman in 2 Kings 4, verses 8-10. It's a fascinating little vignette.

[13 : 05] It might be good to see it because she's such an exemplar of the very kind of thing we're talking about. 2 Kings 4, I'll read a bit to you.

Verse 8, One day, one day Elisha went on to Shunamm, where a wealthy woman lived, who urged him to eat some food. So whenever he passed that way, he would turn in there to eat food.

And she said to her husband, Behold now, I know that this is a holy man of God who is continually passing our way. Let us make a small room on the roof with walls and put for him a bed, a table, a chair, a lamp, so that whenever he comes to us, he can go in there.

See, a little guest room for the traveling preacher. I'll be on a plane today to L.A. and then from L.A. to, I mean, San Francisco, and then tonight from San Francisco to Sydney.

And I'll arrive tomorrow in Sydney, and there will be a guy there and his wife who I have never met that will receive me into their home for three nights.

[14 : 27] On what basis? On the basis that someone we both know by way of one degree of separation away said, you know, he's coming in to be good to have him. I don't want to put him in a hotel.

Number one, I don't have the money for it. Number two, it's not consistent with what I understand we're on about. I will be the recipient of this very thing.

Somebody making a guest room. It's the practice of hospitality for people who are in missionary work is as old as 2 Kings 4.

It's not only that, but it's commended by Jesus Himself. If you remember at Matthew 25 when He begins to separate the sheep and the goats, one of the distinguishing characteristics according to the word of our Lord is I was a stranger and you welcomed me in versus the others.

I was a stranger and you did not welcome me. The practice is commended in the Old Testament. The practice is commended by Jesus. The practice is commended in early Christian writings when you have one named Polycarp who is probably about the same time period as this epistle and he writes to the church concerning Philippi and the whole church was known as a church that was hospitable to Christians who were coming through.

[16 : 03] He says, I Polycarp and the elders with him to the church of God sojourning in Philippi mercy and peace from God the Father Almighty and Jesus Christ our Savior be multiplied to you.

I rejoice greatly with you in our Lord Jesus Christ that you have followed the pattern of true love and have helped on their way as opportunity was given you those who were bound in chains which becometh the saints and are diadems of those who have been truly chosen by God and our Lord.

I love that. That's the pattern of true love is to open your door and to receive a stranger who you do not know who professes faith and is on his way through.

A global connectivity grounded in the gospel. Well if you're like me you're a little guilty right now.

I hate getting those emails when somebody says you know hey you don't know me but I know so and so who knew you from England and I'm going to be in Chicago and by this time I'm like oh no.

[17 : 15] And I'm only going to be there for a couple days and wondering if you could pick me up at O'Hare oh no. I'm like the blue line man the blue line. And can I come to your house and in my mind I'm like how many nights?

Usually there's another family in our church maybe some of you know them the Aaron Holtz's usually when I get those emails I go to my my own heart my own heart goes oh Lord please may the Aaron Holtz's guest room be available.

I mean that's terrible. there's a man here this morning who understands he and his wife well the gift of hospitality it's had huge impact on many many lives to my shame I sat down once and I said what is it how do you have that kind of impact impact?

He looked at me two things he said well very simple do you have an extra bed? I was like oh dagger one do you have time?

here it is fortunately there's other early Christian literature that protects the community as well as commending this practice to the community you may have heard of a document called the Didache the teachings of our Lord and in their teachings you get a protective I was very much helped this week by Dr. Rothschild who put me on to some of the reasons for the Didache as being the qualifications on hospitality but listen to some of this this again goes to this early Christian literature on hospitality for traveling teachers apostles and prophets quote whoever then comes and teaches you all these things aforesaid receive him another line let everyone who comes to you be received as the Lord and then here's the here's the grateful line for us but let him not stay more than one day or if need be a second as well but if he stays three days he's a false prophet and if it is preaching he asks you for money don't listen to him man that's the community I want to be a part of that one there doors are wide open but not to be exploited you know Lucy and one of the early writers again was mocking the

[19 : 59] Christian community because anytime a guy got in jail the whole church was showing up it's like what's with you Christians man somebody gets in trouble and you're all at their door you know you got to get like 80 name tags for jail visits and he's mocking the church because the church was moving and he was saying you you're you're exploit you get exploited so easily and so there's this there's this thing in the early church where we have to have an open door to all and yet you have to be wise in regard to your practice of hospitality you're not to be taken for a fool but you have to have your door open think of it hospitality is tough that's why one of the new testament epistles says practice hospitality and then what without grumbling that's someone who understood the strain of hospitality people from out of town make it even more difficult these are questions I need to consider do I have an open home do I have a spare room do I have a fold out couch do I have an extra chair in my house that could be pulled up to the table come dinner time how often does anyone from outside my immediate family or my closest friends actually find their way behind my door think of it our homes are open to every conceivable form of technology you are inviting in every conceivable form and you got boosters halfway back to make sure you don't lessen any reception from one end to the other we're covered we've let it all in but how many times does a door actually open and a stranger walks in who's on their way through and you've heard that they're a believer that's the particularity of the letter and the practice that's being commended this is the good thing that was done by

Gaius I have a I guess I should just say a burden then as a pastor well personally and then as a pastor much more should be required of us at Holy Trinity Church on this front much more let me put it in simplest terms we have people that we've actually supported sent out for the gospel seven or eight living in some of them incredibly difficult places around the world do we even know their names do we are we vested I recently I think this is an area where we're incredibly immature both as your pastor and as a people I recently have asked the session and they've given me the ability now the question is can I actually pull it off to make a greater commitment to our global ministry partners

I don't know how I'm going to do it need at least two people who are members from this congregation to help carry the ball in it but we should we should be we should be like this man was this should be the good work we do verses seven and eight actually give three reasons why you should put people up in your house do it first for Jesus sake for they've gone out for the sake of the name why do we do it why would you open your door to a Christian who's coming through Chicago that you don't know do it for Jesus sake that's exactly the connection you get out of the gospels Jesus says for you welcome me as a stranger do it for Jesus sake the second reason's there if that's not enough for you these people in verse seven are accepting nothing from the

Gentiles do it for Jesus sake do it for their sake they're actually moving through and across the globe intentionally not asking for funds from the people they're trying to win for Christ that's the gist of that phrase they're not going to the people they're trying to speak the gospel to and ask them to support their work in other words they need to be carried into that work by Christian communities that are committed to that work do it for their sake that is the unbelievers sake finally given that this is Chicago and this might be the thing that moves you do it for your own sake verse eight therefore we ought to support people like these that we may be fellow workers for the truth you want to prove that you're a fellow worker for the truth then next time the email comes put those sheets on the bed and get ready to receive somebody you don't know three wonderful reasons for a hospitable course toward those who are

Christians these are the good things that were done by him notice the contrast the contrast between this one who did these things and then verses nine and ten one named Diotrephus who did not I've written something to the church but Diotrephus who likes to put himself first does not acknowledge our authority so if I'll come I'll bring up what he's doing talking wicked nonsense against us not content with that and refuses to welcome the brothers he also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church wow what what an activity by this guy this guy is a tall ungodly weed in the midst of a religious community look how he's described the one who likes to put himself first Diotrephus really means in a sense nourished by Jupiter there's a lot of irony here

[27 : 12] Jupiter was the first god among the Roman gods and this guy he likes to be the first among all the people that are in the assembly but not only that nourished by Jupiter I mean just imagine it welcomed by the god at his table fed the hospitality of the gods has been given to this man but this man will not give any hospitality to the brethren what an indictment I mean as long as we do Christian baptisms and dedications of infants in this church I will look forward to the day when we baptize or dedicate one named Gaius and I do not expect any mother to walk into our place and go my boy's name is Diotrephus shown hospitality by the gods but known as one who will receive no one that's not going to happen

I guarantee you we might get the first name in the letter we won't get that one he had spoken poorly of the elder he had refused to be hospitable he had actually worked toward excommunication of those who were helping this guy is a trip now there's something here to learn and I want to do this there's a hidden application to consider look at verse 13 I had much to write to you but I would rather not write with pen and ink I hope to see you soon and we will talk face to face I've looked at that verse and I wonder what is that verse trying to do is it trying to say this guy doesn't like to talk on the phone you know is that all it is I had much to do but I'd rather not is he really just kind of pawning his own proclivities off in the letter like I don't really want to write much longer I don't think so I think he did have much to write he had a lot to say about this guy there was a whole church division there were relationships that were in a wake and

I think what he's basically saying here is there's so much to talk about I am not going to put this in an email now that's a word of wisdom for the church today don't work with pen and ink when what you really need to do is be face to face and because to be face to face with someone you're actually now you're navigating the sensitivities of relationship you can actually work toward mutual understanding and I think the elder is saying here man I could go on a lot of stuff that we need to talk about!

situation but I'm not going to leave a message not going to be on your voicemail not going to be in your email when I get there we'll talk about it what a wise elder this one was good thing said about this man good thing done by this man in contrast to one who was unlike this man and then finally a good word was given to this man verse 11 and following beloved do not imitate evil but imitate good whoever does good is from God whoever does evil is not seeing God Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone from the truth itself we also add our testimony and you know that our testimony is true the good word that's given to him is basically this keep doing the good thing keep doing it and receive the one who like you is good

Demetrius he had a good testimony and he's probably the guy carrying the letter back and what the elder is saying is hey let this guy into your house he's one of them receive him let me bring this to a close I never want to experience the pain that the elder of this letter knows regarding the divisiveness in the church I never want to experience it that said may we then be like the one to whom he writes may we be people and a congregation that others who may not even know us would nevertheless have good things to say about us and then secondly may we be about good things may we be welcoming the stranger and thereby inviting them as the guest and thereby demonstrating ourselves to be fellow workers for the truth don't you love the end peace be to you the friends greet you greet the friends

[32 : 51] I love this last phrase each by name I mean no other letter ends like that full commitment of relational connection well let me pray our heavenly father we now go on our way today having a pause to consider this the shortest book in all of the new testament we pray that you would help us to practice hospitality and demonstrate ourselves to be children of the light may we not be afraid of giving ourselves to others and thereby welcome you into our own home in

Christ's name amen many have gone out for the name why don't we sing of the same let's stand together before before