

PM 3 John Is it well with your soul?

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[0 : 00] So Psalm 1. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither.

In all that he does he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. Now we turn to the third letter of John.

The Elder to the Beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.

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.

[1 : 40] 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. 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. For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles.

Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth. I have written something to the church.

But Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. So, if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us.

[2 : 56] At not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to, and puts them out of the church. Beloved, do not imitate evil, but imitate good.

Whoever does good is from God. Whoever does evil has not seen God. Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself.

We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true. I have 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. Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends, each by name.

Let's sing again now. And this time, it's the Scottish Psalter version of Psalm 122.

[4 : 09] That's on page 416. Well, let's turn now to 3 John.

And in particular, verse 2. 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.

Having looked recently at 1 John, and having looked this morning at 2 John, we're looking tonight at 3 John.

This short letter addressed to the beloved Gaius. We are really very privileged to have this letter, because it is a personal letter to Gaius.

It's generally considered bad manners to read other people's letters, unless they give you permission. Even within the family, if a letter arrives addressed to Jane, then I will let Jane open it.

[5 : 39] And she can share it with me, if she wishes. Well, this letter is addressed to Gaius, and he could have kept it to himself, and never shown anyone.

But at some stage, he must have realised that this was no ordinary letter. That this was a letter inspired by the Holy Spirit.

And that it was relevant to the whole church. And that it had to be shared. It speaks of people and problems that are typical of churches everywhere.

And it contains this prayer in verse 2, which is suitable for Christians anywhere. I want to follow the same pattern as I did this morning.

And to give first an overview of the whole letter. And then to focus on that prayer in verse 2. So first then, let's take an overview of the whole letter.

[6 : 52] This is a letter about three men. Gaius, Diotrephes, and Demetrius. First Gaius, in verse 1.

The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth. The elder we assume to be John himself. By now, an old man, according to tradition, probably living in Ephesus.

He used the same title in 2 John. Gaius, we know nothing about beyond what is written here. But it's clear that John thought very highly of him.

He assures him of his love. He loves him in truth. And he prays for him in verse 2. But we'll look at that later. He then gives him a glowing commendation.

In verse 3, I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth. As indeed you are walking in the truth. Some travelling Christians, probably missionaries.

[8 : 14] had reported to John what a wonderful man, Gaius, what a wonderful Christian this man Gaius was. And what a wonderful welcome they had received from him.

The ESV translation, your truth, is rather unfortunate. Given the way that that phrase has been used in recent years.

Suggesting as it does some kind of personal truth. You may remember Oprah Winfrey recently inviting the Duchess of Sussex to share your truth.

As if we had our own personal version of truth. There's no such thought here. Truth is truth in the Bible. Indeed, John goes on to speak of the truth.

The New King James translates it here. The truth that is in you. The truth was in him. And he was walking in the truth.

[9 : 20] Just like those children of the elect lady in 2 John. Following Christ. Who is the truth. And that was a great joy to John.

I have no greater joy, he says, than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. Which is the same, as he said, in 2 John. Some have suggested that Gaius might have been a convert of John.

And hence, a spiritual child of his. But John does refer to his whole congregation as his children. And it was a joy to him to find any of them living faithful Christian lives.

Gaius was a joy to John's heart. In particular, he commends him for his hospitality. Verse 5.

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. Hospitality.

[10 : 32] Is a very important part of the Christian life. Remember how Jesus said, I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink.

I was a stranger and you welcomed me in. It would be easy to preach a whole sermon just on that one thought. Because all through the New Testament we have examples and exhortations to hospitality.

But if it's possible for us, it isn't possible for all. But if it is, then our houses should be places where people are welcomed. Where we're constantly having people come to eat with us.

To share fellowship with us. Maybe even if we are in a position to do so, for them to stay with us. We saw this morning the danger of giving hospitality to false teachers.

But here is the opposite. Gaius is giving hospitality to true missionaries of Christ. These are servants of God who had gone out for the sake of the name.

[11 : 46] I love that phrase. The name. Amongst Jews, the name is God. As you probably know, out of reverence they prefer not to pronounce the name of God.

Whether it was Yahweh or whether it was Jehovah, we don't even know for sure. Because Jews never pronounced it, but simply call God the name. But in the context here, the name is almost certainly the name of Jesus.

Jesus, of course, is God. These people have gone out in the name of Jesus, accepting nothing from the Gentiles.

In other words, accepting nothing from unbelievers, but relying entirely upon Christians to support them. We saw in 2 John how those who support false teachers become partakers in their evil deeds.

Well, likewise here, those like Gaius, who support true missionaries, are fellow workers with the truth. I hope you have an interest in mission work.

[13 : 04] A practical interest, not just a curiosity. Perhaps it may be limited to just sending money. Perhaps it extends to praying for them.

Whatever it is, that support is valuable. And you are partakers in their work as you support them. Gaius, then, was a model Christian.

The kind we long to have in our churches. In contrast, there is Diotrephes, who is a pain in the neck.

He is a tin pot dictator, lording it over the church. I have written something to the church, John says, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority.

The authorised version translates it, he loves to have the preeminence. Which is a very dangerous attitude to have. Paul says in Colossians, that Christ must have the preeminence.

[14 : 22] Who does this man think he is? John warns that if he comes, he will expose this man, who had questioned John's authority.

Spoken malicious words against him. And unlike Gaius, he had refused to welcome these travelling missionaries. And had excommunicated those who did.

Imitate good, not evil, he says. In other words, don't be like Diotrephes. Whoever does good, like Gaius, is from God. Whoever does evil, like Diotrephes, has not seen God.

Not even a Christian. Despite all his pretenses. Men, like Diotrephes, do enormous damage to the church.

And sadly, they're not altogether uncommon. Read through church history and it's littered with people who saw the church as a place for their own promotion.

[15 : 31] A place where they could obtain power. That basically is the story of the papacy, isn't it? Worldly people who have climbed to the ultimate power.

Are able to lord it over. The whole church throughout the world. And yet they have never seen God. Church leaders ought to be humble servants.

Not lords of the church. Church. Finally, Demetrius, in verse 12. Another good Christian.

Demetrius has a good testimony from everyone and from the truth itself. We also add our testimony and you know that our testimony is true.

I wonder if he's suggesting that Demetrius should perhaps become an elder. Maybe in place of Diotrephes. Or maybe Gaius had asked about him.

[16 : 34] We don't know. But I'd be very happy if people were saying this about me. If people were saying Robert has a good testimony amongst all.

And amongst the church. I'd be very happy with that. If that were my epitaph at the end of my life. He has a good witness notice from the truth itself.

Perhaps we should think of that as the truth himself. Here is a man who is truly approved by Christ. Who is the truth. John ends as he did in 2 John.

With the hope that he would be able to come and talk face to face. So much better than writing letters. And he gives him his blessing. Peace be to you.

And he finishes with greetings. The friends greet you. Greet the friends by name. I have to admit that that is one of my favourite verses in the New Testament.

[17 : 44] I once preached an entire sermon just on that verse. Friends is such a beautiful description of Christians. Are these your friends here?

Your best friends? Your brothers and sisters in Christ? Remember how Jesus said, I have called you friends. And it's good to remember them each by name.

I am not terribly good at names. I have reached that stage in life where my brain forgets people's names within seconds of them telling me.

But I strive to remember people's names because it is good to do so. It acknowledges that they are important to you. The good shepherd knows all of his sheep by name.

And so should we. That then is an overview of the whole letter. But let's come now to that prayer in verse 2.

[18 : 56] 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. Now this might seem a very unremarkable prayer.

And yet it's actually quite unusual in the New Testament. If you look at the prayers of Paul, for example. They're almost always spiritual prayers.

That you may be rooted and grounded in love. That a door of opportunity may be opened for the gospel. And so on. And rightly so.

Jesus said, seek first the kingdom of God. But here is a simple prayer for health and prosperity.

It's clear though, even from this prayer, where John's priorities lie. He can pray like this for health and prosperity.

[20 : 09] Only because he is confident that it is well with Gaius' soul. Body and soul are both important.

But the soul is vitally important. Only if the soul is well. Can we go on to pray for health and prosperity.

In our remaining time, I want us to consider this theme of body and soul. I want to ask what the Bible says on health and prosperity.

And what it means to have a healthy soul. And I want to ask the crucial question. Is it well with your soul?

First, what the Bible says about health and prosperity. Down through the centuries, Christians have veered from one extreme to the other on this.

[21 : 19] On the one hand, there have been some who have despised the body. As a mere prison house for the soul. There have been monks who have shut themselves up in cloisters.

Seeking solitude with God. But imposing upon themselves all kinds of bodily privations. Having long fasts.

Wearing hair shirts and so on. As if that were a virtue in itself. At the other extreme, you have the health and wealth preachers of today.

Who say that health and wealth is God's will for you. Who make extravagant claims about miraculous healing.

And who constantly ask for money. Going around in expensive cars. Living in luxurious houses. Both of those extremes are a distortion of scripture.

[22 : 30] Regarding health, God obviously cares about the body. He made the body. And he said it was very good.

Christ came in the flesh. In a human body. To deny that is to deny the gospel.

One of God's promises to Israel was in Exodus 15. That if they would keep his laws. Then I will put none of the diseases upon you.

That I put on the Egyptians. For I, the Lord, am your healer. Jehovah Rophe. The Lord, our healer. Elijah and Elisha both performed healing miracles.

Hezekiah prayed for healing. And the Lord heard him. And gave him 15 extra years. When he thought he was on his deathbed. Psalm 103.

[23 : 35] As we've just sung. Speaks of the God who heals all your diseases. In the New Testament. Jesus obviously performed healing miracles.

So did the apostles. Including John. James speaks of the elders. Praying for the sick. Luke. And Luke was a doctor.

So it's quite clear that the body matters to God. There was no disease or death. In the Garden of Eden.

Disease and death came in through the fall. And there will be no disease or death. In the world to come. Healing and health.

Is clearly God's ideal. But. Not all Christians are healthy. Even in the New Testament.

[24 : 39] In the age of miracles. Even some of the best of Christians. Suffered ill health. Most notably Paul. With his thorn in the flesh.

Timothy. Faithful Timothy. Was told to drink a little wine. For his stomach's sake. And for his frequent ailments. To Timothy 4.

Paul mentions in passing. That he had left. Trophimus. One of his fellow workers. At Miletus. Sick. Presumably he couldn't heal him.

And all of us know. That God can use. Illness for our good. God. I once knew a man in London. Who.

Had to lie on his back. For months on end. After an injury. He used the time. To read the Bible. And he went on to become.

[25 : 41] A well known evangelist. God. And he was. Or there's. Joni Erickson. I'm sure you've all heard of. A radiant Christian. After.

She was paralyzed. In a swimming pool. Accident. Many of us. Have learned. Patience. And humility. Through illness. And we've learned.

To depend. More. Upon God. Illness. Can have so many blessings. That there are times.

When some Christians. Have even gone so far. As to give thanks for it. They've seen. How in their own. Particular circumstances. It has been. God's will for them. At least for a while.

To be unwell. But most of us. Most of the time. Would prefer. To be healthy.

[26 : 38] Rather than ill. And that's right. This prayer. In 3 John. Shows us. That it's not. Wrong. To pray for that.

As indeed. We all do. Think about. Your own prayers. What proportion. Of them. Is actually. For people. Who are ill. Praying for them. To recover. My guess.

If you're anything. Like me. Is that it's. Probably up there. 30-40% at least. Of your prayers. Are about this. And rightly so. It's one of the great.

Problems. That people have. One of the great. Heartaches of people. Is illness. It's right. To pray for them. For health. And let me add.

It's also right. To give thanks. For doctors. And scientific. Researchers. And for the caring. Professions. They are doing.

[27 : 33] God's will. The same applies. To prosperity. God himself. Is infinitely. Rich. The cattle.

On a thousand. Hills. Are his. And many of his. Servants. Have been. Rich. Think about. Abraham. And Solomon. Or Joseph. Of Arimathea.

God. God. Brought Israel. Into a land. Of milk. And honey. A land. Of prosperity. Psalm 1. Says of the godly. As we read.

In all. That he does. He prospers. True. Christ. Was poor. He was born. In a manger.

Paul. Says. Though he was rich. Yet. For your sakes. He became. Poor. But he too. Is now. Crowned. With glory.

[28 : 27] And honor. The riches. Of heaven. Are now his. There was no poverty. In the garden of Eden.

Poverty also. Came in. Through the fall. There will be. No poverty. In the world. To come. Prosperity. Is good.

But. It can be. Misused. It can be. A hindrance. To salvation. As we see. From the rich. Young ruler.

In Luke 18. Jesus says. It is easier. For a camel. To pass through. The eye. Of a needle. Than for a rich. Person. To enter. The kingdom. Of God.

It can be. An obsession. As Paul says. The love. Of money. Is the root. Of all kinds. Of evil. Not money. Itself. But the love.

[29 : 25] Of money. And it can make us proud. And selfish. The wise man said. In Proverbs 30.

Give me neither poverty. Nor riches. Many of the Lord's people. Are poor. And poverty. Can bring blessings.

Of its own. Helping us to rely. Upon God. And to. Treasure. The small things. In life. I was very struck. When I visited.

Christians. In Kenya. How much happier. And more godly. These poor Christians. In Kenya. Were living. In their mud huts. Than we.

We wealthy. Christians are. Here in the west. This prayer. Shows us however. That it's not wrong. To pray.

[30 : 20] That things. Will go well. For us. And for our loved ones. For prosperity. In other words. It's not wrong. To pray for someone. That they would get.

That job. That they so much want. Or that they would pass. That exam. Or whatever it might be. Or find that ideal house. These are good prayers. That we should be praying.

And we do all pray that. And I'm sure. We will continue. To do so. But there is something more important.

The prosperity. Of the soul. The body after all. Is temporary. One day.

We will die. As Paul says. We must put off this tent. This temporary. Dwelling place. Whether it's healthy.

[31 : 19] Or whether it's unhealthy. It will be buried. In the ground. One day. And all our riches. Will vanish away. No matter how many.

Hundreds of thousands. Of pounds. We might be able. To accumulate. In the bank. One day. We won't be able. To touch it. It will be gone.

As far as we're concerned. One day. We will have a new body. In a new world. But the things of this world.

Are passing away. And therefore. Our greatest concern. Should be with the things. Of eternity. And therefore.

Our concern should be. With the soul. Because the soul. Does not pass away. The soul. Is forever. Another. John could say.

[32 : 19] Of Gaius. It goes well. With your soul. Could he say. The same of you. What does it mean. To say. It is well.

With my soul. In our final hymn. We're going to be singing. That again. And again. What do we mean by it. When we say it. What is. A healthy soul.

Well let's take Gaius. As our example. First and foremost. Gaius was saved. That's the most important thing.

A lost soul. Is not merely. An unhealthy soul. But dead. We all need to be saved.

Because we are all. Sinners. Corrupted. And condemned. By sin. First. Corrupted. Sin is like.

[33 : 15] Leprosy. Eating away. At our souls. We need. Cleansing. Or else. It will destroy us. And where can we find. Cleansing.

Except. In the blood. Of Christ. Remember. Naaman. He was a great man. The captain. Of the Syrian army. But.

He had. Leprosy. He was told. To go and wash. Seven times. In the Jordan. We need. To be washed. Just once.

In the blood. Of the lamb. But also. We are. Condemned. We're under.

God's judgment. With an eternal. Death sentence. Hanging over us. There are men. In the United States. Where they have. The death penalty.

[34 : 09] Still. Who've been on death row. For years. I can't imagine. What that is like. Living day. After day. Knowing.

That you're going. To be killed. And yet. Mankind. Is on death row. Awaiting. Not just physical death.

But judgment. And most people. Give no thought. At all to it. They blot it. Out of their minds. They enjoy. The things.

Of this world. And give no thought. To that terrible day. That is coming. Closer. And closer. When God. Will judge. Their souls.

We're under judgment. And the only answer. Is Christ. Who died. For our sins. Gaius. Had faith in Christ. As his savior. Have you?

[35 : 09] That is the first requirement. For a healthy soul. Secondly. As we've seen. He was walking. In the truth. That's always.

A good sign. Of a healthy soul. When a child. Begins to walk. Parents are excited. Little Eleanor. There is starting. To walk. And I'm sure.

David and Juliana. Are thrilled. With every step. She takes. God. Is pleased. When we walk. In the truth. That's a sign.

That we're healthy. Gaius. Gaius was like that. Godly man. In Psalm 1. Who. Walks not. In the counsel of the wicked.

Like diatrophies. Nor stands in the way of sinners. Nor sits in the seat of scoffers. But his delight. Is in the law. Of the Lord. And on his law. He meditates.

[36 : 03] Day. And night. I imagine. Gaius. Reading his bible daily. and avidly listening to preachers. Maybe that's why he wanted to give hospitality to those visiting preachers.

He was trying by the Spirit to obey Christ's commands, to please his heavenly Master. Are you?

Thirdly, he was walking in love. We see that in the hospitality he'd shown. John speaks there of the efforts he had made. He hadn't just grudgingly said, oh yes, I suppose so, you can stay for the night if you want to, but be gone in the morning.

He'd gone out of his way. He'd provided food, no doubt, for them. He'd made them comfortable. He loved to have them. That's love. There's a hint of love too in that final verse about the friends.

His fellow Christians were his friend. Faith, truth and love, three signs of a healthy soul.

[37 : 16] We could add many more. A healthy soul loves God and delights in prayer and communion with God. A healthy soul loves the Son of God and the Word of God and the people of God.

There's no name that it loves more than the name of Jesus and no company that it loves more than Christians. A healthy soul loves the lost as well and longs for them to be saved.

In contrast, a healthy soul hates sin and weeps over its own shortcomings. It's a paradox, that, isn't it? A healthy soul is aware of its own lack of health.

But nonetheless, a healthy soul usually has a strong assurance of salvation because it's trusting not in its own health but in Christ alone and in his atoning blood which cleanses us from all sin.

A healthy soul is finally a fruitful soul. As we read in Psalm 1, it's like a tree by the water bearing fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

[38 : 38] When a tree produces fruit, we say it's healthy. If there's no fruit, well, perhaps it's dying. All of these spiritual fruits can grow even in times of trouble when we're poor or ill.

Indeed, sometimes they grow best then. If you have all this, then you can say, it is well with your soul. And if you have a healthy soul, let me add that you have a wealthy soul as well.

God has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. He's given us his Spirit. He's given us access to the throne. He's given us brothers and sisters all over the world.

He's given us life and peace and a glorious hope of heaven. What more could we ask? Sadly, most people don't see it.

They're taken up with this world and they don't see the value of the soul. We've seen in the last 18 months just how obsessed the world is with health.

[39 : 57] Yes, COVID is important, but have you noticed how it's taken over the BBC news as if that's the only thing that matters? People sometimes say, if you have your health, well, that's all that matters, isn't it?

No, it is not. Health is often people's number one concern and their number two concern is wealth and the economy.

And spiritual health comes a long way down the list, if anywhere. Even Christians are sometimes obsessed with their health and with pleasure and possessions and power.

At a church where I ministered years ago, there was a lady who got quite exasperated with the conversation after the services because she said all that they ever talk about is their holidays.

Didn't talk about the sermon. All they wanted to talk about was the lovely places they'd gone to. Think about your own thoughts, your own desires, your own conversation.

[41 : 08] I wonder how much is taken up with the things of this world. So many Christians are spiritually unhealthy.

There's an old hymn that laments this. O Saviour Christ, our woes dispel. For some are sick and some are sad.

And some have never loved thee well. And some have lost the love they had. And some have found this world is vain. Yet from the world they break not free.

And some have friends who give them pain. Yet have not sought a friend in thee. If that describes you then you need to reassess your life and seek spiritual healing.

It need not be like that. John prays here for body and soul. And they can both prosper together. But if we have to choose the soul comes first.

[42 : 14] There are logically four possibilities aren't there? There are some who have an unhealthy body and an unhealthy soul. Those are the people most of all to be pitied.

There are some who have a healthy body but an unhealthy soul. And they're probably quite content with life. But actually their situation is a disaster.

They have happiness now but eternal woe awaiting them. A healthy body and a healthy soul is the ideal.

But even with an unhealthy body if you can honestly say it is well with my soul then you have what matters most. Whatever our outward circumstances may we all be able to say it is well with my soul.

Amen.