

AM 2 John Walking in Truth

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[0 : 00] I made it clear in the children's talk that the Bible, of course, wasn't written in ancient Egyptian, in picture language of hieroglyphs, but the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, and if you saw Hebrew letters, you'd think they were very peculiar and very difficult to read, and the New Testament in Greek, which is also different from the way we write today.

Most of us here would struggle to read them in Hebrew or Greek, though I'm sure our preacher next week, John Angus MacLeod, would have no trouble. So we're very grateful that we have it in English, and let's read it in English.

I'm going to read first from Psalm 119, and then afterwards we'll read that letter to John. So Psalm 119, and I'm reading the first section, verses 1 to 8.

Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord.

Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart, who also do no wrong but walk in his ways.

[1 : 20] You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently. Oh, that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes.

Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments. I will praise you with an upright heart when I learn your righteous rules.

I will keep your statutes. Do not utterly forsake me. We turn over now to the second letter of John.

And I hope that you will notice a link there with Psalm 119. So, to John. The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth.

And not only I, but also all who know the truth, because of the truth that abides in us, and will be with us forever.

[2 : 34] Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father, and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love. I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father.

And now I ask you, dear lady, not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another.

And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it.

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.

Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.

[4 : 04] If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.

Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete.

The children of your elect sister greet you. Well, let's turn now to that second letter of John.

And in particular, verse 4. I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father.

Having recently preached through 1 John, it seemed logical today to look at 2 John and 3 John.

[5 : 27] These are the two shortest books in the Bible, but there is much here to help and inspire us.

Both 2 John and 3 John open a fascinating window on the early church. What was it like to be a Christian in those early days?

Well, these letters reveal a vibrant Christian community. The kind of church that I'm sure we'd all like to belong to. But one which even then had its problems.

The particular problem highlighted in 2 John is false teaching. There were travelling preachers going around, spreading false ideas about Christ.

John warns us against them. warns us not even to receive them into our house. 3 John, as we shall see this evening, highlights the problems caused by a dominant personality in the church, and encourages hospitality towards genuine Christians.

[6 : 53] what I want to do this morning is first to give a brief outline of the whole letter. It's only 13 verses, so it won't take long.

And then to focus on just that one thought in verse 4, of walking in the truth. So first then, the outline of the whole letter.

And we begin, of course, with the greeting in verses 1 to 3. The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, not only I, but also all who know the truth, because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever.

Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son in truth and love.

Most ancient letters began with a greeting, usually in the form of an X to Y greeting, and this is no exception. But straight away in verse 1, there's an element of mystery.

[8 : 14] Who is the elder? And who is this elect lady? And why the secrecy? Not naming either of them.

Well, the elder seems quite clearly to be John the Apostle. The language is the same as used in John's Gospel and in 1 John, and it deals with the same themes.

So it seems logical to assume that they were written by the same person. The secrecy may have been because of persecution, or he may simply have been known as the elder.

He was, after all, by now an old man, a father figure in the church. Peter calls himself an elder in 1 Peter 5.

So why not John? The elect lady is thought by some to be simply a Christian woman, known to John, maybe a prominent lady in one of the churches.

[9 : 27] But many have been drawn to the idea that it is actually the church. Maybe the church at Ephesus, or one of the other churches in Asia Minor, where John had ministered.

That might sound a bizarre idea, but the church is called, in Scripture, the Bride of Christ. John himself uses that title in Revelation 19.

And in that case, her children would be members of the congregation. John speaks of Christians as children, remember. 1 John 4 verse 4, little children, you are from God.

1 John 5 verse 21, little children, keep yourselves from idols. Either way, whether it's an individual, or whether it's the church, she is elect, chosen by God, and loved, loved by John, and loved by the whole church, because of the truth that they all share.

Truth they all know, the truth that is in them, and with them. Or should I say, the truth who is in them.

[10 : 56] Christ says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. That truth is the basis of all Christian fellowship today.

Christ, the living truth, dwelling in us, dwelling with us, uniting his people in love and truth.

John confidently adds a blessing, grace, mercy, and peace from the Father and the Son will be with us, must be with us, if Christ is with us. We then have some words of encouragement in verse 4.

I rejoiced greatly, he says, to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father. Only some of them, apparently.

But even that is cause for rejoicing to John. It's wonderful, first, that they are Christians, disciples of Christ, following the Lord, following the Good Shepherd.

[12 : 09] It's still more wonderful that they are faithful Christians, walking in the ways of Christ. Not only do they know the truth, not only is the truth in them, but they're living in accordance with the truth.

But we'll come back to that later. There follows an exhortation to the lady herself in verse 5. Now I ask you, dear lady, not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we had from the beginning, that we love one another.

And this is love that we walk according to his commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it. The commandment in question is of course John 13, 34.

A new commandment I give you, that you love one another. So-called 11th commandment. But notice how he links love and obedience.

This love is just not a vague feeling of wanting the best for other people. Love and obedience are connected here.

[13 : 22] love means keeping God's commandments. And what is that but walking in the truth? So truth, love, and obedience are inseparably bound together.

A threefold cord that cannot be broken. then we have some words of warning, verses 7 to 11. We must not only walk in truth, but also we must guard against error.

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.

Jesus warned about false prophets. Matthew 7, 15, Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

They had arrived already. These people pretend to be Christians. Perhaps they even believe themselves to be Christians.

[14 : 33] But they're deceived themselves and they are deceiving others. As we've seen in our studies in 1 John, there was a heresy growing in the latter part of the first century called Gnosticism, which had strange mystical views of Christ.

And quite likely that is what John has in mind here. But anyone who denies the apostolic doctrine of Christ, Christ, as both God and man dying on the cross and rising again for our salvation, anyone who denies any part of that is undermining the gospel and leading people astray.

John says, Watch yourselves. In other words, be on your guard so that you may not lose what we have worked for but may win a full reward. Christians are occasionally led astray.

Don't let it be you who is led astray. There are rewards in the Christian life for the faithful Christian.

And there are hints of rewards in heaven. Don't throw them away. don't listen to those false teachers.

[16 : 06] And don't give them any encouragement. Apparently these people were going around the churches expecting hospitality. Do not receive him into your house, John says, or give him any greeting for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.

That sounds harsh, but truth matters. It makes no sense to invite wolves into the sheepfold.

Truth certainly mattered to John. There's a story of him going into a bathhouse and seeing a Gnostic teacher called Carinthus there. And apparently John immediately rushed out of the bathhouse in case a thunderbolt from heaven should come down upon Carinthus and he might be caught up in it.

We certainly shouldn't let such people into the house of God, or at least not into our pulpits. If they want to come and listen to the gospel, that's wonderful. But no false teacher should ever be allowed to preach to God's people.

If only churches in our day were more careful over this. I wish what I was saying was just of antiquarian interest, that here was something that was happening in the first century and isn't that interesting.

[17 : 39] But no, it's happening in the 21st century, isn't it? You could go into hundreds of churches all around Scotland and hear things that grate on you because they're not according to the word of God.

not just in minor matters, but in fundamental matters of the gospel. You'll hear the law of God being totally undermined.

You'll hear the divinity of Christ being denied. You'll hear salvation by the blood of Christ dismissed as an old-fashioned idea. These are wolves.

people should never be allowed into Christian pulpits. Truth and truth alone should be heard from our churches.

In closing, John promises to visit them in verse 12. Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. When he says paper, it does mean papyrus.

[18 : 39] That was what was used. Instead, I hope to come to you and talk face-to-face so that our joy may be complete. We're very grateful, aren't we, that he did write with paper and ink.

Otherwise, we wouldn't have these wonderful letters. But face-to-face fellowship is always best. And haven't we discovered that for ourselves in this past year and a half?

Emails, Zoom conferences and so on. They all have their place. They're all valuable. But there's no substitute for fellowship in person.

Finally, he sends greetings from the children of your elect sister. Either another family or another congregation. So that then is the outline of the letter.

But let's now come back to our text. And that thought of walking in the truth in verse four. Throughout the Bible, walking is used as a metaphor for living the Christian life.

[20 : 00] In Genesis five, Enoch walked with God. So did Noah in Genesis six. God said to Abraham, walk before me and be blameless.

Israel was told in Deuteronomy five, you shall walk in all the way that the Lord your God has commanded you that you may live and that it may go well with you. God said of various kings that they walked in all the ways of their fathers, for better or for worse.

Psalms one says, blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked. And as we read in Psalm 119, blessed are those who walk in the law of the Lord.

Isaiah says, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord. Micah asks, what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?

Jesus promised in John 8, whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life. Acts 9 describes the church walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

[21 : 27] Paul says in Romans 6 that having received new life from Christ we must walk in newness of life. He says in 2 Corinthians 5 that we walk by faith not by sight.

Ephesians 4 we're to walk worthy of our calling. Ephesians 5 we're to walk in love and as children of light. In Colossians 2 Paul says as you received Christ Jesus the Lord so walk in him.

In Colossians 4 we're to walk in wisdom. John himself speaks of walking in the light. 1 John 1 verse 6 and in 1 John 2 verse 6 he says whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

now walking is a very ordinary thing to do. We've all done it this morning you walked here into church.

So likewise for the Christian life is for the most part very ordinary. it's one foot in front of the other.

[22 : 49] It's just obeying Christ's teaching day by day. Nothing more than that. Occasionally there might be something a little more dramatic just like if you go for a country walk you might occasionally have to climb over a stile or jump over a ditch.

So in the Christian life there might occasionally be some unusual challenge but for the most part it is very straightforward. That's not to say it's boring.

Most of us enjoy going for a walk and the Christian life ought to be enjoyable. Remember what Christ says in Psalm 40 I delight to do your will oh my God.

Now to enjoy a good walk you need two things you need a path or at least some sense of direction and you need the power to walk.

And spiritually God has provided us with both. The path is obviously the way of Christ as taught in the Bible.

[24 : 07] Walking in the truth means first believing the truth concerning Christ as our Lord and our Saviour and then obeying the truth living according to the commands of Christ.

It's so important that we go his way and not ours. If I want to get from A to B and I don't know the way I will look at a map or at least I'll look for a signpost to show me the way.

Or nowadays perhaps I might look at my Google Maps app on my phone or I'll ask for directions. The one thing I won't do is just take a guess and walk in a random direction that appeals to me and hope that I get there.

If I do that then I'm sure to go astray. In the Christian life our map is the Bible. That map will tell us the way to go.

It will also sometimes tell us the way not to go. And that too is important. When the Bible says no it means no.

[25 : 23] In the Ten Commandments when it repeatedly says thou shalt not it really does mean thou shalt not. Absolutely not.

No excuses, no compromises, no getting round it, thou shalt not. Opposite our house there's a beautiful path along the riverside.

But unfortunately there's a bridge that has collapsed on that path. And you can't get through. And there are clear signs up saying the bridge is collapsed, the path is closed.

In other words, don't go that way. And yet still we watch them every day, people who don't believe the sign, people who still try to walk along that path, still trying to walk through the creek where the bridge was supposed to be, getting stuck in the mud, still trying to wade their way through the mess, getting lost.

There are Christians like that who ignore the warnings and not surprisingly they get themselves into trouble. Walking in truth means going God's way.

[26 : 51] There are many voices that are whispering to us to go another way. The world, the flesh, the devil, they're constantly tempting us to go a different way.

But God has promised in Isaiah you will hear in your ear a voice behind you saying this is the way. Walk in it.

That is the only way. That is the path and we must keep to it. These children in verse 4 were doing just that.

they had not been led astray by false teaching. They were following the good shepherd. As for the power to walk, well we walk in the power of the spirit.

That is the great promise of the new covenant, isn't it? In Ezekiel 36, I will put my spirit in you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

[27 : 55] Jesus, on many occasions, literally enabled people to walk. He summed up his ministry in Matthew 11 by saying the blind receive their sight and the lame walk.

More than once he said to a lame man, rise up and walk. And that is a picture of his spiritual ministry. By nature we are powerless to walk in the truth.

That's why when a non-Christian says, I'm going to follow the teaching of Christ but I don't believe he's the son of God and I don't believe all this about the cross, that's why all their efforts are doomed to failure.

Try as they might to follow the teaching of Christ. If they don't have the power of the spirit, they won't be able to. Our spiritual legs as it were are paralyzed by sin and we just can't do it.

But Christ says to us, rise up and walk. And we find to our amazement that in his power we can. True, we may need to practice.

[29 : 14] Children have to learn to walk, don't they? a newborn babe in Christ likewise may stumble about a bit. Even the most experienced believers may not always find it easy.

There are obstacles to climb over, there is marshy ground where it isn't always clear where we're going. But if we follow the Lord and rely on him, he will enable us to walk in the truth.

The question is, are you doing so? John rejoiced that some of these children were walking in the truth.

Some weren't. And that is still true today, whether we're speaking about individual families or about the family of the church. John would have rejoiced even more if all of her children were walking in the truth.

truth. And so would we today. Taking the word children literally, Christian parents obviously want all their children to walk in the truth.

[30 : 29] Not just some, but all of them. That begins with them believing the truth, believing in Christ for themselves, embracing the faith of their parents.

faith of them. But it doesn't stop there. We want them to live as Christians, not just for a few years as children while they're under our care, but for the whole of their lives.

To that end, we teach them, maybe using a catechism or some other help. And that is true, incidentally, whatever our views might be upon infant baptism.

baptism. We love our children. We want them to walk in the truth. There are many things we want for them. We want them to be happy and healthy.

We want them to do well in their exams, and so on. But the very best that we can wish for them is that they walk in the truth. Parents want that.

[31 : 29] The whole church wants that. Or if we take the word children here in the broader sense of the church family, we want the whole congregation, every one of them, to walk in the truth.

In any congregation, there are always a few who have heard the gospel, but never quite grasped it. We want them all to believe and be saved.

And we want them all to live faithful and godly lives. Ministers want that. Elders want that. The whole church wants that.

This is the best we could wish for our fellow Christians. And we could add, Christ wants that. There is rejoicing in heaven when we walk in the truth.

Maybe as individuals we need to ask, are we causing joy or sorrow to the elders of the church? Are we causing joy or sorrow to our fellow Christians?

[32 : 45] Are we causing joy or sorrow to Christ? And maybe we should ask, could we do more to help our fellow Christians in this?

you know, we're not walking alone, we're walking together. And sometimes people stumble and they need a little bit of help. Could we help one another more by praying for one another, by setting a good example, by encouraging one another, as John does here, by drawing alongside one another in fellowship, walking with them, and maybe occasionally, if necessary, gently correcting them, being willing always to be corrected ourselves.

May all of us here be found walking in the truth and bringing joy to both heaven and earth. Amen.