

Gospel Partnership in Challenging Circumstances

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[0 : 0 0] well can I please invite you to have your bibles open again at that letter we just read 3 John and we're going to spend our time this evening from now on looking at that letter and really the first eight verses of that letter and but as we turn to that letter can I pray for us because the last thing you want to do is just listen to me we need God to turn up and to speak to us father that is our prayer please would you speak your words of truth and authority none of us want to simply listen to a man because ultimately the words of men fall to the ground but the word of the Lord lasts and stands and is established forever and that's what we desire this evening no matter where we are located geographically spiritually we ask please would you speak to us by your word so that we would see things as you see them and we would be involved in your purposes in your ways for our ultimate desire is the glory of your name in Christ Jesus our Lord amen till the coming of Christ there will be the need for the church globally to send workers in to the world that is just something that we can see cover to cover in God's world God's word Jesus makes this abundantly clear throughout his earthly ministry in many places he asks the church to be those who are involved in the beautiful task of making disciples amongst the peoples of the world he asks his disciples and followers to pray that there would be laborers sent out into the fields and he also remember that beautiful encounter with the woman at the well and she goes to the town and there are people coming towards the disciples and Jesus and he says look the fields are white to harvest do you see the peoples but when faced with challenging circumstances each of us have the tendency to do a few different things don't we we have the tendency to a greater or lesser extent to pull back to look inward or to drop off the radar when it comes to the spiritual realities of life and of this world instead of focusing on what is truly important our heads and our hearts can entertain thoughts of delusional fantasy avenues of proud self-interest or we can be completely bowed down to misplaced fears in things which are substitute gods you see it's in these moments of great challenge that we need to regain our senses and recognize once again the main and plain things of scripture to allow them to be the thing which set the trajectories for our lives to be the thing which encourage us on our path as disciples and one of those main and plain things that we see in god's word is the necessity for global evangelism in a chaotic world it's there all the way through god's word christ is to be known and loved and treasured and trusted and magnified and made much of throughout all of the world but martin how does that happen in situations like we're doing just now it's pretty chaotic out there martin things are all up in the air martin yet martin knows that i am also a person who has experienced the last six months of life in this world how do we do this in the midst of challenging circumstances

now i want to encourage us and challenge us this evening to see that there is a super answer to that in this small letter which can often be neglected third john here is a wonderful example of what it is to do these things in such a predicament here we see genuine gospel partnership in challenging circumstances but before we go to look at the specifics that exist in this very small postcard letter we need to have some awareness of what's happening in third john my guess is most of us don't have much background to what's happening with this letter one to three john those letters that are all grouped together were written by the wise old apostle john the person who knew jesus and was the beloved disciple of jesus and they are written near the end of his life probably in the 90s of the first century so john is an old man john has walked the road of discipleship he has seen everything in one sense that can be seen he is wise and his words are to be listened to persecution at this point in time has seen a sharp spike under the rule of domitian the emperor of the day because he required allegiance of an allegiance to imperial worship in return for material prosperity the way you can see this most clearly written out for us in god's word we don't need to turn to secular history to see this we can see it in god's word because this is the same context that revelation chapter two and verse chapter two and chapter three are written into it's the exact same thing happening at roughly the same time period and these chapters that that book of revelation is written just before uh three john adds to this the fact that there are false teachers who are doing the rounds infiltrating local churches for example look at diatrophies the person we have already made mention and comment on um it would be fair to say that you would not want his life to be your cv he is not the sort of person you should aim to be he is certainly not a true leader of the church of christ or if you flick over your page uh to 2 john if you look at 2 john verse 7 you'll see that some of the the details of what it is these false teachers are saying it says 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 anti-christ and why does john speak so strongly about this because they do not believe ultimately in the doctrine of the gospel they deny that jesus has come in the flesh that jesus has paid the penalty of sin in his body on the cross and therefore jesus is not the one who has been raised from the dead for the justification of sinners jesus is not the person who ultimately saves us from the wrath of god jesus is just some other person yeah okay we might worship him but because he's not come as a person it means that that wrath absorbing sin defeating death and resurrection to justify sinners doesn't make sense no wonder john says these people are like satan because they are anti the christ make no mistake about john his mission team that we read of in 3 john and gaius are all well aware of challenging circumstances but instead of them turning themselves inward they look upwards and they look outwards rejoicing in the wonderful blessing of being involved in taking the gospel of god into the world the temptation set before us in the midst of the challenging circumstances we find ourselves in in the 21st century in the western world as the church is to forget about the world out there

and to concentrate on what is in front of us it's scary out there and there's lots of things which can change and that we cannot control but i think that i'm on good grounds to say that john his mission team gaius they would not be constrained to that way of thinking at all they would not allow those blinkers to dictate the purpose of their life because they are captivated by the central vision of scripture which is that god deserves the worship god demands glory and all the peoples of the world must hear of him in order for that right relationship with him to be brought into existence and so in this very personal letter to gaius and to his church we get a glimpse at some of the most important aspects of what it means to develop genuine gospel partnership which will have a global impact for the glory of god's name in the world i'm just going to try and work ourselves in a couple of three different themes grouping together thoughts in this passage it's so short but there's so many things in it john really wants to get as much across in this tiny little postcard as he can to gaius to encourage him and so i'm going to start us by looking at this thought what is true must set the agenda what is true must set the agenda that's what we can notice first of all from this little letter popular opinion culturally or even theologically should not be the defining marker of what we do look at diotrophies he's an example of someone who bought into popular culture theologically thinking about god the wrong way and it led to disaster rather gospel truth is the thing which should set our agenda look at how john speaks about gaius the amount of times this word truth comes up in these 15 verses is fantastic their friendship is something which is founded in the truth of the gospel verse 1 what's more gaius was no charlatan like diotrophies and some of the other false teachers he walked the talk second half of verse 3 and verse 4 what he believed he did he didn't just stand up at the front sit down in the small group and just spout out what he said about god and then just did what he wanted what he believed he did what he said he put into practice and this is very clear uh in in the text gaius has been invested in seeing the work of the gospel among the peoples of the world flourish but how do we know this how can we say that for certain well we can see this in the way that he welcomes john's mission team into the church that he's a part of it's a group of strangers if you look at verse 7 it's a group of strangers that he didn't know but he served them why why does he serve a group of strangers because he understood that these brothers had been set aside for a very specific task of taking the gospel of jesus out from the church where john is most likely ephesus taking that out from the church in ephesus to others first section of verse 7 did you see that for they have gone out for the sake of the name we're going to think about that in a little bit more detail in just a minute because it's a stunning oh what a stunning calling on someone's life gaius lived in challenging times but his context did not distract him from what was true people needed to hear about christ and so he served in such a way that this could happen through these brothers who had come to him i want us to notice a very important detail

about global mission and the local church because i think gaius so beautifully captures this gaius's conviction about the truth of the gospel was the rhythm which set the agenda of his life and it led him to recognize the normality of global gospel ministry the normality of global global global gospel ministry his conviction about the truth of the gospel meant that he was he saw global gospel ministry as a normal part of the christian life but all too often there's an incorrect untrue vision of global mission in the 21st century today which concludes that this is the activity of an elite few or an obsessive minority friends what john is saying about gaius shows us that that way of thinking just is not true he commends gaius saying in verse 5 it is a faithful thing that you do in all your efforts for these brothers strangers as they are he says to gaius in his small church facing lots of difficulties what you're doing brother is brilliant is faithful equipping them loving them serving them that is what this is all about you see our circumstances may be challenging and who knows they may well get more challenging in the coming months and years and actually the last thing that we need to worry about is a virus may become more challenging for us in terms of the freedoms of our christian faith and living it may become more difficult for us to express specific aspects of our belief in christ and what that means in terms of lordship in every area and aspect and dimension of our lives but we should not become those who are play-doh in the hands of our culture or our context allowing those external pressures to drive us and mold us instead our convictions concerning the truth laid out for us so clearly in the word of god should be that which sets the agenda for our life because until jesus returns the church must engage in this task in this ministry throughout the world come what may which john was very clear about and which john's life testified to so here is a question for our own reflection have you allowed the scope of god's purposes in his word to shape your understanding of his work in the world and therefore your role and part in that my encouragement my advice and to all of us is the same thing that i would give to myself which is martin take a leaf out of brother gaius's book because he is a wonderful example to follow let what is true set the agenda of your life let what is true drive who you are let the gospel shape you so that you can truly be a partner in what god is doing in the world for the fame of the name of the lord jesus christ the second theme and the second thing i want us to think about is this who we send and partner with matters when we think about being involved in god's work in the world who we send out into that and who we partner with in that really matters in life guys his church most likely had received suspect teachers from this letter we can't say specifically second john was more than likely written to the same churches and so we've got this impression that they probably had some suspect teachers what we can know for sure

is that diotrophes the guy who's mentioned in verse nine of the letter he was someone who was self-absorbed self-appointed he was a charlatan ruling the church by the force of his overbearing personality we almost get the impression that gaius is a little bit um timid doesn't really come up to the fore and so this guy diotrophes just gets to say what he wants because he's loud now please don't say martin you're loud and therefore don't make that equation here's a quick aside if anyone has the aspiration to be involved in christian ministry or leadership whether it is in scotland the uk europe the rest of the world pay attention do not be diotrophes never be that man because the temptations will be there to be that man all the time to be loud and say what you want and get what you want done that is not the way of christ the way of christ is the way of the cross the way of the cross is the road of humility humility is what christ desires from his people especially of those who have that aspiration to lead his people listen up to what john points out about healthy gospel ministry and partnership because it shows us something of that humility coming out i just want to point out a couple of things there's a lot more that i could do but for the sake of time let's just notice two things about who we send and partner with mattering first have you noticed the importance of the church in this tiny little letter the church really matters the church really matters and john is very happy to talk about the church a lot in his small letter this isn't like transfer deadline day where you've got lots of free agents who want to go wherever they please desperate to get somewhere that they can do what they want these brothers who have been sent out by john have clear accountability with a local church did you see that in verse 6 it's it's such a passing reference that you might just skip over it see it in verse 6 they testified to your love before where the church they had been out to gaius's church and they came back and they spoke at the church to give accountability to give account of what it is that they had been doing the church really matters there is structure in god's purposes there is order in god's mission and after they have completed their assignment they return to their own church and they explain what it is that they have been doing this is a small sign but a sign nonetheless of the importance of accountability these brothers who have been sent out are not going off doing their own thing and this is essential to establish in any ministry partnership especially if people are going to be serving at a distance within the organization that we serve with in omf we know that you guys lovingly support someone involved in ministry in east asia and it's beautiful for us to see the way that that relationship exists between her and her sending church at glasgow city and that's a beautiful thing to see and i want to encourage you in that continue doing that be those sorts of people encourage that sort of accountability and relationship and going into the future here is the thing that i want to leave with us partner with and raise up people in the church here who love christ and who love his church and see it as central to his purposes in the world not people who want to go and do their thing and make sure that people understand their views and their thing but people who love christ and who love his church

[20:16] are willing to humbly be accountable to the church second thing quickly in this um second section did you notice the purpose of this team did you notice their purpose in the first century world many of the cities were interconnected particularly if you think of the city of ephesus it was a massive center of commerce and of culture with interrelating trade it was an interconnected city and there would have been lots of people who would have traveled for work and study restrictions aside the 21st century has seen this upscaled i don't even know 10 100 a thousand fold in terms of numbers but it certainly has been upscaled with people movement all over the world with people who live in or nearby global cities moving for work or for study but that's not actually what's happening here this isn't people who have their job and they just so happen to move and you know they were working for hsbc in london and now they're working for hsbc in hong kong that's not what's happening here what we have here is a very clear demonstration of people who have been sent out with an express purpose not because they're moving for their work people who have been sent out for a very express purpose verse 6 of this letter they testified before the church and they went out for the sake of the name verse 7 they have gone out for the sake of the name this verse is the key verse which actually speaks about the lord jesus in this short letter to gaius these brothers go out for the express task of serving the name now we need to realize that this purpose can be warped by human sinfulness can't it it can be so easily changed and warped by our horrible sinful attitude of heart and mind and the western church has been horrendous for this where we go with a complex complex in our minds and our hearts of we being the white western saviors who will go there and fix all the things and we begin to justify our actions and our attitudes by saying oh but we've been sent for the name when in reality what we're doing is making a name for ourselves and that is not what john has in mind at all he just does not think like that one bit what he says is if you're going to be out doing this you need to realize that your name means nothing and his name means everything i'll tell you about one of my friends i never really met him but he was whipped and lashed and he was taken to rome and he was under arrest and then they killed him and he loved jesus my friend paul that i will see in glory paul didn't care about his name john didn't care about his name peter through many trials of thinking that he was important didn't care about his name they cared about the name which deserves honor and glory and worship that is what john has in mind and that is how these brothers these believers acted they did not care about themselves they were concerned about the main thing which reverberates cover to cover throughout scripture which the lord jesus instructs us to pray hallowed be your name you see there are a thousand and one needs in this world and very often i get brought into discussions and debates about the needs of the church in scotland and the needs of the peoples of the world and why they should be pitted against each other whereas actually i don't think the bible ever gives us license to pit these things off against each other

ultimately the bible says the name of the lord should be praised from the rising to the setting of the sun he is to be hallowed hallowed and where he is not being hallowed and made much of and trusted in that is where we as his people are supposed to be if we go based on us meeting the needs and not about extending the fame of the name of christ to the nations and to the peoples who don't know him we will burn out in seconds we will just nose dive off because we are not actually going with that correct purpose in the center of our being it is about obedience to god's word for the fame of god's name and so for you guys as a church and also for us in cumberland who are listening this evening we desire to partner with and raise up people within our own church who will be something like these brothers who are sent out for the express purpose of seeing christ glorified these brothers who are willing to count the cost because they knew that treasuring christ was worth more than life it turns out when you have brothers like that being sent out throughout the world people sit up they pay attention and they think whatever that is that is something to think about i hope that we can see that being sent into the world for the name of christ is not for people who are self-styled lone rangers walking about with their little pistols at the side just shooting anything that comes past them doing whatever they feel like going wherever they want that is certainly not biblical mission whether it is based in the uk or in other parts of the world it is for believers who seek to grow in maturity with christ in the context of a relationship with the local church they are believers who are weak and sinful just like we all are until christ comes or calls us but they are people who are willing to live a life in love to christ and for his church above everything else until christ returns there will be the need for the church to go throughout the world extending his name raising up and sending up people to be sent in to the world for that name and so here are two questions which are pointed challenges are you willing to be one of them oh but martin it's really tough and it's i don't know what's going to happen tomorrow well gaius had no idea what was going to happen tomorrow john had no idea what was going to happen tomorrow the brothers had no idea what was going to happen tomorrow neither did paul neither did peter they were captivated by what was true and therefore they committed their life to following what christ has said is true second thing what are we putting in place in our churches to see people raised up to be some of them because that is one of the things which the lord jesus has placed over us as the people of god what are the things we are putting in place what are the ways and the avenues we are carving out to say to people look at the peoples who don't yet know jesus he deserves glory will you do this finally last theme for us to engage with in this letter is that how we send and partner must honor god we can see that how we send and partner even in challenging circumstances like those faced by gaius and john needs to be done in a way which honors god you see that in verse 6 don't you you will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of god

i mean john has very high standards doesn't he you will send them like god is sending them you are to do this in a manner which honors him and so it seems to make sense that this must mean that the churches are to work in cooperation with each other in an outpouring of lavish generosity verse 6 we've just read and then verse 8 therefore we ought to support people like these that we may be fellow workers for the truth cooperation and lavish generosity come together we've already seen that first aspect these churches were working together gaius had served the brothers the brothers had served their home church by reporting back to them and john is serving gaius by encouraging him and by saying to him time after time you're my dear friend gaius is having a horrible time with this overbearing ruler in the church deitrophies telling them that he's an idiot time after time gaius is helping him because they worked in union for the glory of god being sent out into the world for the sake of the name is not something that is to be done in isolation by one church all on their own again it gets back to this point of to be involved in god's purposes is not to be a lone ranger to do these things in cooperation in unity is a beautiful way to be interdependent within the body of christ what's more for those of us who are involved in a presbyterian church it is a wonderful way for us to express our presbyterian convictions in practice which is that we get alongside and we share our resources for the principle of seeing christ magnified we don't just hold on to what we've got so that people get to see that we're good at it we give generously and lavishly to those who god has raised up to see the name worshipped and adored we desire to serve together for the gospel in scotland throughout the uk and to the ends of the earth that's what we do that is written into the fabric of what it means for us to exist as the church but we can also see that this sort of action is a responsibility for those sorts of cooperating churches can't we these brothers were sent out for the sake of the name verse 7 accepting nothing from the gentiles that's stunning isn't it nothing from the gentiles a better way for us to probably put this into our mind is nothing from unbelievers they are not going to be dependent on unbelieving people to see the name of Christ worshipped and adored when the believers who should understand these things because they have set their lives on the agenda which is true should accomplish and should see happen that means that the church every one of us has the responsibility to ensure that the needs of these brothers and sisters are met look at what John says we should we ought to support people like these remember John's underlying conviction they need to be sent in a manner which is worthy of who of God and I don't know about you but that makes me ask the question well what does that even mean what does it mean to be sent in a manner worthy of God how would God send how does God send well we know how God sends don't we we've seen so clearly how God sends we know how God sends he has been

lavish in his sending because God so loved this world that he sent his only son that whoever believes in him would not perish but would have eternal life that's how God sends lavishly generously graciously costly filled with love filled with a mind towards the good of many people and filled with that ultimate goal in mind for the glory of his name that is the sort of sending that John has in mind because it turns out that the guy who wrote John's gospel is the guy who wrote third John God sends graciously and lavishly for the fame of his name and for the good of many people to know Christ he sent Jesus for us you see this sort of sending and partnership that we are called to each of us and each of our churches that we belong to even in challenging circumstances is the call of God on our lives on the backdrop of a dark world filled with thoughts of self-preservation or self-fulfillment the church of Christ has the opportunity to say we are giving glory to God because God has given everything and he is worthy of glory like we read from Psalm 115 not to us oh Lord not to us but to your name be glory forever because your steadfast love and faithfulness we live and we move we have our breath we have our being we have even been introduced to Christ by the power of his spirit speaking through his word about the fact that when we have believed we do not need to suffer that eternal separation that is the lavishness of how God sends and we have the opportunity as his people to in some small way replicate something of God's heart and mind towards his glory being seen in the world friends challenging circumstances will exist until the day of Christ's coming in the western world we have fooled ourselves into believing that life was just going to tick along nicely that everything was going to grow and everything was going to work and everything was going to make sense the Bible never gives us that luxury never tells us that that's what life should be like for the prolonged period they will exist until the day of Christ's coming and for us the task remains to see people and places come to join us in the worship which is due to God's name by the means of the obedience of us to the truth partnering with gospel saturated

Christ loving disciples throughout the world and a unified desire to glorify Christ in the world and to do that in a wonderful humble cooperation with brothers and sisters throughout the world I don't know about you guys but I find this section exceptionally challenging and my little notes at the end say Lord Jesus please make us people like that can I pray and then we will sing to close oh Lord Jesus you know that we are not like that and so we pray with humility please make us people like that please make us people who are captivated by your glory captivated by your beauty captivated by who you are because we are not going into this world to offer people doctrine we are going into this world to offer them you to offer

[36 : 29] Christ and so Father we pray would you please captivate us with Christ would you enthrall our hearts with love for Jesus and not love for a thousand different things good as they may be but passing fleeting and temporary Father thank you that we are those who have been saved and redeemed thank you that you have people in every part of this world who you know by name and who in that perfect moment you will call to repentance and obedience to trust and to faith in Jesus Christ and so Father we pray please would you stir your people in such a way that many more would be involved in seeing the name taken so that the day where people would repent and trust and believe in all the parts of this world would come to fruition

Father we thank you for our sister who serves in Asia we praise you for her and our desire is that as she is staying just now in Scotland that you would be continuing to equip her for your purposes in that part of the world that you would open up opportunities for her to be involved in sharing Christ Jesus and that through her recent studies you would increase the opportunities increase the amount of chances that she has to share Jesus with those that she works with and those that she lives with our Father we want to pray for that huge nation of Vietnam and ask Father that in your mercy you would raise up your people in that nation to take the gospel of Jesus to the many millions who have never even heard that he came in the first place

Father I pray for your church here at Glasgow City for those who are weak and those who are frail and those who just want to give up Father my prayer for them is that they would know that they have been bought at a wonderful price in Christ Jesus that their life does matter before you and that where they want to throw the towel in I pray Father that where they find themselves this evening whether it's here in this building or in their own homes or wherever it is that they would see a saviour who has nail marks in his hands and feet and a spear mark in his side saying you are my child and I love you with an everlasting love and I will not let you go you are mine you are one whom I have died for you are part of my inheritance so take heart

Father for those who are facing an uncertain future not knowing what to do or where to turn in these coming weeks whether it's to do with finances or matters in their family or their health I pray Father that they would recognize the wonderful beauty of Jesus not in some superficial way as though we're giving a pat answer saying there there you'll get on but that they would encounter the beauty of the sovereign Lord and would know his upholding and love and patience and care and see him lead them to the father who never leaves or forsakes any who are his own Lord we marvel at your majesty and your kindness we are in awe at your humility and the people like us are counted as your brothers and sisters before time began bought brothers and sisters and so father please make us people like we've been talking about tonight hallowed be your name amen