

GREAT FAITHFULNESS**3 John****(Read 3 John)**

Intro: I was Sheila's soccer coach for a number of years. One of those years there were so many players named Ashley on our team that my assistant and I called the little 12 year olds by their last name. There just seemed something wrong about that, but what could we do, Ashley was a popular name. Gaius was just such a name in the Apostle John's day. So it being a very common name, the Gaius John is writing to could be any number of people with that name in the New Testament. Whoever it was, John thought a lot of him and tradition has it that he made Gaius the bishop of Pergamum. Further tradition has it that Gaius was known for his hospitality and his open heart.

This letter, like the ones we covered previously in this *Little Letters, Big Message* series, is typical of any letter from John's time. If you were to find a letter from A.D. 100 written by a business man to a family member or friend, or even to a client, it would have been practically the same formula. So this is typical correspondence, only it is the word of God from one of the Apostles and therefore we get a glimpse of not only a window into life 2000 years ago, we also get truth to live by.

And there's that word truth. Last week we were talking about walking in truth and again this week we are again...

Walking in love and truth

- John hammers at it again in Third John. As a matter of fact, the word "truth" or "true" is used six times in this little letter. He isn't dealing with outside, heretical influences this time though, he is dealing with someone who is IN the church and is spreading malicious nonsense. So he intends to set the record straight and let the truth be known.
- You see, the more things change, the more they remain the same. Even in those days, there were relationship issues in the church. And do you know why? It's because people are involved. Where there are people, there will be friction. I tell couples preparing for marriage that if you don't fight, there is no life. Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not talking about fisticuffs or violence. And I'm not talking about name calling and insults. I mean that conflict will happen in one way or another any time you have human beings together. But it's how you deal with that conflict that determines how you grow from it. Gaius's church had Diotrephes was unwelcoming to visitors and spread nonsense and Demetrius who was someone spoken of in glowing terms – more on him in a bit. John intends to deal with this when he arrives and more on that in a bit as well.
- In the NIV which I use, John refers to his friend Gaius twice as "dear friend". Other translations more accurately use the word "beloved". That word and other variations of the word "Love" which, as we learned last week comes from the Greek work Agape, has been used a lot in all three of John's letters AND his Gospel. As he writes his letters he often refers to his readers as beloved friends and beloved children. So you KNOW that they are extremely dear to him – and that's why we need to realize that, even though he loves them, he still has hard words for them sometimes. In fact it is BECAUSE they are his beloved that he needs to correct them. And he does that, but all in an atmosphere and attitude of love.
- In Gaius's case though, he has encouraging words. And as he writes to his friend he points out something we all need to know. . .

We need healthy souls AND we need healthy bodies

- John prays that Gaius is healthy. That is because he is interested in everything about his people. Wouldn't we want that for everyone? Of course, and the Apostle that his friend enjoys good health.
- Being healthy in body makes it that much easier to be healthy in the soul. My heroes are those people who, despite physical infirmity, have a strong faith. But it's perfectly understandable when someone asks me why God allows them to suffer. We don't know why God allows it, but he does.
- Here, it is obvious, John wants his friend Gaius to prosper in life and health in proportion to his good soul. We should pray the same for one another, even as we...

Do what you are called to do

- THIS IS HUGE! This is a letter than made it into the Biblical Canon and it is in support of a man who isn't a great preacher as far as we know. In fact he's known for his hospitality. He used the gift he was given.

- Some are called to be preachers, some are called to be missionaries, some are called to be Sunday School teachers, some are called to be farmers, some are called to be machinists. Some are called to be builders. Do you get my point? WE all have a calling – for some it might be right on the front line in the pulpit or on the mission field. For others it might be to stay home and pray and give. And besides, the mission field you have on either side of you in the factory, in the field, in the office, is just as white for the harvest as anywhere in the world. I often covet your opportunity to be witnesses – I mostly work with Christians all day.
- What I'm trying to say is, you are a missionary whether you are here or in some exotic place. It's your job to share Jesus.
- Now on to a key issue that is obvious here...

The importance of hospitality

- For months we talked about John's concerns with Gnosticism, but in this letter he is concerned about missionaries who were not being welcomed as they travelled through the land sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ. His thinking is, whoever is preaching Christ as having come in the flesh into humanity; Christ crucified, and Christ risen, is to be welcomed with open arms and assisted in every way.
- You see, they didn't have Hilton, or Best Western or Bed & Breakfasts in 100 A.D. There were inns; remember, there was no room in the inn for Mary and Joseph, but that was probably good. You DID NOT want to stay in an inn in John's day. They were dangerous and flea infested. The only thing that would have come close was the last Motel 6 I stayed in. Let's put it this way, it was just better to stay in a home. And that is what people generally did. It was a common practice in the culture of the day to extend hospitality as an almost sacred duty. If someone came under your roof, you were obligated to provide for them and protect them – even in the heathen world.
- Knowing this, it was only to be expected that the Christ Followers would take it even more seriously. We are going to study the letters of Peter next and he writes this, *Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.* 1 Peter 4:9. And the writer of Hebrews goes even further *Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.* Hebrews 13:2. And Paul commends hospitality a number of times as he does in Romans, *Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.* Romans 12:13. William Barclay says this, *"In the early church the Christian home was the place of the open door and the loving welcome. There can be few nobler works than to give a stranger the right of entry to a Christian home. The Christian family circle should always be wide enough to have a place for the stranger, no matter where he comes from or what his color."*
- This has been my experience as I have been in other cultures. (Tell about my experience in other cultures – Hondurans who gave us THEIR lunch; Francisca giving me eggs; Chicken at meals)
- I think this is something we really need to think about in today's political climate where the subject of immigration is often in the news. Recently, I was talking to an African friend of mine who lives here in town. He is here legally and yet he is often the subject of racial insults and comments. He also said that the same thing happens with people who live in his same community (very near this church building by the way) who are insulted for their dress, their race, and for their immigration status. They are here legally too – many of them are students at the university where they pay full tuition because they do not get the kind of scholarships American students do. The comments cause great fear. This is a travesty Church! Scripture tells us to welcome the alien and the outsiders. I agree that ILLEGAL aliens are indeed breaking the law needs to be dealt with. But I believe that Christ Followers need to be at the forefront of practicing Christian hospitality by not only leading all people into right relationship with Jesus, but also right relationship with their legal status. (Rant over)
- All to say that John commends these traveling servants of God and bearers of the Gospel to the hospitality and the generosity of Gaius. Apparently Diotrephes is a person who is not on mission and was probably giving Gaius trouble and probably in the issue of hospitality and certainly having a welcoming spirit.
- And finally, as we look at Demetrius, let me talk briefly about...

The joy of seeing your children (biological AND spiritual) walking in faith

- John says, *Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone—and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true.* 3 John 12. John apparently knows this man. He is probably a product of his ministry. And he is pleased with how he turned out.
- There is great joy in seeing the people we have influenced over the years become servants of the Lord in their own right. It is a HUGE responsibility and the pay-off is when we see them ministering in some way. Let me just say, when you have the opportunity to speak into the life of a person on the journey to Jesus and life in Christ – take it!!
- As a church we have experienced it. We see young people serving here Sunday after Sunday as teachers, worship leaders, deacons, leaders in the community etc. and we spoke into that. And around the world there are people that ABC raised up and sent out. It was often painful when we said farewell, but the joy comes when we see them impacting the world for Jesus.
- So whether they are your flesh and blood or your kids in Christ, don't forget to savor the joy of seeing them serving Jesus.

Conclusion: Now, as I wrap up, let me cover something I was going to talk about last week.

John, as he did in 2 John, realized in this letter, the difficulty of discussing any more on paper, and promised face to face time when he came for a visit. His words have much to teach us in our electronic age. He says writes in verse 13 of this letter and verse 12 of Second John *I have much to write you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink.* 3 John 13. Here's the truth: **Face to face is ALWAYS better!** How many times have you been mad because someone didn't respond to a text, email, Instant Message, or voicemail? What a waste of emotional energy! Don't take it personally. If you don't hear from me it's because I somehow missed it, or more likely forgot. I'm sure that's what it is for 95% of us. If we don't respond, call, or hunt us down. If you have an issue to discuss, remember, face to face is always better. (Second rant over)

And that, ABC is how to practice Great Faithfulness. Amen.