

Joy to the Church Where Faith is Seen

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 December 2021

Preacher: Josh Johnston

[0 : 00] We're going to turn to our Bibles now, and we're going to read together in the third letter of John. So after Peter's letters, we have 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John, tucked in before Jude and Revelation. And Josh is going to be leading us through this shortly.

I'm going to read the whole letter, beginning then at verse 1. The elder to 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.

That's an interesting verse, isn't it? Good health as it goes well with your soul. For I rejoice 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's 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'll do well to send them on their way, on their journey, in a manner worthy of God, for they have gone out for the sake of his name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore, we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth. I've written something to the church, but Diotrophes, who loves to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. So if I come,

I'll bring up what he's doing, talking wicked nonsense against us, and 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.

[2 : 35] We also had our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true. 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'll talk face to face. Peace be to you, and the friends greet you. Greet the friends, every one of them.

Amen. May God bless to us his word. Well, do turn in your Bibles again to the third letter of John. For me, growing up, Boxing Day always brought with it the turkey sandwiches. Well, I hope we've had our fill of turkey, because as we open up 3 John, what we have is a totally different kind of sandwich. What we have is a bit of a dangerous church member sandwich.

Two mighty fine pieces of bread either side, Gaius and Demetrius, but in the middle, the menace, Diotrophes, whose shadow looms large. Well, this morning we'll be focusing on Gaius, so I guess that's just a piece of bread today after all the feasting of yesterday. But with any sandwich, if you put one rotten ingredient in it, it doesn't matter how good the bread is, the whole thing is spoiled. And that's an important reality for a church. Our Christian lives are not independent of one another. Now, somewhat unusually in this letter, Jesus isn't actually mentioned by name, but that in a new way minimizes the significance of what John's written. Because if Christ had not come, if Christmas brought nothing of meaning to celebrate, then there'd be no possibility for a church to exist. The fact that Christ has come means that lives can be and are changed forever.

And the truth is that the church is vital for each one of us, because it is the arena in which the fruit of Christ's work is seen. The church is the arena in which our faith is lived out, seen, encouraged, modeled, steered, and all the rest. And so how you and I interact with Christian brothers and sisters is really significant for ourselves and for each other. And that's really at the heart of this little letter. All that is commended or warned is behavior that is on display in front of other Christians. And it's either a source of joy or jeopardy. Now, before we dig in to see how John explains these things to us, just to orient ourselves a little bit on John's letters, two and three John are the shortest letters in the New Testament. They're tiny little things, often called apostolic postcards. But they go together with one John, which is slightly longer, and it deals in large part with a church that's faced a

significant portion of its membership, leaving them and leaving the truth. That's an immensely unsettling thing. And so one John reassures the left behind church. But then two John, which we looked at together not long ago, is taken up with, what do you do when those who've abandoned the apostolic gospel come around your church and seek to influence and to win people to their progressive, poisonous gospel?

[6 : 14] Well, John's message to them, slam the front door shut. There's a time when the most loving of churches are unwelcoming because a truly loving church holds tightly to the truth. And so no platform can be given to dangerous ideas that deny the Lord Jesus. And then three John, which we'll look at today and next week, is taken up with encouraging genuine welcome and concern for and partnership with real gospel workers. Two John, don't welcome those who reject the plain teaching of Jesus.

Three John, don't shun those who are real and faithful gospel workers. Invest in them. It's hard to know if two and three John were written definitively to the same church or not.

There's disagreement amongst commentators on that. But either way, what we can see from both of them is that in any age, in any day, both messages are important. Concern for one of them oughtn't to ever lead us to neglect the other. These two little letters go together. True churches offer genuine and warm welcome to real brothers and give no platform to anyone who undermines the fundamentals of the faith.

Those two things go together. But now that this morning, we're beginning to look at three John, and we're going to do so in two parts. This morning, joy to the church where faith is seen, verses one to eight. And then next week, jeopardy to the church where folk chase status.

So this morning, joy to the church where faith is seen. And so the first thing that we see within these verses in verses one to four is love exemplified, love exemplified. Genuine Christian faith always reveals itself in love for the church. And such faith warms the hearts and brings rejoicing to those who witness it. Just like in two John, three John holds truth and love together very tightly.

[8 : 29] They cannot be separated. So as John writes to Gaius verse one, he does so in truth and love. Truth and love are two sides of the same coin. A church that cherishes the truth loves. A church that is loving cherishes the truth. And we see from John's warmth towards Gaius, we see that from John's warmth towards Gaius, but we also see it from Gaius himself.

We see from, sorry, John and Gaius are bound together in the gospel, and that prompts genuine love and concern from John for Gaius. And so John is exemplifying in these verses what he wants to encourage Gaius to give himself to and to keep giving himself to.

So note, as well as John saying that he loves Gaius and the truth in verse one, he refers to him as beloved four times. Verse one, verse two, verse five, and again verse 11, beloved.

And so it's fitting how John opens the letter. He has concern for Gaius as a whole person. Look at his prayer in verse two. I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health.

Now it's important for us to get that in right perspective. John shows concern for Gaius' material well-being, that he'll journey well and that he'll be in good health. And it's a good and right desire to see people well and flourishing. But that's not an ultimate desire, is it? As with many things, we can fall down wrongly on both sides of this. On the one side, we can be very pious and have an attitude that doesn't really take an interest in brothers and sisters on anything other than on spiritual things. The interest stops there. So perhaps that would look like leading a growth group, being involved in a growth group, and only really interacting with them when it comes to the Bible study and the time of prayer, and never really showing an interest in them at any other time.

Not getting to know one another, showing concern for the day-to-day struggles that each of us face as people living under the sun. Well, that's to separate our Christian lives from our daily lives, and that can't happen.

[10 : 55] Or it could look like things like trite and unhelpful quoting a Bible verses at someone who's just experienced a great bereavement, instead of putting an arm around them and sharing tears with them. And a wholly pious approach to life that doesn't really take an interest in people.

But on the other side, we can fall down by only showing concern for someone's health and prosperity in this age. And we've seen that large scale, haven't we, in the pandemic? It's tragic to see people placing physical health above spiritual health, cutting out essential fellowship in the gathering of the church, and so endangering that which lasts forever in order to protect a life which passes away. Look closely at John's prayer here. He says, I pray that all may go well with you, and that you may be in good health as it goes well with your soul.

I pray that your health and flourishing would match your godliness. That could be a dangerous prayer to pray, couldn't it? But as it is, Gaius is flourishing in his faith. Verse 3, For brothers who have spent time with Gaius have reported to John that he is walking in the truth. That's why John prays as he does, because Gaius is flourishing. Listen to David Jackman on this. He says, There's no profit in us pretending that we can live on a super spiritual plane when God has made us flesh and blood.

Our attitude to life in this world should be positive, expecting God to be good and gracious to us because we know his character. But never for one moment presuming on his kindness or imagining that this world is more important or significant than the next.

[12:50] The truth is that suffering is part and parcel of being a Christian. We don't need to seek that out. We should expect it, be prepared for it.

But it would be somewhat awry if we wanted to experience it or worse still, sought it out for others. Now, loving our church family means caring chiefly for what the unseen reality of heaven and hell will mean for them, but also caring for them as flesh and blood, as human beings.

Yes, concerned ultimately that he reached the last day mature and ready to gloriously reign with the Lord Jesus, but also that in the midst of whatever their sorrows and griefs, whatever their sicknesses and trials, whatever the hardships and losses that they bear, that they know the loving, tangible support of the family of God.

So John prays for and is concerned, yes, for material things. And perhaps that's a helpful reminder to us. But look at what his biggest desire is. What is it that produces joy for him and rejoicing?

Verse 4, it's that he hears that Gaius and indeed others are walking in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

[14:18] Well, John has exemplified in these verses what he wants to encourage Gaius to continue to give himself to. Genuine support for the whole person.

And so we see, secondly, that John, in verses 5 to 8, says that love is encouraged. He encourages Gaius in his love.

A faithful church perseveres in love for the brothers. There are two things that are testified to about Gaius to John. First, we've seen it in verse 3 already.

The brothers testified to your truth, as indeed you're walking in the truth. Now, when John says your truth, that isn't the kind of postmodern my truth that we hear celebrities pontificating about these days.

As if truth were a subjective sort of thing. Now, Gaius' truth is that he's walking in the truth. It's that he's living the Christian life. The truth has become the pattern and shape of all that he does.

[15:22] And so it now belongs to him. So that's the first thing testified to, Gaius' truth. But the second, verses 5 and 6. Beloved, it's 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 see, walking in the truth is living a life of love for Christian brothers. Gaius walks in the truth and that prompts his love.

His love is seen and poured out in his hospitality for fellow gospel workers who are passing through this church. Much like to John, these brothers and strangers that are referred to are likely traveling preachers.

So Gaius is known to welcome faithful teachers into his home and to support and encourage them. And John wants that to continue. He wants Gaius to persevere in this kind of hospitality that cares even for strangers.

It's likely that Gaius needs to be encouraged like this because of a man named Diotrephes. Diotrephes was causing great harm in this church.

[16:41] Look at verse 10. He refused to welcome the brothers. He's not doing it himself. But he also stops those who want to and he puts them out of the church.

So it would be a very easy thing for Gaius to lose his nerve here to doubt that he should continue to invest in other workers as he's doing. And so that's why John needs to encourage him very strongly in this.

And he does so in five ways. Before we look at those, obviously we don't live in a setting where we as a church need to rely on itinerant preachers and teachers.

But that doesn't mean there aren't implications for us in what John says. There are implications for any church here in how they interact with their leaders and how they support their ministry partners.

But also we want to be a church that's training people, training students, members, apprentices, ministers, many of whom will pass through and serve faithfully elsewhere.
[17 : 45] So there is much that we can take heed of here as we look at these five encouragements. So the first one, verse five, caring for brothers evidence is faith.

It's a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for the brothers. That's what John says. It's a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers. It is worth us remembering that pulling back from loving and serving our fellow Christians is never a sign of growing spiritual maturity. It is far more often a sign of our own spiritual cooling. The arena in which our faith is seen and modeled and evidenced is in our day-to-day life amongst our church family. And the consistent teaching of the Bible is that if faith isn't seen, it isn't real faith. Well, Gaius' faith was living and active. How do we know?

Because he loved the brothers. Notice verse five, even those who were strangers. Gaius lived with an open home. He lived and breathed sacrificial hospitality for the sake of the gospel, for the sake of his brothers and sisters.

[19 : 05] It wasn't done out of self-interest. He wasn't doing the, I'll invite you to my party, so you'll invite me to yours thing. No, he made it his mission to embrace even strangers, people he may not see again, people who are passing through.

This kind of care is without ulterior motives, but it's simply about being hospitable to fellow Christians because they belong to the same Heavenly Father to which we belong. And love and care like that is a testimony to a life of real faith.

So that's number one. It evidences real faith. Number two, second encouragement. It actually models love for the church. Look at verse six. Gaius' love was testified to before the church. When there are clear examples of hospitality at play, then that helps others to take up the mantle and do likewise. Because our faith is lived out in our relationships with one another. It's seen. It's known. I've been in this church for nearly 10 years, and it will never be lost on me the impact that so many had in my first year or two by showing hospitality and kindness to me.

[20 : 22] I'd never experienced such a warm, genuine church family before that. And it's made me want to do likewise. And I'm sure I won't be the only one who's experienced that.

That sort of thing can mark a ministry and the rest of a life. That kind of an impact that ripples long after you've hosted someone in your house.

The church family seeing flesh and blood examples of love only serves to help the church family love. So Gaius has proven that he's a faithful believer.

He's modeled love for others. But third, verse six, what he does is an act done to God himself. It's an act done to God himself.

John says, you will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. Hospitality shown to God's people, to God's workers, is hospitality shown to God himself.

[21 : 29] Nothing of ourselves and nothing of our substance poured out on behalf of God is ever a waste. He knows, he sees what we give up and what we give out. And it's done for him.

So even when we've put on a lavish spread and it's been unappreciated by those who've had at our tables, even when we've invested in people richly and it seems to have gone unnoticed, God himself knows what we do for him.

John says, when showing hospitality, when investing in brothers and sisters, do so as if you were doing it for God himself. Crack out the fine china. Let them have your bed.

That bottle you're receiving for a special occasion. What's more special than showing hospitality in a manner worthy of God? But even when we can't do things like that, remember the words of the Lord Jesus.

He says, I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick. You visited me. I was in prison and you came to me.

[22 : 41] When do we do these things? He says, truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these, my brothers, you did it to me. Every coffee, every glass of water, every meal invested in people for the kingdom is no waste.

I'm sure we're not the only ones who've had some bumpy and awkward student lunches and we've greeted students that we've never seen again. And in a church like ours where we have a constant throughput and flow of people coming to us year after year and then moving on after they graduate

or get a job, it can feel like a thankless task to set ourselves to embrace and welcome and invest again and again and again.

New students, new apprentices, new workers, new families, endless pouring out of ourselves. But look at John's words.

Verse six, you'll do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. Those who do pass through, those who are only here for a year or two, students, apprentices, they provide us with the opportunity to send them on their way refreshed and equipped for service elsewhere, to be fruitful in settings beyond our own here in Glasgow.

And so the investment in a student or an apprentice or a minister in training over a few years that ends up with them upping sticks and going elsewhere may turn out to produce much gospel fruit in another city perhaps completely unbeknown to us.

[24 : 24] And though we don't know about that, we keep doing it because we do so as if it's for God himself. It shows real faith, it models love.

We do it as if it was to God himself. Number four, as we show real concern and support and encouragement to brothers, it serves as a tonic for those likely to suffer.

It serves as a tonic for those likely to suffer. Look at verse seven. Gaius is showing support and hospitality for those who go out for the sake of the name.

Those who give themselves to gospel work. Now in 1 John and 2 John, those who have gone out, that phrase when it's used, those who have gone out are those who are abandoning the gospel. But here in 3 John, those who have gone out are going out as gospel servants. They've gone out for the sake of the name. But that for the sake of the name phrase is laced with the inevitability of suffering.

[25 : 33] It's a phrase common throughout the book of Acts where those engaged in ministry suffer dishonor for the name. Those who are given to minister to the Gentiles will see how much they must suffer for the name.

But John himself uses that same phrase in his gospel when he tells his disciples of the hatred the world's going to have for them, of the lengths they'll go to to reject and oppose his people.

He says this, all these things they will do to you on account of my name. The reality is that the more engaged in gospel work one is, the more likelihood that opprobrium and opposition will come their way.

And fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ is a tonic. It's an opportunity to be refreshed, to be sent out again with a renewed vim and vigor for the costly task, to be sent on their journey well.

So an encouragement offered to someone engaged in ministry will never be a wasted thing. Few will ever know the hidden costs and discouragements and attacks that come.

[26 : 51] But a word of encouragement will never be a waste. An act of love and support will never be wasted. This sort of thing is a tonic to those likely to suffer.

But number five, it is also essential partnership. Love and support and care for those who are brothers is essential partnership.

Verses seven and eight. The truth is that we get to and ought to partner in and share in real ways with those in full-time gospel ministry outside our own setting.

That little phrase in verse six about sending them on their way, sending them on their journey, that's a phrase that appears in various letters in the New Testament. Paul says, similarly to Titus, in sending them, see that Zenos and Apollos lack nothing.

Or he says to the Corinthians and to the Romans that Paul might stay with him for a while so that they can help him on his journeys. Sending people well on their journey means more than looking after them whilst they're there.

[28 : 02] It means setting them up for what they're going on to do. Look at verse seven. These supporters, these workers that Gaius supported were not accepting any support from the Gentiles.

They were going out for the sake of the name and accepting nothing from those they were working with. Now, the pattern of the Bible is that gospel workers are funded by other Christians.

Few things undermine the gospel proclamation more than the accusation that it's a racket, that the motivation is simply to garner more money. Now, Paul, throughout the New Testament, argues very strongly and to the Corinthians, he argues particularly strongly that he is right, he has the right to be funded for his ministry, but he doesn't take it up in order that he might make the gospel clearer.

Sometimes it's right to show that we're not in it for the money because we're not. And that's the case with these brothers that Gaius supports. They go out for the name, prepared for all kinds of tribulation, and they accept nothing from those they're on mission to. They offer the gospel freely to the Gentiles. But God's design is that the people of God fund his ministry.

[29 : 24] So verse 8, therefore, it is right that Gaius supports people like this. They need it. Gospel work will cease when Christians shut their wallets.

But where our wallets are open, we are invested in the ministry. We're partners in it. As we train and equip people and send them off and support them in their ministries and missions, you think of our gospel partners that we've got, any encouragement that they have, we share in because we're partnered with them.

So think about David and Margarita, about to head off to Cyprus. We've trained them, we've looked after them, we've hopefully sent them out refreshed, ready to serve the Lord.

And when we pray for them, when we hear updates about their ministry, they're encouragements to us too. We share in all that they're going to do. Every life changed by the gospel through their ministry encourages us as we're fellow workers with them for the truth.

That's what happens when we do this, when we tend to and care for brothers and sisters who are given over to service of the Lord. But look again at verse 8.

[30 : 46] Supporting ministry for a Christian isn't an optional thing. Look at the word that John uses there. We ought to support.

We ought to. It's been said that one of the reasons humanitarian and social projects are so much easier to fund raise for is that you can't show videos of hell.

There are no shortages of tragedies in this world that are worthy of support and we can get all kinds of pamphlets that show us that heartbreak.

We can watch videos that stir us and very often they are promoting good things for Christians to support. But that word ought is very important.

Nobody else is going to fund gospel ministry. Nobody else has a vested keen interest that people avoid the reality of hell. We can't show videos of it.

[31 : 52] But as heartbreaking as the tragedies of this world are the reality of hell the unbearable ferociousness of God's good and just wrath against sin is far worse than any bodily suffering in this world.

The world doesn't believe that. But the church does. We knew it. That's the very thing that Jesus rescues us from.

And it's why people are prepared to go out for the sake of the name even though it will bring them great tribulation. The church must support gospel works.

Christians can or may support all kinds of charitable things but the church and Christians must support gospel work as the most important thing because in doing so we're showing that what we treasure is the eternal far more than the temporal.

Verse 2 care and support for the body is good and right but always in right perspective to the soul. Well we're going to see next week the obstacle that Gaius is faced with but even in the face of Diotrephes even when it's unpopular and costly the truth is that any instance of love for the brothers is to be encouraged.

[33 : 20] So press on Gaius that's John's encouragement to him press on for all these reasons and he's saying to us press on press on also because that is where joy is found.

Walking in the truth by walking in love brings the greatest joy verse 4 verse 3 it prompts rejoicing isn't that true? Doesn't it stir within us a joy like no other to see people we've invested in flourishing with the Lord?

Wouldn't it be great to hear in a couple of years of the Ely's ministry flourishing and we think the part that we've been able to play in that. I heard recently of one of our new members who joined in the past year when they were inquiring about membership and belonging to a church they realized that church isn't just about worshipping God it's about investing in other Christians too.

And since then I've seen this person throwing themselves into doing just that in multiple ways looking out for those sitting by themselves bringing people along trying to get them plugged in to life in the church and that has warmed my heart no end.

A few of us are at our best in winter it's cold it's dark it's been busy we've had two years of swirling uncertainty and limitations and all these other things and it's so easy to get plunged into gripes and groans to embrace discouragements to carry the cloud of gloom over us I certainly find that I'm sure I'm not the only one but friends as we persevere in being a loving church that seeks to support the brothers that seeks to encourage and refresh and equip those who will minister in all kinds of settings those who spend time with us those who've gone out from amongst us as we seek to invest in them that is the place of joy investing in the brothers will bring us joy that doesn't just get us through the winter but through life so crack on your kettle do what you can do to send a brother or sister on their journey in a manner worthy of God joy to the church where faith is seen in love for the brothers let's pray

[36 : 00] Lord grant us your help to hold fast to one another make us a people ever more joyful and encouraging supporting and building up dear ministers dear brothers and sisters even when it is costly so today amen happy who hey don't ee