

3 John Walking in the truth, living in love  
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Today we are looking at 3 John.

If you got the impression that I am cleaning up the loose ends of books in the NT that I have never preached on before, you would be right.

Next week is Jude.

We're covering 3 John in a single week because the themes are pretty similar to 2 John and I don't want you to get bored.

Let me briefly touch on the similarities.

There's this phrase, 'walking in the truth'.

It's quite a lovely depiction of living as a Christian.

When John writes to the church in 2 John, he says 2 John 4 "It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father has commanded us."

Here in 3 John, he's writing to his friend Gaius, and he says, 3 John 3-4, "It gave me great joy when some believers came and testified about your faithfulness in the truth, telling how you continue to walk in it.

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth."

Well we spoke at length about walking in the truth in 2 John.

I won't go over it again.

Simply to say that it's not just about believing stuff.

It's about living as though the stuff we believe is true.

The second similarity with 2 John is the focus on love.

2 John 5-6 he told the church,

"I ask that we love one another.

And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands.

As you have heard from the beginning,

the command is that we love one another."  
In 3 John, Gaius is commended for his love,  
"Dear friend,  
you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers and sisters,  
even though they are strangers to you.  
They have told the church about your love."  
In both letters, if the God's people are urged to one thing,  
it is love.  
So when we looked at 2 John,  
we spoke of truth and love,  
and how Christians are called to both,  
even though we may lean towards one or the other.  
Those are similarities between the two letters.

There's also a difference.  
It's a difference brought about by their different circumstances.  
In 2 John, the church was in danger from false teachers  
who did not acknowledge Jesus as the divine Son of God.  
And the church was commanded not to offer hospitality  
to those who would cause such harm.  
In 3 John, we have the other side of the coin.  
Gaius is being commended  
for offering hospitality to some faithful travelling preachers.  
And two other characters,  
Diotrophes and Demetrius, are held up as examples.  
Don't be like Diotrophes.  
Do be like Demetrius.  
And it seems that their attitude to the travelling preachers  
is what John is holding up as examples to avoid or imitate.  
So to boil it down to a sentence.  
In 2 John you don't offer hospitality to false teachers.  
In 3 John, you do offer hospitality to teachers of the truth.

And last week I explained a bit  
about how the social situation made hospitality very important.

This wasn't dinner parties.  
This was the basics of a roof over your head when you were travelling because there were no hotels.  
Itinerant ministry couldn't function without such hospitality.  
And the church at the time depended on itinerant ministry.  
If you want the church to walk in the truth,  
the church needs to be taught the truth.  
There were a limited number of Christians in the early church who had a thorough knowledge of the truth.  
And those that there were often went from town to town teaching.  
It was before they days of a settled pastoral ministry in each town.  
The sort of thing you might expect in the suburbs today.  
I mean there's been a minister in Hastings for more than 100 years.  
We are returning in rural parts of Australia to a more itinerant ministry.  
In many country centres, the kinds of places that BCA ministers in, there is just no way for the minister to be in every town each week.  
The minister might visit your church once a month.  
The other three Sundays, the locals run the service themselves.  
Now that doesn't present the same challenges in being taught the truth today as it did in the early church.  
Today, you just download a sermon by Tim Keller or John Piper or Alistair Begg.  
You listen to it together as a congregation.  
You discuss it a bit to help chew the ideas over in your minds.  
And chances are you are getting better teaching than many suburban churches with a settled minister.  
But in the early church,  
they were really dependent on the itinerant ministers.  
They wouldn't have had copies of the whole New Testament.  
They might have had one copy of one gospel for the whole church.  
And now a letter from the apostle John.  
And just occasionally a Christian leader passes through the town.  
It's a wonderful opportunity to learn the truths about your Saviour.  
And you have to make the most of it.

Well this is where Gaius was being an absolute champion.  
John says to him,  
"Dear friend,  
you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers and sisters,  
even though they are strangers to you.  
They have told the church about your love."  
This wasn't random acts of kindness on Gaius' part.  
You can tell that by the next sentence.  
These were itinerant preachers.  
And Gaius was doing something to make their ministry possible.  
Highly likely, he was giving them a place to stay and food to eat  
while they ministered in the town he lived in.  
And that is really gladdening the heart of the apostle John.  
Gaius has done a really good thing there.  
He might not have been able to do the itinerant preaching himself.  
He might not have had the knowledge to be able to do that.  
But he was enabling someone else who could.  
It's a crucial way of promoting the gospel.  
Finding people who are able to do things that are really important,  
and enabling them to do that.

I have a friend, Miranda Starkey.  
Some of you have met her.  
She comes up to do the camp parent role with her husband Rick  
at the Balnarring SUFM.  
You might be lucky enough to meet her  
when the Balnarring team comes to a service here.  
Now Miranda wouldn't get up and speak in front of a group of people.  
It's not her thing.  
But what is her thing?  
Well her work is as an accountant.  
And she's a very good accountant.  
She works a couple of days a week for a small accounting firm.  
She spends a couple of days a week doing the mum things  
that you do when you have four kids.

But another thing that she does is makes time for enabling ministry.  
So Michael Collie at SparkLit needs someone to do SparkLit's books.  
Miranda goes in a does it half a day a week.  
Same at her church,  
she does the role that Diana does for us.  
She puts all the accounts into Quickbooks  
or whatever the accounting package is.  
It's enabling ministry.  
The work that Michael Collie does is unique.  
I don't know of any other organisation in the world  
doing a similar thing.  
And Michael is uniquely placed to do it  
with his 16 years of experience  
of publishing Christian books in Argentina.  
But you can't do much  
without someone to tick your accountancy boxes in our modern world.  
So Miranda enables ministry.  
That's what Gaius was doing  
that the apostle John was commending him for.

But you know what happens when you do a good thing for God?  
You never get to rest on your laurels.  
There's always a new challenge to go a bit further in serving the king.  
And so it was for Gaius.  
3 John 6-8 "Please send them on their way  
in a manner that honours God.  
It was for the sake of the name that they went out,  
receiving no help from the pagans.  
We ought therefore to show hospitality to such people  
so that we may work together for the truth."  
What is John talking about here?  
The itinerant preachers are moving on from Gaius' town,  
and John wants Gaius to give them a good send off.  
He's not talking about a marching band and a tickertape parade.  
He's talking about funding the next stage of their ministry tour.

If they leave town well supplied for the next stage of their ministry, then that will honour God.

We can't expect non believers to help them in their ministry.

Why would they?

So it's incumbent on Christians to help out such people and so become partners in the truth of the gospel.

That's the thrust of John's message for Gaius.

And that's really the purpose of this letter.

John is absolutely sincere when he commends Gaius for his love.

But he's not going to all the effort or writing a letter, and it was a lot of effort in the ancient world.

He's not going to all that effort just to give him a pat on the back.

John has something he wants from Gaius.

"Please send them on their way in a manner that honours God."

As I was thinking about that,

it crossed my mind

that it needs to thought about in light of Jesus' words,

"My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

When I said there's always a new challenge in serving the king, you could get the impression that God is a bit of a task master.

Whatever you do in his service, he always wants more.

How could that not be a burden?

But you see,

the things you do in the service of the King of Kings are not a burden.

Because God changes our hearts so that serving him becomes a joy.

I don't think for a minute that when Gaius received this letter, that he removed the seal thinking to himself,

"I wonder what the apostle John wants now?"

It would have been more a case of,

"I really appreciate being able to be part of John's plans.

And any itinerant ministers that he commends are worth supporting.

And it gives me a thrill

to be part of getting this good news out to the world.

I'm completely sold out for the Lord Jesus.

But there are some things that I can't do myself,  
that I can see need to be done.

It's great that I can help others to do them."

If he didn't have that kind of attitude,  
then I'm sure John wouldn't have written to him with the request.

That said,

you can tell that John is in a bit of a spot.

He's already had one go

at trying to organise a proper welcome for these travelling preachers,  
and he's run into some problems.

3 John 9-10 "I wrote to the church,  
but Diotrophes, who loves to be first,  
will not welcome us.

So when I come, I will call attention to what he is doing,  
spreading malicious nonsense about us.

Not satisfied with that,

he even refuses to welcome other believers.

He also stops those who want to do so  
and puts them out of the church."

It sounds like this Diotrophes is a piece of work.

He's set himself up a little empire in this church.

It's the kind of thing

where you know when you speak to the people in the next town.

"Oh that church, yes we know the one.

That's Diotrophes church."

It's his little powerbase.

And he's so scared of anyone else having the limelight,  
that he will refuse entry

to any travelling preachers who might come to town.

He even spreads rumours about the apostle John.

If you put yourself back in the first century,

it takes a unique kind of arrogance

to undermine one of the 12 apostles personally chosen by Jesus.

This was the guy who was described as 'the disciple whom Jesus loved'.

It seems almost inconceivable,  
that you would fail to welcome John,  
and anyone else who was travelling with him.

But we know how ego works.

We've all seen it.

Someone who is so precious about their own turf,  
that they won't do what is in the best interests of the group.

But there's also a step beyond ego.

That's when you get to paranoid.

And it seems Diotrophes had got to that stage too.

"He also stops those who want to do so  
(that is welcome John and the travelling preachers)  
and puts them out of the church."

You can imagine Diotrophes bullying of his fellow church members.

"As leader of this congregation,

I've made a decision that we won't be welcoming outsiders.

We don't know them.

We don't know what they are going to say.

And unfortunately some of our members are being uncooperative  
about that decision.

So in the interests of the unity of the congregation,

I'm going to have to ask anyone

who doesn't want to go along with that decision to leave us.

I do this with sadness in my heart.

You all know how much I care for each one of you.

But it's so important that we preserve the unity of our congregation,  
that I feel I have no choice but to take that step."

You can make it sound all nice and caring.

But in the end, it's just bullying.

I get my way or you guys have to leave.

And we've seen this year how ugly it can be  
when an institution or a state starts to bully its own members.

But when someone gets as paranoid as Diotrophes  
about anyone else sharing some leadership responsibilities,  
it's relatively easy for the paranoid person to convince himself

that his bullying is actually serving the best interests of the group.  
It is in the end a judgement call.

There are some issues  
where you do need to be willing to let people depart.  
If they want to start worshipping Ra the Egyptian Sun God,  
then you need to say,  
You'd better go and form your own religious organisation.  
There's no room for Ra worship in the church of Jesus.  
But in the case of Diotrephes,  
it wasn't about what anyone believed or taught.  
It was about him being in charge.  
And the fact that he couldn't cope if someone else was in charge.  
Very ugly.  
Sadly too common.

Well John has warned his good friend Gaius  
about the perils of the bad example of Diotrephes.  
Finally he wants to leave him with a good example.  
Someone he can look up to and imitate.  
And so John points his friend in the direction of Demetrius.  
3 John 12 "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."  
So here's a person you can look up to.  
No one has anything bad to say about this guy.  
Now Demetrius is still alive.  
Every second funeral I take,  
the family tells me  
that no one had a bad word to say about the dearly departed.  
It can't be true.  
There are very few people out there  
who no one has a bad word to say about.  
It's just after they've died that no one says anything bad about them.  
But Demetrius is alive and kicking.

And no one has a bad word to say about him.  
 Obviously the man is not perfect, no one is.  
 But his life is of such a quality that people can recognise it.  
 Not just his close friends, everyone can recognise it.  
 Now Jesus says something that might make you worry at this point.  
 This is Luke 6:26,  
 "Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you,  
 for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets."  
 Should Demetrius be worried about everyone speaking well of him?  
 Well no.  
 There are people around who everyone speaks well of  
 because they tell them whatever they want to hear.  
 That's what the false prophets did.  
 "You want me to tell you that God is going to bless you,  
 sure I can do that.  
 Oh the collection bowl is over there, by the way."  
 But that's not Demetrius' situation.  
 People speak well of him because they recognise the quality of his life.  
 And it's not only people who speak well of Demetrius.  
 He's even spoken well of by the truth itself.  
 What does that mean?  
 I think it means that the facts bear out the assessment that people make.  
 If you take an unbiased look at the quality of Demetrius' life,  
 it says what everyone else says.  
 He's someone worth imitating and looking up to.  
 And finally, John himself also speaks well of him.  
 And as Gaius knows,  
 John is the one who shared the good news of salvation with him.  
 John can be believed.

What's the point for us of all this commendation of Demetrius?  
 3 John 11 "Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good."  
 John wants Christians  
 to spend some time thinking about who to imitate.  
 I asked Lane Prowd one time,

who is someone like that?  
And he said to me, Bob Collie is.  
Well I think that's right.  
Bob Collie is a man you could imitate  
knowing that he's leading you in a good direction.  
But you might not know Bob Collie.  
Or you might be a woman  
and feel like you'd like a female example to imitate.  
Don't worry there's more than one right answer to this question.  
But it helps if you have some examples  
of what you would like to be imitate in your mind.  
Of course we want to imitate the Lord Jesus.  
He's the top of all of our lists.  
But he's not here in flesh and blood right now.  
And sometimes it's helpful to have an example in the flesh.

So where have we been today?  
First of all John was encouraging Gaius  
to be hospitable to the travelling preachers.  
We want to enable good ministry to happen.  
Secondly he was warning Gaius about the troublesome Diotrephes.  
We want to avoid those who are ego maniacs  
and can't cope with anyone else sharing leadership responsibilities.  
Thirdly we want to have some examples of people,  
people like Demetrius,  
whose faith is an inspiration and an encouragement to us  
in our goal to follow Jesus.