

Truth in Action

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[0 : 00] Well, I do enjoy watching documentaries on TV. I guess it must be my age. I especially enjoy watching fly on the wall documentaries where people are being recorded simply just living out their lives because you do get a glimpse of who people are and what they're like their character comes through when they're essentially just being themselves instead of acting for the cameras.

Well, in John 3, 3 John, what we get is basically like a documentary, a fly on the wall documentary of a first century church. We get an insight into the inner life of the church itself, but also the lives of some of the characters who belong to that church.

But unlike 2 John, this is written to an individual. Sorry, 2 John written to a church. 3 John is written to an individual.

But in both of these letters, the apostle John, who is the author, he essentially wants his readers to be walking in the truth. So if you look down, reading today, 3 John verse 4, he talks about walking in the truth. If you flip over to 2 John, also verse 4, he also talks again about walking in the truth.

So he is wanting people to walk in the truth. Now there's a sense in which whether you call yourself a Christian believer or not, you are basing your life on something. You're walking in a certain direction. You have a certain worldview, beliefs, philosophies that influence the way that you think, you talk, you act, what you do with your time, what you do with your money.

[1 : 39] All of this describes, in a sense, what you're living for, who you're living for, what you want to achieve, what you want to do. You're walking in a certain direction in your life.

And so the question that John really forces us to answer is, well, how are you walking? What direction are you going in? Because he wants his listeners, his readers, us today, to be walking in the truth.

And the truth he is referring to, of course, is the truth of the good news of Jesus Christ. What he wants his readers to believe and then live by.

And he gives us three characters in this letter who are described for us. Because, in a sense, they help us see the picture portraits he gives us of them show us what it means to walk in the truth.

So if you notice, he writes to his dear friend Gaius. And he commends Gaius for his hospitality. But then he also mentions this guy, Diotrephes. And he condemns him for being harmful to the church.

[2 : 44] And then he, again, he mentions another man called Demetrius. And he commends Demetrius for being honorable. So each of these three men help us understand what it means to be walking in the truth.

And so that's really the application for us. Whether we would call ourselves a Christian believer today or not. But the question is, are you walking in the truth? So let's look at three things.

First of all, let's look at hospitable Gaius, verse 1 to 8. Then harmful Diotrephes, verse 9 and 10.

And then honorable Demetrius in verse 11 and 12.

We're going to base the whole message around each of these three characters. So first of all, hospitable Gaius. Look at verse 1. John writes, So the elder is John.

His dear friend is Gaius. In fact, the literal word is beloved. That's how John refers to him. And you notice in verse 2, verse 5, and verse 11.

[3 : 52] That's what he calls Gaius, a dear friend. Someone he loves. And we don't know exactly who this guy, Gaius, was. But he was an active member of the church that John is writing about.

And so verse 2 tells us, Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you just as you are progressing spiritually.

So he's praying for Gaius' good health. And that was common in a letter back then to be asking for someone's health or to be praying for their good health just in the same way as it's common in greeting in our letters today.

But notice that John's not simply concerned about his physical health, which tends to be primarily what we are concerned about today, either our physical health or the physical health of others. But John here speaks about his spiritual health. And he notes that Gaius is progressing spiritually. Literally, John says, As it goes well with your soul.

[4 : 56] So according to John, it is well with Gaius' soul. And so just as he is spiritually healthy, John wants his physical health to match it.

And so how can John make this health assessment on this man? Well, look at verse 3 and 4. It gave me great joy when some believers came and testified about your faithfulness to 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. So it seems like a group had visited the church where Gaius was a member and they had reported back to John and to others about Gaius, what he was like.

And they'd seen how he was walking in the truth. Not only did he believe the truth, but he lived the truth out in his life. And so John knew that Gaius was spiritually healthy because of what he was doing.

Well, what was this man, Gaius, doing? Well, in a word, hospitality. He was hospitable. Look at verse 5. Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers and sisters, even though they are strangers to you.

[6 : 09] Now, it's not used here, but the New Testament word for hospitality literally means the love of a stranger.

The love of a stranger. And that's exactly what Gaius is doing here. He's a lover of strangers. Because hospitality doesn't mean hosting your family or hosting the people who are your friends. It means hosting those who are strangers. Because in the context in which John is writing here, in those days, travel was basically impossible unless somebody were to show you hospitality. It wasn't like there was all of these cheap hotels around, like laterooms.com would give you, and you could just check into a hotel when you turn up at a place. No, you had to have someone offer to you, the stranger, a bed or a meal for the night.

And so what John is doing here is he's praising Gaius for the way that he opened up his home to then welcome strangers in. And these strangers that John is referring to are missionaries or teachers about Jesus in the early church.

[7 : 23] So they would travel around spreading the good news of Jesus in different places to different people. And so they would need the churches to host them, to help them.

And Gaius was one of those people who did that. He supported them so they could focus on their ministry in sharing the good news of Jesus with other people. I guess he gave them a comfortable bed for the night.

He would have made sure they were well fed with a nice meal, maybe sit down by the fireside and kick their slippers off and relax, et cetera, et cetera. His home was open.

His life was open to welcome people in. And so word of Gaius' excellent hospitality seemed to spread around other people.

He loved people. He cared for people. And that was known. So verse 6 says, they have told the church about your love. Please send them on their way in a manner that honors God.

[8 : 23] So Gaius wouldn't just take care of them when these traveling teachers, these missionaries were with him, but he would also send them on their way with whatever they needed, whether food or money or material support, whatever it was.

And John's saying this is to be done in a manner that honors God. Because it wouldn't honor God if God's people came to a church and that church full of God's people failed to support God's workers. So John's telling us here why showing hospitality is so important. Verse 7 and 8. 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. So three things that John says here. First, these people, these teachers, missionaries, they do it for Jesus.

It was for the sake of the name that they went out. The name is Jesus Christ. And so these missionaries traveled out and about because they wanted to spread the good news about Jesus.

[9 : 37] And so secondly, they depended upon the church. John says they are receiving no help from the pagans. So pagans are those who are outside the church who are obviously not going to

support the mission work of the church.

And so if the missionaries were going to be able to share the good news of Jesus for free, it was the responsibility of the church to support them. And then thirdly, he says, they all work together. Verse 8. We ought therefore to show hospitality to such people so that we may work together for the truth. And so while Gaius wasn't a missionary, he could invest in the mission by showing hospitality to those who were.

Because it's not just those who go out to other places who are involved in mission work, is it? It's also those who are at home, who can support and who can offer hospitality because all are to work together in this one mission of Jesus Christ.

We do it with our prayers, of course, but we do it with whatever God has blessed us with and he's blessed us all with different amounts and different gifts and different things. And so it's always going to be costly offering or showing or giving hospitality.

[10:58] It's going to be costly with our personal time. It is going to be costly with our family time. It's going to be costly with our money. And yet John's saying, be like Gaius because every Christian ought to show hospitality.

That's our responsibility in being part of Christ's church. So let's just apply this and think, what does all of this look like? Well, firstly, I think obviously, it involves supporting Christian workers to do Christian work.

And that honors God. If people have been called and they've been commissioned by the church to go and proclaim the name of Jesus to here or there or anywhere, then they need to be supported by the church itself, of course, through our prayers and through our giving, but also through us as individual people, through loving and caring and practically supporting and for the name of Jesus Christ.

And secondly, therefore, it's going to involve opening up my home and welcoming people in. In other words, inviting people into my personal space.

So into my home, obviously, through my door, into my lounge or around my dining table and eating food from my fridge, spending time with my family.

[12:27] But of course, hospitality shouldn't just be seen in a narrow sense. It goes further than just welcoming people into my physical space. It is about inviting people into my life in some way, which will mean loving other Christian believers that I know, I can see, who are part of the church, but it will also mean loving other believers who I don't know, who want to serve for Christ through the church.

So there will be strangers that I ought to show hospitality to. But also, further still, hospitality means loving those who are outside of Jesus Christ, who aren't part of his church, by caring for their needs and seeking to meet them.

So that's going to be physical, yes, a bed for the night or a meal around the table or a gift, but it's going to be spiritual too, giving our time in order to listen or to encourage, to guide, to counsel or to pray for.

Hospitality will mean inviting someone into my life so I can give time to help them and their relationship with God, to help them grow closer to God or even to know God for themselves.

So that might mean taking time to read the Bible with them one-to-one or to invite them along to church to bring them with me. because you know as well as I know that there are just so many people around us, our neighbours, our friends, our family members, people in this church, our church, people around about, so many people who are in need.

[14:15] And if we just think about it, I'm sure we could show hospitality to them in a multitude of different ways. I love how the author Rosaria Butterfield puts it in her book *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*.

She's talking about hospitality and she says radically ordinary hospitality is this, using your Christian home in a daily way that seeks to make strangers, neighbours and neighbours family of God.

It brings glory to God, serves others and lives out the gospel in word and deed. I love that bit, the purpose of hospitality is to make strangers, neighbours and neighbours family of God.

Isn't that beautiful when you see that happening and also when you're able to be involved in that? Well, John is saying that's how you're progressing spiritually. Gaius, I can see you doing that and it's a beautiful thing to behold and it's an indication for John that Gaius has a good soul.

All is well with his soul because of his love and care for others. So that's hospitable Gaius. He's good. Okay, next one, not so good. He's harmful diatrophies, verse 9 and 10.

[15 : 35] So John, he commends hospitable Gaius but he condemns harmful diatrophies. So Gaius clearly loved others. Diatrophies loved himself.

Just listen, 9 and 10. I wrote to the church but diatrophies 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. Okay, so diatrophies seems to be this really dominant, difficult character in the church.

He was probably a leader. We don't know much about him except what John tells us in this brief picture portrait. But we discover enough to see how he is harmful to Christ's church.

So he highlights this harm in five ways and don't worry, these are quick. So diatrophies is dangerous. First, because he loved to be first. He wanted to be the main character in the church.

[16 : 45] So whereas Gaius willingly served others, diatrophies wanted to promote himself. He was far more concerned about advancing his own reputation than about seeing the message of Jesus, the gospel of Jesus advance and change people's lives.

Secondly, he rejected apostolic authority and that was the apostle John. John says he will not welcome us. So diatrophies didn't even acknowledge the authority of the apostle John.

And who did John get his authority from? Well, he got it from Jesus Christ. But diatrophies ignores that. He was his own self-appointed authority.

Third, he spread malicious nonsense. It could read here that diatrophies was talking wicked nonsense against us. He was bad-mouthing.

John bad-mouthing the other leaders and slandering them. Fourth, he refused to welcome people. So again, in contrast to Gaius who welcomed strangers, diatrophies refused to welcome other believers.

[17 : 56] And so missionaries would come needing hospitality by diatrophies to slam the door shut on their faces. He would have nothing to do with them, telling them just get lost.

And John, in his second letter, had told the church to reject false teachers. So maybe diatrophies thought, well, you never know. Some of these guys could be dodgy, so let's not offer them hospitality.

But these men weren't false teachers. because John's talking about people who have been officially recommended by him. And yet diatrophies refuses to welcome them.

Not only that, fifthly, he stopped other people welcoming them too. He basically excommunicated people. We read, he puts them out of the church.

He's like acting as if he is the gatekeeper. He is deciding who is welcome and worthy of a place in the church and who isn't. Basically, he is a law unto himself, trying to control everything and everyone.

[18 : 59] Power had gone to his head and he had abused his position of leadership. And so John's description of him is absolutely shocking. And the harm he caused to the church was devastating.

So what does somebody like John have to do? Well, he can't just leave it. Somebody like diatrophies carrying on the way that he is. Diatrophies and his modern day successors and they're out there are always going to be harmful to the church.

And so John names him and he shames him but John says he will take it further because he's going to show up and we read, call attention to what he is doing.

So his toxic deeds, his toxic words must be exposed. Because basically when somebody puts themselves first in a church, what they do is, well, they reject biblical authority when it comes to leadership.

They assume leadership themselves, self-promoted leadership. They spread nonsense and lies. They slander people. They reject people. they refuse people.

[20 : 14] They control people. Do great damage as they push their own agenda rather than the gospel agenda of Jesus Christ.

And so this isn't just a problem for a first century church. This is alive and well in the 21st century church. And so harmful people must be exposed because of the danger they cause to people in churches.

And so John's words to Gaius commend him for being a spiritually healthy believer but his words about Diotrephes condemn him because he's a spiritually unhealthy person.

And John wants a spiritually healthy church. And so it needs more people like Gaius and less like Diotrephes. Okay, thirdly, Demetrius in verse 11 and 12.

Like John, we don't need to say much about him but Demetrius was possibly the carrier of this letter to Gaius. And perhaps John gives Demetrius a shout out in the letter because he wants Gaius to show hospitality to him as well.

[21 : 31] But John also mentions him because he's a good example of walking in the truth.

Remember, John wants his readers to be walking in the truth like he wants us to walk in the truth and so he sets up Gaius, good example, Diotrephes, bad example, Demetrius, good example of walking in the truth.

And Demetrius is the total opposite of Diotrephes. Just look at verse 11. Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God.

Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God. John's saying, be careful who you imitate. Be careful who you seek to emulate because there will always be bad examples and there will be good examples even in the church and so you need to be careful who it is that you're following.

Don't copy the wrong people is what he's saying because our actions, whether good or evil, will prove whether we know God or not.

So verse 12, he 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.

[22 : 53] So notice how John commends Demetrius by saying three things about him. First is that he was well spoken of by everyone. Everybody knew Demetrius was the real deal.

Why? Well, secondly, because he lived by the truth. Demetrius was well spoken of even by the truth itself. So his lifestyle commended the truth of the good news of Jesus.

In other words, he lived in line with the truth of the gospel. He didn't just believe it in his head, he lived it out in his life and by his lips.

And people could see this. I was reading recently about John Stott, the late John Stott, who was a pastor and teacher of All Souls Church down in the heart of London.

And he had a really significant ministry as a minister and as an author. He wrote so many books.

But he was a single man. And in the book I was reading, somebody who once lived with John Stott said about him, who this man was in public, he was exactly the same in private.

[24 : 04] Because I've seen him, I've watched him all day, every day, and the truth he proclaims from the pulpit can be matched up in the life that he lives. And that's really what John is saying here about Demetrius.

And that's why, thirdly, he was commended by the apostles. He was such an honorable person in John's letter because of the integrity of his life.

And it's an integrity of life that we should all have if we profess to follow Jesus Christ. where the doctrine that we believe in our head and in our heart, it must be seen in all of the deeds that we do.

They must match up. Because it's all evidence that we know God. And that's why John gives us these three characters and gives us a portrait of them so we can see, well, whether they do really know God or whether they don't.

God is a illustration. Just imagine if the people of Christchurch Glasgow, so that would be you, okay, if the people of Christchurch Glasgow were filmed for a fly-on-the-wall documentary and the camera crew came in and they wandered around the building and they went downstairs and they went into, not the toilets, but they went to the cafe area and they listened to the conversations and saw how people reacted with one another and engaged with one another and so on and so on and so on.

[25 : 35] But not only that, it's a big film crew, so they split themselves up and they came home with us and they filmed us to see what we're like in our homes and with our families and they pick up all of our interactions, they listen to all of our words, they film our behavior, then the question is, well, would they gather enough evidence together to convict us of being a Christian, of being someone who is walking in the truth?

Would it be enough footage even to pull together a reel for social media to prove that we do walk in the truth, that we are progressing spiritually, that all is indeed well with my soul?

And it's seen in my words, in my actions, in my Bible reading, in my prayer time, in my hospitality, in my love for my family, in how I treat my wife or my husband, in how I engage with my children, in how I interact with all of the neighbors in my street.

Is there enough there to pull together to say, yeah, he or she, they're walking the truth. You can tell, you can see by how they're living their lives.

Okay, so we've had hospitable Gaius, harmful Diotrephes, honourable Demetrius, but just one more. And fourthly, happy John.

[27 : 08] I say happy because I was running out of words that started with H that could describe the different characters in 3 John, but John is certainly happy. Look at what gives John his greatest joy, again in verse 3 and 4.

So John was overjoyed to hear that Gaius was walking in the truth.

And of course the primary application of this letter is that you and I, that we walk in the truth. But we should also find great joy in seeing others walk in the truth.

And so John is speaking of his children here and what he means is his spiritual children. And so for us that will be our brothers and sisters in Christ.

We will love to see their spiritual progress. It will bring us great joy. But not just our brothers and sisters in Christ, if we've got children and even for our own children.

[28 : 26] What brings us the greatest joy when it comes to our children's lives or our grandchildren's lives? What gives us most happiness? Is it academic achievement?

Is it sporting accomplishment? Is it leadership skills? Is it confidence? All of that is great. Nothing wrong with finding joy in all of these things.

But what really matters? At the end of the day, it isn't what our children have achieved. It isn't what they have accomplished. What matters most is that they are walking in the truth.

And so nothing should make us happier than to see their spiritual progress. Is that where you find your greatest joy? It should be.

Because at the end of the day, that is all that really matters for them, for you, for us personally. So as we wind this up, John's third letter helps us understand, helps us see visually what it means to walk in the truth.

[29 : 35] Primarily by focusing on Gaius and his hospitality. And so doesn't this letter then challenge us to how we are walking in the truth and how we are showing hospitality.

And so as we finish and close, what is going to motivate you and me to walk in the truth and be hospitable people?

Well, it is only by remembering that God is the ultimate host. And that's why Psalm 23 has had such a prominent place in our worship service.

We had inner call to worship. We sang two different versions of Psalm 23 because in essence it encapsulates what the Old Testament, what the Bible teaches us about God being a host, God being hospitable.

Listen to this. what an absolutely fantastic host the Lord God is.

[30 : 53] God is. it's only when we have experienced his goodness, his love, his lavish hospitality that we can then be hospitable to other people.

Because God has given us the most extravagant hospitality possible, how? In giving us Jesus Christ and everything that comes with him.

you know, the story of this world and the story of our lives in this world is that we were made to be in a relationship with our loving creator God.

Where our true home is to be in his presence. The very reason for our existence is to dwell with the living God who made us.

And that's how it all started at the creation. And yet ever since then, since the fall of our first parents, Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, we have all been in exile from God.

[31 : 58] We are strangers and we are separated from him because of our sin. And there's nothing that we can do to get back to him. And yet the fantastic news of Christianity that we find in the Bible is that our loving creator God longs to welcome us back to him.

And he's made that return possible through the Lord Jesus Christ. Because Jesus came to lead us home. And so despite our sin, alienating us from God, Jesus came to die on the cross to deal with our sin.

And you know Jesus is the ultimate stranger. danger. Because when he died on the cross, he was God forsaken, forsaken by God as he hung there carrying the weight of our sin.

Jesus drank the cup of God's wrath for us so he could offer us the cup of God's blessing. We are now through faith in Jesus.

We are welcome around his table to eat bread and drink wine with him. And we'll do this shortly as we celebrate the Lord's Supper together.

[33 : 17] Because Jesus invites us, you, me, to enjoy table fellowship with him as he leads us home.

before Jesus' death, he said these words, my father's house has many rooms or many mansions, is another translation. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

And when we're there, in heaven, in that mansion, in that home, receiving even greater hospitality from God, then our fellowship will be even sweeter as we sit at the table of that great marriage supper of the Lamb, which this communion table here is really simply a foretaste of.

It's a starter for the main course which is still to come. And so can you see that in Jesus Christ, God has flung open the doors and by his grace he welcomes us in, offering hospitality to strangers like us who don't deserve a bit of it, but he gives it anyway because of this amazing love.

And so it's only when you know that Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many, that you'll want to serve others that will be there in your heart because of the one who has served you.

[34 : 50] only that can make us hospitable people. As we remember the lengths that Jesus has gone to to serve us, will we be willing to open our home, to let others into our lives, to do what we can to best love and serve them?

Let's pray. Let's pray.