

3 John

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[0 : 00] Now, I don't know if many of you else have this privilege, but I get to ride on the Central Line Tube every single day. Now, I'm not on it for very long, but when I get off at Shepherd's Bush, there's one of these tube adverts, advertising a book.

I'm a big fan of books. But this particular book is called *You Were Not Born to Suffer*. It's a big white poster, a picture of an attractive author on the front.

He's got brilliant white teeth. You can't miss it. The strap line for this book reads this. Overcome fear, insecurity, and depression, and love yourself back to happiness, confidence, and peace.

It tells us that we have a problem. Fear, insecurity, and depression. But also, we have the power to change so that we're happy and confident.

And the answer, according to this book, is very simple. Love yourself. But tonight's passage is very different.

[1 : 10] It tells us the very opposite of this. It tells us that if we want to be changed, if we want to live a full life, a life that God intended for us, the answer isn't to love ourselves.

It's that we need to understand the gospel. And when this happens, the result will be that we'll no longer love ourselves, but we'll look outwardly and love others.

Now, in this little book, John introduces us to four people who have heard the gospel. Gaius, Diotrephes, Demetrius, and himself.

Three of them were changed by the gospel, but one of them was not. And as we open 3 John this evening, and observe the contrast between their lives, I hope that we'll see that it's only a true understanding of the gospel that changes us.

And these particular changes are shown in three ways. Firstly, we all care about the spiritual condition of others.

[2 : 12] Secondly, it will cause us to love one another sacrificially. And finally, it will change our character. Firstly, people who truly understand the gospel care about the spiritual condition of others.

Now, look down with me. The first person we are introduced to in this book is Gaius. And John knew him very well. And 3 John is a letter written to him.

Three times in this letter, John calls him beloved. And it's in particular in John's personal writing to Gaius that we see that John had seen him changed by the gospel.

Verse 4 hints that actually John may have brought this man to faith. He calls him one of his spiritual children. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

Now, I don't know about you, but more times than we're not, we're not very good at finding out how people are. My good phrase, I'm sure you know it, I'm sure you've used it even today, how are you?

[3 : 19] It's probably the most used sentence in the English language. And we've all learned the acceptable responses. Yeah, good. Or my personal favourite, I'm fine.

And we're all very satisfied with these responses, even though it doesn't really tell us very much.

John's greeting, on the other hand, to Gaius is completely different to this.

I pray that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul. John is interested in how Gaius is doing physically, but his emphasis is upon how well Gaius' soul is.

And John saw firsthand that it was our souls that need the greatest care and attention because this is the part of us that matters to Jesus. This is the part of us that will last for eternity, either with God or without God.

Now, John's emphasis towards Gaius is not something that we think about often today, is it? I would say that the majority of us might even get offended if we are asked about our spiritual condition.

[4 : 26] I'm sure it often implies that we've done something wrong or we've missed church for a few weeks. It is a myth to say that we have to know one another well in order to ask these questions of each other.

John's focus at the very beginning of this letter should remind us that we need to be concerned about one another's spiritual condition. And this isn't the only place in the Bible where this happens. In the book of Hebrews, the writer instructs Christians to exhort one another every day, as long as it is called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

You and I need one another to be encouraged and challenged so that we can grow in our faith and live out the gospel. And as we understand more of the gospel, we want to care for one another. Care for one another's spiritual condition like John cared for Gaius. Right from his conversion, John saw how the gospel had impacted Gaius' life.

[5 : 30] And this brings him great joy and so he wrote this letter to commend him for this. John saw that Gaius had understood the extent of his sin and how it had changed his life, particularly in the way that he loved others.

Which brings me to my second point. That as we understand God's love, it causes us to love one another sacrificially. John tells us about this love in verses 5 to 6.

I don't know if you want to look down with me. It says, It is 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 will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. Now, Gaius probably wasn't very extraordinary. And in fact, we don't really learn a whole lot about him other than that he loved others.

But he loved these brothers sacrificially. In fact, he didn't even know who they were. These brothers were, verse 5, strangers to Gaius.

[6 : 40] And what they were doing, verse 7 tells us that they were gone out for the sake of the name. Maybe they had been on an evangelistic mission or maybe they were going to encourage other Christians.

But this did not stop Gaius from opening up his home, inviting them into his house. He opened up his heart and shared his life with them. He was faithful in all his efforts.

He gave 100% to strangers. Imagine the love that he gave to his friends. He gave up his time, his energy, his home, and his resources in order to serve others.

And Gaius cared for their needs before they set off from their journey. And he prepared them for their journey. Because he loved the gospel. He was changed by the love that Jesus had for him. And this is what it means to love others sacrificially. And sacrificial love is not just hospitality, the perfect Sunday lunch with a house full of people, or just being nice.

[7 : 52] It's loving all Christians at any cost as the opportunity arises. This could be serving in church, spending time with other Christians, or doing something that scares us, like the book table in Greenford on a Saturday morning.

Jesus told his disciples, people will know that you are my disciples if you love one another. Now in saying this, Jesus reveals that not all men are his disciples.

Only those who have been changed by the gospel so that they live out a sacrificial love for one another. And in the same way, at the end of this letter, we will see that not all people who have heard the gospel are truly Jesus' disciples.

John tells guys about two men, two men called Diotrephes and Dermetrius. And John very cleverly contrasts them alongside one another, particularly to show their different characters.

And this brings me finally that a true understanding of the gospel changes our character. Look down at verses 9 to 11. Now this tells us a little bit more about Diotrephes.

[9 : 09] In particular, he likes to put himself first. He was selfish. And he doesn't acknowledge church authority. He was also talking wicked nonsense against John and others.

Diotrephes was a bit of a gossip. And he didn't recognize John's authority as an apostle, which is incredible since John had spent three years with Jesus.

And in wanting to cement his position further in his church, Diotrephes attempted to poison the minds of his congregation in order to distrust John and other Christians.

He refused to love other Christians and he prevented those who tried to live out the gospel.

Diotrephes may have heard the gospel, but he didn't understand it.

And we all struggle with sin of gossiping and selfishness at times. Sometimes it's a little bit juicy, isn't it? But as Christians, we want to fight against sin because of what Jesus has achieved for us. [10:21] Now, John Stock once said to remind yourselves of this every day. Christ is my brother, my sin died with him, and I now reign with him.

As Christians, we reign with Jesus and we have the power to fight against our struggles with sin. This is a wonderful truth of the gospel. In Romans chapter 5, it says that as we endure in living the Christian life, it produces character and character produces hope.

And even though Diotrephes had heard the gospel, it hadn't shown this change in character. So although he may have claimed to have known God, John tells us that by his evil works, we know that he had not seen God.

And John here is unmasking the true nature of his character in order to protect the church. He wants to ensure that the church isn't led into evil because he recognises the danger of a false Christian who claims to know the truth.

Now, Demetrius, on the other hand, demonstrates to us by his character that he was transformed by the gospel. Verse 12. Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone and from the truth itself.

[11:45] We also add our testimony and you know that our testimony is true. Now, there are three things that we should take note about Demetrius. Firstly, he has received a good testimony from everyone.

Demetrius was living a life transformed by the gospel and everyone could see it. Perhaps you know a Christian like her. In a previous church there was this elderly lady.

She was a lovely, sweet lady who was genuinely happy to give up things for her forsaken, to love others. And one time she came up to me on a Sunday morning and told me how much she didn't like her television and that she wanted to give up her TV watching and give up paying for her TV license.

So that she could support me financially. And even now, nearly six years later, I'm still impacted by how she lived out her faith and loved me sacrificially. Secondly, about Demetrius, the truth gives him a good testimony.

He was living in accord with scriptures. He lived as God intended him. And thirdly, the Apostle John affirmed his faith.

[13:04] This is a threefold testimony about the faith of this man. The church sees it, the scriptures give evidence for it, and the Apostle John confirms it.

Demetrius was from God. He had been born again and was one of his children. His life was transformed by the truth of the gospel inside and out.

Just like Gaius. And in the same way, we too, we need to be from God. To be born again. We need God to reveal himself to us in order for us to understand the gospel and live it out.

And this is what changed the lives of John, Gaius, and Demetrius. So let's not settle for what an advertisement board tells us, what culture tells us.

that we have the power to change ourselves. That we can only, that can only be learned through self-help book with a couple of top tips. Let's not listen to this.

[14:09] And even as Christians, it's so easy to step back into thinking that somehow we can change our own hearts. By looking inwards to try to think more positively about something.

To replace sin with something else. But this is futile. Jesus died for us because we cannot save ourselves.

So we need to put our hope in Jesus. And as we trust in him and depend upon him, we will be changed. And we will begin to care for each other's spiritual needs.

And love others sacrificially. And our characters will be changed to become more like Jesus. Let me pray.