

Good morning, Moon Valley!

We are continuing our mini sermon series titled, ☐ “Notes of Encouragement.” It is a study through the little New Testament letters of 2 and 3 John.

Last Sunday, we covered all of 2 John. Today we are covering all of ☐ 3 John, which has only 15 verses in all. From 3 John, we are going to learn how to experience the greatest joy.

If you are like me, you may be skeptical. You may be thinking, “So, Bob, you’re telling me I’m going to learn how to experience the greatest joy? Sounds like an exaggerated, overselling preacher ploy to hook me into listening.”

I get it.

But I’m not making this up; I’m taking this straight from our text. Specifically, in ☐ verse 4, the apostle John says,

ESV 3 John 1:4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

John is explaining here what gives him the greatest joy in life. The original Greek word translated ☐ “joy” is not a Christian code word for misery with a smiley face. The Greek word is χαρά. It describes “a feeling of inner happiness, rejoicing, gladness [or] delight.”¹

So, John is talking about his greatest source of happiness and delight—his greatest joy. His greatest joy is to hear that his children are walking in the truth.

¹ Friberg.

When you hear John say, □ “my children,” your first thought may be that John is referring to his biological children. But that is not who John has in mind.

John is referring to his spiritual children, not his biological ones. His spiritual children are those whom John has had a hand in leading to faith in Christ, including those he has helped grow in their relationship with Christ. John’s spiritual children are those he has made to be disciples.

Of course, spiritual children can include biological or adoptive children. Indeed, a main responsibility of Christian parents is to make disciples of their biological or adoptive children, helping to transform them into spiritual children as well. By their words and actions, parents are to invite their biological or adoptive children to come to faith in Jesus and to grow in Jesus.

When John hears that the disciples he has made are □ walking in the truth, it brings him the greatest joy. Walking in the truth means living according to God’s principles and commands revealed in Scripture, God’s truth revealed to us.

John’s words suggest that his experience of joy and ours as believers is inextricably tied to the fulfillment of our purpose in life: to make disciples. When we are fulfilling our God-given mission to make disciples, we experience joy.

You may be familiar with something called the Great Commission in □ Matthew 28:19. It’s a command Jesus gave to his followers just before he ascended to heaven. Jesus says,

ESV Matthew 28:19 “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . .”

We can find ourselves striving to make a lot of things in this life.

- Make a living
- Make a name for ourselves
- Make ends meet
- Make ourselves comfortable
- Make a home
- Make love
- Make a mark
- Make ourselves happy
- Make the grade
- Make the kids behave
- Make history
- Make it through the week
- Make friends

These can all be worthy pursuits. But if you are a Christian, there is no higher calling than to make disciples. And according to John, there is no greater joy than to fulfill that Great Commission—to see the life of Jesus in your spiritual children, to know that they are headed for heaven and heeding the Lord, and to know that you had a hand in their well-being.

If you are not experiencing the kind of joy John is talking about, perhaps it is because you are in some way out of commission.

Some of you may be thinking, “Oh no. Here comes the guilt trip for what I’m not doing.”

Relax.

Third John is going to help us examine ourselves and our alignment with God's purposes. It is going to give us a glimpse of how we can align ourselves with God's will in making disciples in some very ordinary, doable, accessible ways.

The goal is joy, not guilt.

Let me briefly catalog the people mentioned in this letter.

Of course, we have □ John, the writer of the letter.

The recipient of the letter is a guy named □ Gaius. This letter is truly personal in that it is addressed to this individual, not an entire church. Nowhere are we told this explicitly, but it seems that Gaius is one of John's spiritual children. At some point, John probably led Gaius to Christ or helped him grow in Christ. We're going to see how Gaius is now walking in truth and is thus a source of joy for John. A part of walking in the truth is to be involved in making disciples, and we're going to see how Gaius is involved in that.

In this letter, John also mentions □ "the brothers." These are traveling evangelists, or we might call them missionaries. These are believers who are also engaged in making disciples, but in a different way than Gaius. They are professional ministers in the sense that they derive their support from the generosity of believers.

Among "the brothers" there is one in particular whom John mentions. His name is □ Demetrius. We don't know much about Demetrius, other than John endorses him as a fellow disciple-maker to be welcomed and supported.

There is another person, not among the evangelists, who seems to be an antagonistic leader in a church, perhaps the church to which Gaius belongs. His name is □ Diotrephes. And John calls him out as selfishly getting in the way of making disciples.

So, □ Gaius and Diotrephes are going to give us an intriguing contrast. They are both believers. They are both probably in the same church. And they are both regularly involved in their church.

But one partners in making disciples and thus sets himself up for joy.

The other actually prevents the making of disciples and sets himself up for joylessness.

Now, with the characters identified, let's work our way through the letter. In □ verse 1, John says,

ESV 3 John 1:1 The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.

John identifies himself as □ “the elder.” This is likely a paternal term of endearment. If Gaius is indeed John's spiritual child, then it would make perfect sense that John would say to him something like, “This is your old man.”

When John says Gaius is the one □ “whom I love in truth,” it is consistent with what we learned last week. Namely, real love operates within the boundaries of truth God has revealed.

The truth is: We are to love another as Christ loved us. Christlike love seeks the best interests of others even when it costs us a great deal.

So, for example, the greatest way John could love Gaius is to convey to him the truth about the person and work of Jesus Christ and his offer of eternal salvation to all who will simply believe in him.

There is no greater gift that can be given, no bigger benefit that can be bestowed than leading a person to faith in Jesus. And once that person has believed, there is not a more loving thing we can do than to help that person grow in Christ, because such growth provides a benefit not just in this life, but also throughout eternity.

So, the Great Commission is not about selling people; it's about loving them. At Moon Valley, we call it bringing life.

In verse 2, John says to Gaius,

ESV 3 John 1:2 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.

As a believer who is walking in truth, all is well with Gaius's soul, his inner life. John prays that Gaius's outer life would go as well as his inner life.

Someone has cuttingly speculated that if we prayed this and God granted this for all believers in the church today—that their outward condition would match their inward condition—many would be hospitalized.

I thought it was funny. And then I realized there have been seasons in my Christian life when I also would have been hospitalized.

John continues in verse 3.

ESV 3 John 1:3 For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth.

Evidently, some traveling missionaries, “the brothers” had come to where Gaius lives, and Gaius extended to them Christlike love in support of their work. When the brothers moved on to where John was located, they raved to John about how Gaius was walking in the truth, living out Jesus’s command to love one another. This prompted John to rejoice.

And now in □ verse 4, John makes the claim with which we started.

ESV 3 John 1:4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

Then, beginning in □ verse 5, John heaps praise on Gaius for walking in the truth, as evidenced by his loving support of the missionaries. And he urges Gaius to continue. John says,

ESV 3 John 1:5 Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are,

□ ESV 3 John 1:6 who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God.

□ ESV 3 John 1:7 For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles.

Here in verse 7, John puts his finger on the primary work of the missionaries, namely, □ “they have gone out for the sake of the name.” That is to say, they are traveling from place to place for the purpose of making disciples of Christ. Their occupation is to make disciples.

And they are □ “accepting nothing from the Gentiles,” which is to say, they are entirely supported by the generosity of believers within the church. In this case, “Gentiles” is a term for unbelievers outside the church.

Because of the importance of their work in making disciples and because of their dependence on the giving of believers, John says in □ verse 8,

ESV 3 John 1:8 Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

This is an important verse because there is a mistaken notion that to be committed to the Great Commission one must become a pastor or a missionary like “the brothers” in our text.

But John is saying that, to the extent that we support those who are making disciples, we ourselves become partners in disciple-making. John describes such supporters as □ “fellow workers for the truth.”

Gaius is an example. Gaius is walking in the truth, but he is not counted among the missionary brothers. Nevertheless, through his support of his missionary brothers, he is a fellow worker, a ministry partner, a disciple-making equal.

This is consistent with the biblical imagery of the church being the body of Christ composed of many different parts, with each individual part vitally dependent on the others for the healthy functioning of the whole body in making disciples. The question as to which is more important, the heart or the liver, is unanswerable because one can't function without the other.

So, too, here at Moon Valley, my work as pastor is not more important than your work. Without your support, I have no job. Without your involvement, we have no church. Without you bringing others, we will see no growth.

Your support is vital in making disciples—in bringing the life of Jesus to our world. And that support takes many forms, according to the unique giftedness and capacities of every member of this body: encouraging, teaching, comforting, inviting, giving, greeting, serving, cleaning, praying, visiting, gathering, and otherwise volunteering—all working together to bring life.

The key question to ask ourselves is this: To what extent am I actively partnering in the process of making disciples? How am I bringing the life of Christ to my world?

This is important because bringing life to others can bring the greatest joy to you. Indeed, that is the big idea from the text: Bringing life to others can bring the greatest joy to you.

Am I a selfless partner in bringing life? Or am I just a selfish spectator? Or just a satisfied customer?

It is quite possible for me to be very active in church and have no particular interest beyond myself. I can come only as a spectator for what I can get out of it. I can come as a customer seeking only my own entertainment or enlightenment. I can come only because it makes me feel better.

I am not trying to make you feel guilty if you have these motivations. In fact, I'm glad you're here. I myself first starting attending church for these very reasons. I have played the role of selfish spectator and satisfied customer. And I am still embarrassingly selfish.

But the truth is: Bringing life to others can bring the greatest joy to you.

Along with this truth is the sad reality that there has always been those in the church who are missing out on the greatest joy. Diotrephes is one of them. John mentions him in □ verse 9.

ESV 3 John 1:9 I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority.

Reading between the lines, John likely exercised his apostolic authority in writing a letter of recommendation for “the brothers,” encouraging the church where Diotrephes attends to support them in any way they could—housing them, feeding them, encouraging them, praying for them, funding them.

That Diotrephes is mentioned as one who does not acknowledge John’s authority as an apostle suggests that Diotrephes is a leader in the church, perhaps an elder.

A prominent characteristic of Diotrephes is that he is one □ “who likes to put himself first.” He is not a selfless partner; he is a selfish power broker.

John goes on about Diotrephes in □ verse 10.

ESV 3 John 1:10 So if I come, I will bring up what he is 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.

Diotrephes blocks all support of the brothers in making disciples. He discredits John who recommended them. He himself will not welcome them. And he stops others from welcoming them, ostracizing those who try.

How could Diotrephes do such a thing? It is a failing of church leadership. First, if Diotrephes was indeed an elder, he shouldn't have been because he is not qualified. Second, Diotrephes was apparently such a strong personality that the other leaders in the church just let him do it.

Scripture does not romanticize the leadership of the early church. They were sinners just like the rest of us.

But this does point up the importance of having a plurality of *biblically qualified* elders who are mutually accountable. When elders are appointed who are not qualified and when elders surrender to strong personalities, it is an invitation to trouble like this.

There is another question that occurs to me. *Why* would Diotrephes do such a thing? Why actively hinder the making of disciples in the church that was created by God to make disciples? We are left to speculate.

In my sanctified imagination, I can see Diotrephes wanting to maintain the status quo. "This is my church, and I like things just the way they are. My needs are being met. I am in a position of influence. I am in my comfort zone. We don't need any outsiders trying to challenge or change us."

When we lose sight of our overriding purpose to bring life, we can inadvertently stand in the way of it. And rob ourselves of the greatest joy in the process.

In □ verse 11, John does not mince words.

ESV 3 John 1:11 Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God.

John is not talking here about eternal salvation. He is talking about born-again believers who have a choice to do good or evil in supporting the making of disciples. The choice of words is sobering. According to John, those believers in the church like Diotrophes who hinder the work of the ministry in making disciples are actually doing evil.

Those who do good are from God in the sense that their actions have their source or inspiration in God. Those who do evil have not seen God in the sense that they have lost sight of God and his purposes.

Now, in □ verse 12, John commends to Gaius another one of the missionary brothers named Demetrius.

ESV 3 John 1:12 Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself. We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.

John cannot count on Diotrophes to support Demetrius, but he can count on Gaius, so he writes this letter to Gaius directly.

John finishes off his letter in □ verses 13 through 15 in a customary way.

ESV 3 John 1:13 I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink. 14 I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face.

□ ESV 3 John 1:15 Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends, each by name.

We have worked our way through the entire letter of 3 John, and we are left with □ the big idea: Bringing life to others can bring the greatest joy to you.

I want to acknowledge that there is a flipside to this that some of you know all too well. When a loved one is not walking in the truth, it can be the greatest source of heartache.

It is important to realize we can't make anyone believe in or follow Jesus. We can bring the life of Jesus to them, but they themselves are responsible for receiving it. We can encourage others to walk in the truth, but they may simply walk away, and some do.

And when they do, we can feel the sting of rejection and the sadness of knowing it will not end well for them.

While we cannot avoid the pain of this, we can tell ourselves the truth. We are responsible to bring life to others; we are not responsible for how they respond.

And the big idea is still true. Bringing life to others can bring the greatest joy to you.

Let me share with you a story that affirms this.

After a two-week hospitalization, my ninety-five-year-old father has just been transferred to an in-patient hospice facility where he will live out his days.

It has been heartbreaking. And joyful.

You see, my father also happens to be my child who has been walking in the truth.

Forty-seven years ago, after my freshman year in college, I came to faith in Christ because someone brought life to me. I ended up marrying her.

I was the first in my immediate family to believe. Shortly thereafter, I decided to share my faith with my father.

I was so nervous. I don't remember exactly what I said. Something about having received the gift of eternal life myself, I wanted him to have it too because I loved him.

I just remember feeling like I had botched it. I had no evangelism training. My biblical knowledge was thin. My theology had holes. And my delivery was cringeworthy.

Dad was very polite. He said he thought this Christianity thing might just be a fad with me. He suggested we take up the subject again in a year to see if I still felt the same way about it.

I marked my calendar.

In a year, I sat down with my father again. I told him that my faith had only grown stronger, and I invited him to believe in Jesus for eternal life. He said that he could see now that this was not a fad for me, that I was different. But he said that he was just not ready to take the step of faith for himself.

I was disappointed. But I invited him to come to church with me. He came. The preacher shared the gospel and gave an altar call, inviting people to come forward as an expression of their new faith in Jesus.

Dad got up and walked down the aisle. And he has been walking in truth ever since.

Friday was Dad's first full day at hospice. And he experienced what I now understand some do on their first day: a rally. He has advanced dementia, but that day he was fairly lucid, alert, and able to string a few words together. I read Romans 8, the part that begins, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." We prayed. I he said, "I am so fortunate."

And now, the joy for me is inexpressible. Dad is leaving but I know exactly where he is going and that I will join him one day.

I have no greater joy. And I want that joy for you.

Let's pray. Lord, thank you that someone brought your life to us. Help us to bring life to others and grant us the privilege of experiencing the joy that can come from it. Amen.