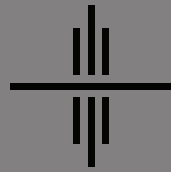




The Quarterly

Summer Letters



Cities Church

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Contents

- 6 Why the Summer Letters
Jonathan Parnell
- 12 Week 1
- 22 For Love's Sake
Josh Adams
- 28 Pastor's Kids Confidential
The Parnells
- 32 Week 2
- 44 The Confronting, Amazing Patience of God
David Easterwood
- 50 Week 3
- 62 Community Groups
Jonathan Parnell
- 68 Week 4
- 80 Story
Jordan Larson

- 94 Week 5
- 106 Let's Talk Face-to-Face
 Jonthan Parnell
- 112 Week 6
- 124 People Matter
 Michael Thiel
- 130 Week 7
- 142 Contending
 Kevin Kleiman
- 148 Week 8
- 158 How I Choose Songs for Cities Church
 Nick Aufenkamp
- 164 My Life, My Words
 The Enersons



6

Why the
Summer Letters

Jonathan
Parnell

It tends to rain in June.

Now it doesn't rain everyday, but it comes down enough to push back the feeling of summer to some time after solstice, to when summer becomes the sum of time marching its way to July 4th, to when, as the dog days arrive and the next thing ahead is football, finally the real summertime sets in.

By then it's been hot long enough that you take it for granted. The grass is so green and the trees so lush that you might even catch yourself trying to imagine how it all looks under freshly fallen snow. And somewhere deep inside,

though you'd never admit it, you might even miss the snow a little, at least parts of the snow, at least for an instance. God knows we love four true seasons, even if we can't help but complain about each one while it's here.

But we're doing a new sermon series. That's what I'm trying to say.

Right in the heart of summer, in real summertime, we're doing a new sermon series through the shortest letters of the New Testament: Philemon, 2 Peter, 2-3 John, and Jude.

We've chosen to do this series for a couple reasons, one practical and the

other theological. Starting with the practical, because summer in Minnesota is traditionally a season of travel and weekend activity, and thus lower church attendance, we didn't want to do a series of sermons that depended on one another. For example, a series like Colossians works best if you can hear every sermon. That's because each sermon builds on the one before it and sets up the one coming after it. It's a barrel of monkeys (if you remember that flat illustration).

These shorter letters, however, are so concise that it doesn't take weeks to unravel its message. You can pretty much

grasp the point of the epistle with one honest look, or maybe two, or sometimes three. We think that the length of these letters matches well with our erratic July and August schedules. To be sure, I'd still encourage you to come for each sermon if you can, but in case you miss one, take comfort in knowing that you can jump right in on the next Sunday. The flexibility is that even if you miss a sermon, you don't have to miss the series.

As for the theological reason, these shorter letters of the New Testament are not just short, they're also obscure. They are what has been called "occasional epis-

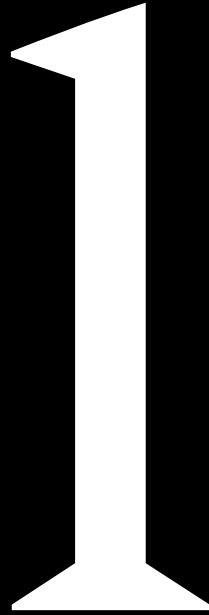
cles.” That means they were likely written to address specific issues in the early church, and sometimes that can make them feel less relevant to our lives today. And because they’re not immediately practical, we can shy away from them (or skim over them) in our normal Bible reading. But short as they are, and occasional as they might be, this summer we want to roll up our sleeves and dig into what God has for us in this less popular section of Scripture. This is God’s word, and we believe it’s a chest full of treasure better than gold, sweeter also than a tri-

ple-scoop cookies and cream on a smoldering afternoon.

I have no doubt that we will learn together in this series, but I’m asking that God do far more than that. I’m praying that he surprise us again with Scripture’s riveting relevance, and that we freshly discover, in ways that only God can show us, the power of his word. In the Summer Letters.

22 For Love's Sake
Josh Adams

28 Pastor's Kids Confidential
The Parnell's



Day 1

Q1 Read the book of Philemon. Who is Philemon? Why is Paul writing a letter to him?

Q2 What's the significance of how Paul goes about making his request of Philemon?

Q3 Paul writes in verse 12 that he is sending Onesimus back to Philemon. If Paul is asking for Onesimus' freedom, why would he send him back to Philemon?

Q4 How does Paul hope that Philemon receives Onesimus when Onesimus returns? What transformation has happened that would make this reception possible?

Q5 Why does Paul offer to pay any debt Onesimus may owe Philemon? Of whom is this behavior reflective?

Day 2

Q1 Read 2 Corinthians 9: 6-15. What point does Paul say he's making in verse 6? Why does he strive to make this point?

Q2 Read verse 7. How does this relate to what Paul asks of Philemon in that letter? In what ways does this relate to your life?

Q3 In verse 10, how does Paul strike against the notion that people are responsible for their success?

Q4 According to verses 11-12, what ultimate purpose does our generosity point toward?

Q5 How does this passage relate to the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross?

I pray that
the sharing of
your faith may
become effective
for the full
knowledge of



every good thing
that is in us for
the sake of
Christ.

Philemon 6

Day 3

Study Psalm 115

Sermon Notes

July 3, 2016

History

20

Church

A dark, high-contrast portrait of John Calvin, showing his face and a beard, set against a black background. The portrait is the central focus of the page.

John Calvin

John Calvin was born on July 10, 1509. Calvin was a French theologian and pastor who had an impact on the Protestant Reformation. Calvin's chief published work was *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.



For Love's Sake

Philemon

22

A black and white photograph of a modern building with large windows and a palm tree in the foreground. The image is oriented vertically, with the building's facade and windows running from top to bottom. A thick, dark vertical beam or pillar is prominent in the center. In the foreground, the dark silhouette of a palm tree's fronds is visible on the left side. The name 'Josh Adams' is written in a white, serif font, oriented vertically along the right edge of the image.

Josh Adams

The great thing about being a new Christian is the raw hunger you have for the word of God. You yearn for it to the point you want to devour the whole Bible in one sitting. It's a fantastic part of a young Christian's life as you see God in previously unknown ways. The downside, if it can be called that, can be when the hunger turns into fleeting consumption, when the hunger doesn't allow you to slow down to consider what the Bible is actually saying.

For me, one of the starkest examples of this hunger in my own life happened with Paul's letter to Philemon. Upon my first reading of the book I thought it was simply a nice story about Paul telling someone named Philemon he should free a slave named Onesimus. That was it. That was the whole part and parcel that I took from the letter. It seemed like a perfectly fine message for its size. In my mind, a short letter meant nothing profound could be addressed or conveyed when there were comparatively massive works like Romans waiting to dispel knowledge by the bushel. Thankfully, God doesn't only allow us to read his word once.

When I read the letter now, what shines isn't Paul simply asking for Onesimus to be freed by Philemon but why Onesimus should be freed. Equally important is how Paul requests this man's freedom. In both cases (the freedom of Onesimus and the request for that freedom), Paul rests on the shared relationship he has with Philemon through Jesus. All of this also hits on the freedom that comes through belonging to Christ.

In verse 8, Paul makes it clear he could command Philemon to free

Onesimus by writing, "Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you." Later, in verse 13, Paul builds upon his approach and expounds upon why he's not commanding anything of Philemon. In that passage he writes, "I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord."

With both verses Paul lays out that he could have used his authority to compel Philemon to act in the desired way. The command could have been given and Philemon would have been compelled to agree. However, Paul's approach shows the beauty of the life we have in Christ. Our lives (just as Philemon's roughly 2000 years ago) are no longer ones composed of "do this because of that." Our lives are governed by the new life we have in Christ. The reason Paul gives Philemon to free Onesimus is not simply because slavery is wrong but because Philemon and Onesimus are now brothers in Christ.

There is no earthly, man-made law that binds Christians to who they are or how they live. There is only Jesus. Paul does not request Onesimus to be freed from slavery because of some societal or political ideology. Instead he appeals to Philemon's nature as a Christian. As a Christian, why does he have his brother in bondage? Why, for whatever reason, would you hold a debt over a Christian sibling's head? Why, when after all that you have been forgiven through Christ, would you not forgive another for what they owe you? Christians are not of this world. We do not behave like

the world. We belong to Christ and therefore we act like him.

With his letter to Philemon, Paul is gently reminding his fellow brother of this new life's walk. Paul doesn't command but he guides. He doesn't scold but he reminds Philemon of all that he has gained through Christ. Paul doesn't condescend to Philemon, rather he speaks with a heart full of love for his brother. So no, this letter isn't what I originally thought it was all those years ago. It addresses slavery but, more vitally, it addresses the way in which Christians should approach how they treat one another. We do not act out of commands but for the sake of love.

In my mind, a short letter meant nothing profound could be addressed or conveyed when there were comparatively massive works like Romans waiting to dispel knowledge by the bushel. Thankfully, God doesn't only allow us to read his word once.



28



Pastor's Kids
Confidential

The Parnells

Jonathan Parnell is the lead pastor at Cities Church. He and Melissa, his wife, have five children (Elizabeth, Hannah, Micah, John Owen, and Noah). What follows is a no holds bar interview with the three oldest children: Elizabeth (8), Hannah (6), and Micah (5).

→ How old are your parents?

Elizabeth: 30
Hannah: 30
Micah: 40

Correct answer: Both Jonathan and Melissa are 30. As far as the interviewer is aware, Micah was not grounded for his answer.

→ Where did your parents grow up?

H: Carolina
E: North Carolina
M: North Carolina

Correct answer: North Carolina

→ How did your parents meet?

M: When daddy saw mommy and fell in love.
E: In high school. Mommy's friend said there was a new boy in school.
H: They met at the zoo!

Correct answer: Unfortunately not the zoo. They met in high school.

→ What do your parents do?

E: Dad comes and takes me to Barnes & Noble. Then we read and we get a snack. I once smashed my face into a Beanie Boo unicorn. It felt good!
H: They go on dates.
M: They always kiss, they hug, and laugh, and go to meetings.

Correct answer: The kids took the question a different way than the interviewer had intended and their answers were better than his intent. Elizabeth answered what her dad does with her. Hannah and Micah answered what their parents do together. So they're all right.

→ What do your parents do for a job?

H: Daddy goes to work and mommy takes care of us and takes us to school.
M: Mommy takes care of us. Daddy is a pastor and mommy drives us to church.
E: Dad's a pastor. Mom takes care of us. It's simple.

Correct answers: Jonathan is a pastor and Melissa is a professional mom to five kids.

→ What did your parents go to college for?

M: He celebrated in college and now he's a pastor. She learned to take care of people.

E: Math, science, and spelling.

H: They learned about God and kissing.

Correct answers: Melissa studied Biblical Studies and English while Jonathan studied Biblical Studies and History.

→ What's your mom/dad's favorite book of the Bible?

E: Dad's is John. Mom's is John, too.

H: Mom likes the Psalms and dad likes all of them!

M: Mom likes Mary. Dad likes when Jesus died.

Correct answer: Both Jonathan and Melissa claim the Psalms as their favorite book.

→ What's your mom/dad's favorite book or movie?

M: Mom likes Frozen and as a little kid she picked out a Frozen book. Dad likes baseball and the Cardinals.

E: Dad's favorite book is the Chronicles of Narnia. Mom's favorite movie is Zootopia. Her favorite book is Roald Dahl.

H: Mommy likes the God movie and daddy likes the God movie. They both like the God book.

Correct answers: Melissa: Anything by CS Lewis (book) and Steel Magnolias (movie). Jonathan: Holiness by John Webster (book) and The Sandlot (movie).

→ What do your parents like to do in their free time?

H: To do something fun with us!

M: Go on dates.

E: Being together. Go on dates and a whole bunch of things and a fancy dinner.

Correct answers: The interviewer may have forgotten to ask the correct answer but these sound like good things to do with free time.

→ What sports do your parents play?

E: My mom plays basketball and my dad plays football and baseball.

H: Mommy played basketball and daddy played baseball.

M: Mommy likes to play flip ball and soccer. Daddy likes to play Cardinals.

Correct answers: Melissa: volleyball, softball, and basketball. Jonathan: baseball.



Day 1

Q1 Read 2 Peter 1:1-15. What does it mean to “have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours?” Who are the people that are equal? What’s the importance of this statement?

Q2 By what means do Christians have the things of Christ? What are some of the items we have been given through Jesus?

Q3 Based on the latter part of 1:4, why is there corruption in the world?

Q4 Starting in 1:5 and going through 1:7, Peter lays out a string of items that act as supplements to our faith. What are these supplement items? How do these items build upon each other and strengthen our faith?

Q5 What reason does Peter give in 1:14-15 why he’s specifically telling his audience to remember their teaching of the truth? Why is this message just as important today?

Day 2

Q1 Read 2 Peter 1:16-21. Why, in 1:16, would Peter explicitly state that he, and his fellow apostles, “did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses to his majesty?” What comfort(s) should this bring us today?

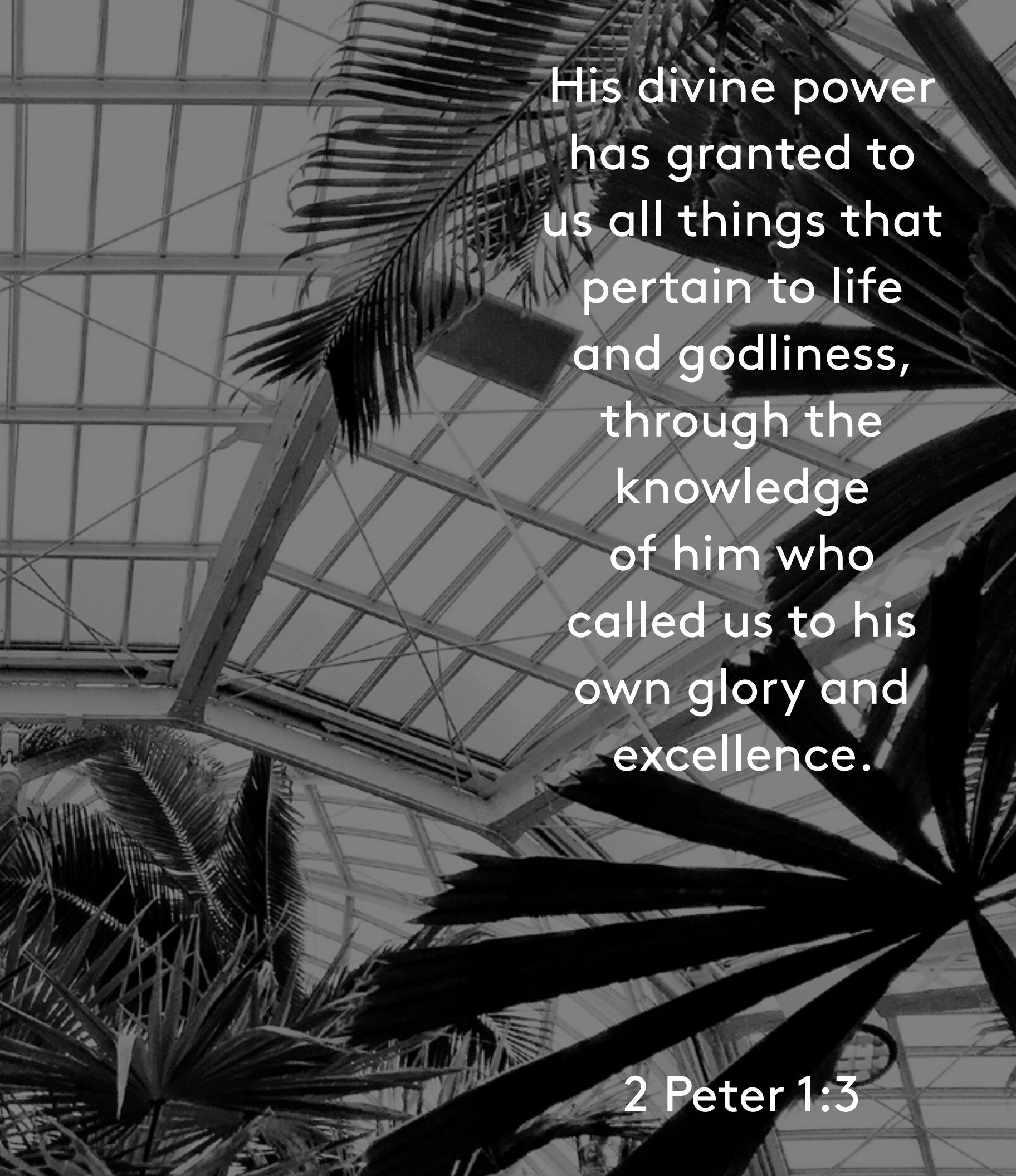
Q2 What moment in the gospels is Peter referring to in 1:17? What was the significance of this event?

Q3 What is “the prophetic word” Peter refers to in 1:19? What does it mean that it is “more sure” than the transfiguration he referred to moments earlier?

Q4 At the end of 1:19 Peter writes, “Until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.” What moment/event is Peter calling out with that phrase?

Q5 According to 1:20, where is the only place prophecy originates? What power does God use to communicate through people?



A black and white photograph of a large conservatory or greenhouse. The structure is made of a complex grid of metal beams and glass panels. Several palm trees are visible, their fronds reaching upwards and outwards, creating a sense of height and natural growth. The lighting is soft, highlighting the textures of the glass and the silhouettes of the plants.

His divine power
has granted to
us all things that
pertain to life
and godliness,
through the
knowledge
of him who
called us to his
own glory and
excellence.

2 Peter 1:3

Day 3

Study Mark 9:2-13

Sermon Notes

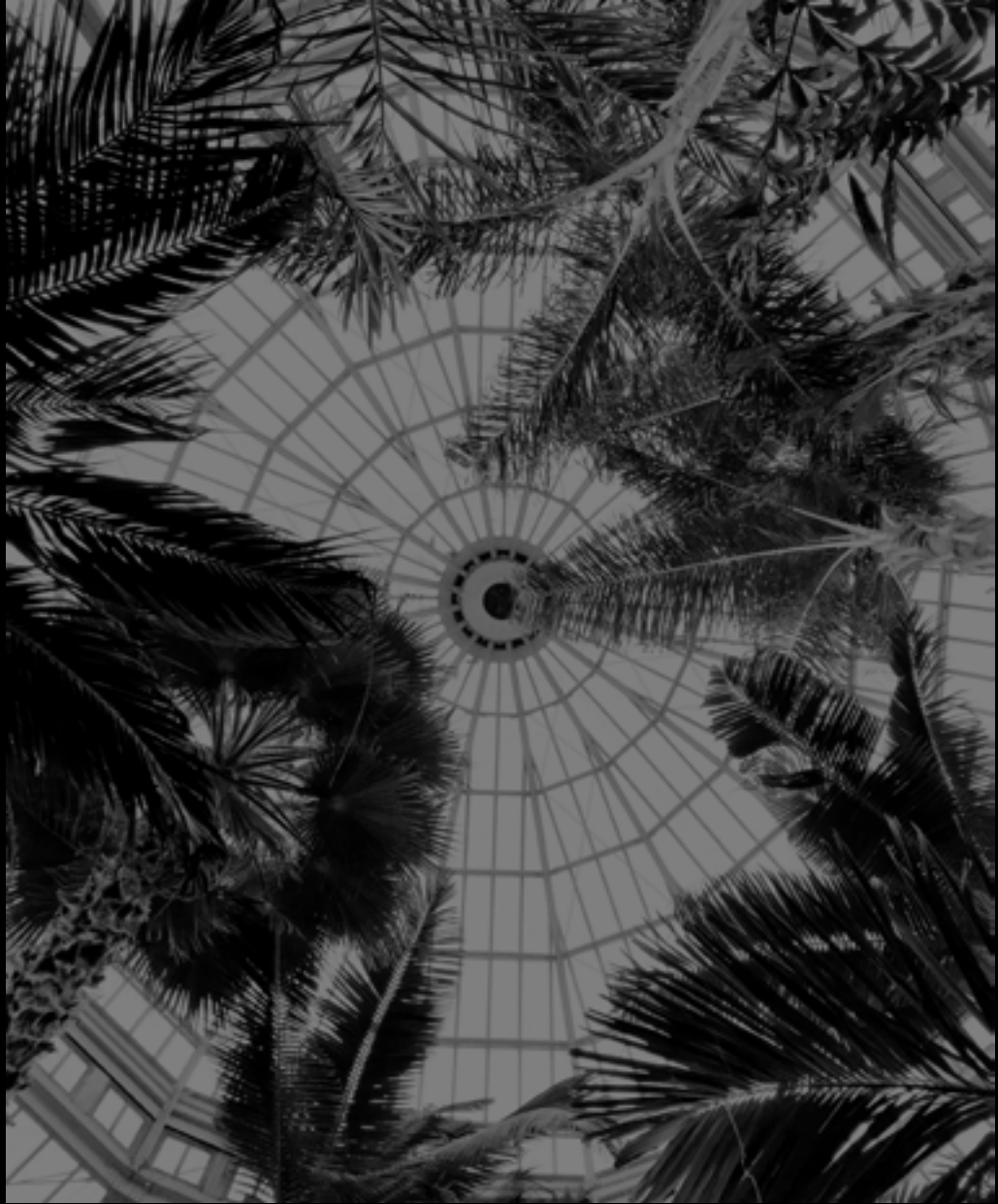
July 10, 2016



The Pilgrims

In the middle of July of 1620, the people who would become known as the Pilgrims left Delfshaven (in The Netherlands) for the New World. The Pilgrims were English people living in The Netherlands due to the instability in the United Kingdom. Seeking religious freedom, the Pilgrims set out for the New World to create an English colony where they could practice their religion freely. Thanks to its democratic tendencies and beliefs, the colony they established, Plymouth, would have a significant effect on what would eventually become the United States.





The Confusing, Amazing Patience of God





Does God see how the world mocks him in word and deed? Does he hear the teachers leading thousands astray through destructive heresies? Does he care about all those who are hurt and lost? These are the questions we ask when we consider the world around us through our social media feeds. And when we ask such things, we sometimes have a more accusatory tone than we would like to admit.

Under the first layer of questions is a second that consists of “Don’t you care about your reputation?” or “Why won’t you do something, God?” This second layer of questions and the motivation behind them is telling. Is it God’s reputation I’m worried about or my own? Do I really care about those led astray by the harmful doctrine of the newest mega church or do I just want my co-worker who goes there to see that I’m right? Is my heart in anguish over the hurting people of the world or do I just want the guy who wounded me to feel pain? The apostle Peter’s second letter preserved for us in the Bible is an important diagnostic for our hearts when such questions arise.

Although a relatively short book of the Bible, 2 Peter leads us to take a long look at our ideas of justice and mercy. A careful reading of this letter can guard us against two great dangers: underestimating the justice of God and underestimating the grace of God.

We tend to read too quickly through a letter like 2 Peter. You can read it in ten minutes or less and then check it off the Bible reading plan. It is easy for a Christian to casually fill in a few mental placeholders and be done. Chapter one reminds us of how

great it is to be a Christian and that we should be working on a few things while watching for false teachers. Chapter two is where the false teachers are called out and shown for what they really are and that leads us to chapter three where we are reminded of the Lord’s coming and encouraged to be ready. We reach the end unaffected except for maybe a smile at the part about Paul’s letters being hard to understand. I would invite you to slow down this time through 2 Peter.

Pumping the brakes a few times through 2 Peter might lead you to notice, as it did for me, that chapter two is uncomfortable. I am usually up for a good chastising of false teachers, but chapter two traces their evil past the point of rebuke and all the way to their destruction. It didn’t sit well with me. I wanted the scene to be more like a Saturday morning cartoon in which the bullies who were picking on me were embarrassed when my super hero best friend showed up to tell them they were wrong. I wasn’t looking to reserve for them the gloom of utter darkness. Pumping the brakes in chapter two made me uncomfortable at first, but now I was at a trembling full stop.

We can be tempted to say to those who mock God, “Just wait. You’ll see.” But be careful in doing so, Christian. Be sure that you’ve thought that retort through to the end. Peter reminds us that the end is certain for those who persist in wickedness. Their destruction is assured and complete. God is just and those who scoff at his holiness will not be suffered forever. Peter, through the Holy Spirit’s inspiration, is beginning to answer some of the questions we had

God is not slow as some count slowness.

He tarries for a reason. His justice is sure and will have its day, but he waits with patience. He pauses in mercy.

in the beginning. God does indeed see and hear the mockers and the false teachers. He sees them far better than we do and he will deal with them with far more finality than we probably considered.

But why does God wait to reveal the totality of his justice? For help in answering that we have chapter three of 2 Peter. If the picture of God's justice in chapter two left us with our knees knocking, then the view of God's mercy in chapter three will absolutely level us.

God is not slow as some count slowness. He tarries for a reason. His justice is sure and will have its day, but he waits with patience. He pauses in mercy. Peter tells us in chapter three that God's patience is our salvation. I cannot stress enough the importance of letting chapter three of 2 Peter soak in and saturate our hearts.

I am sure that some faithful saint looked around at his or her world in 1979 and thought, "What a mess, God. Hasn't this gone far enough? Haven't the scoffers had their time? Won't you come now and take away all the pain?" And if Jesus had come again at that time, I would not exist. And worse, I would not know the salvation of the Lord. I would not have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the promise of one day worshipping God in his full, unmitigated presence. The same can be said for most of the people of Cities Church.

In mercy God suspends the destruction of the wicked in order for more of the wicked to become saints. Does God care for the hurt and the lost? That was our last question from the first paragraph. God cares

immensely for the hurt and the lost. More than we can imagine. He cares so much for the hurt and the lost that he waits to execute his final judgment in order to call more of the hurt and the lost to salvation through faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

It is not wrong to wait for the new heavens and the new Earth with expectation and longing, but as long as the Lord waits to return, there is work to be done. If we are counting justice and mercy by our own measures, we open ourselves to the errors of our sinful nature. We want the scoffers to be wiped out, but just after I cease to be one. We want the Lord to act quickly, as long as I had enough time to safely reach home. We are happy that his mercy reached even me, but does it need to reach the guy I don't much like? We are wrong in such thoughts and 2 Peter helps us see that.

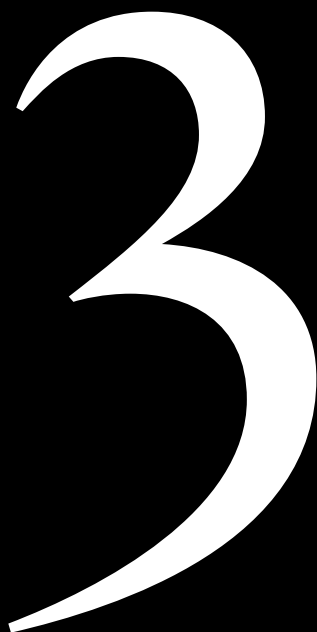
Each new day that the sun comes up prior to Christ's return is opportunity. Each day is opportunity for more of the hurting to be healed and more of the lost to be found. Peter tried to tell me in chapter one, but I was going too fast. In chapter one, Peter encourages us to make every effort to supplement our faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. He says that the lack of such things makes us so nearsighted that we are blind, but if we have them we will not be unfruitful. While we wait for Christ we are to be fruitful. Fruitful in growing closer to Jesus.

Fruitful in lives that more perfectly reflect his glory. Fruitful in sharing the gospel with as many as will listen.

I pray that God would use the time that Cities Church spends in 2 Peter to motivate us by his Spirit to count his patience as salvation, not only for us, but for these cities.







Day 1

Q1 Read 2 Peter 2:1-16. Right away in chapter 2, Peter warns his audience of false teachers. In what way will these false teachers arise? What consequence on the truth of Christ will these false teachers have?

Q2 Why does Peter list the various trials of the righteous and the punishments of the unrighteous? What purpose do his illustrations serve for us today?

Q3 What methods will false teachers use to ensnare people to their deceitful practices?

Q4 What is the ultimate fate of those that would distort the truth about God?

Q5 Why does Peter introduce Balaam in his letter? What does the story of Balaam (which happens in Numbers 22-24) show about God's power?

Day 2

Q1 Read 2 Peter 2:17-22. Who are the “waterless springs and mists driven by a storm” that Peter mentions in 2:17? What does this description reveal about the motivations behind these people and the endurance of their message?

Q2 What does it mean “for them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved?”

Q3 Peter writes in 2:19 that “whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.” How is this true? What examples in your own life speak to this passage?

Q4 Why is it worse to profess freedom from sin’s enslavement only to return into its embrace? What does this say about the false teachers’ statement of belief?

Q5 Peter references Proverbs 26:11, which says, “Like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool who repeats his folly.” Why is this true?





Day 3

Study Hebrews 6:1-8

Sermon Notes

July 17, 2016

Apollo 11



The crew of Apollo 11 became the first people to ever set foot on the moon on July 20, 1969. Landing on the moon was only possible because God created it and physics.









Community Groups

Vision
Highlight

Jonathan
Parnell

Community Groups are the organizing structure for ministry at Cities Church. We like to think of our corporate worship gathering as the heartbeat that pumps life into the day-to-day ministry that happens in and through our Community Groups.

A couple years ago when we were crafting the vision for discipleship at Cities, we originally called these groups “Mission Teams.” The point was that we wanted to emphasize their “mission” purpose as something different than our experiences in traditional small group ministry. We defined the groups as “focused, shared ministry networks” — they would be a band of Christians focusing on ministry in the places we live, work, and play; and they would be sharing ministry together as men and women with a variety of spiritual gifts. Community Group means Christians would be teaming up not mainly to care for one another, but to be a collective witness for those who don’t know Jesus. The purpose was to make Jesus known, to love our neighbors, to seek the good of the Cities by starting in our own communities as a community of Christians — which is why “Community Group” eventually stuck.

As we’re entering our second summer as a church, it seems like a good time to highlight a few other pieces that go into this vision for discipleship. There are at least three pieces that sit under our Community Groups as foundational convictions.

1

Discipleship Is a Community Project

It is our conviction that we are always missionaries in community, not lone evangelists sent into the world. The commission to make disciples is given to the church as a whole, not individual Christians in isolation, or to those who are exceptionally gifted. “At the center or hub of life,” Chester and Timmis explain, “is not me as an individual but us as members of the Christian community.” Therefore, we want to create a structure that sees mission as a community project. We seek the good of the Cities together — in shared ministry.

2

Discipleship Needs a Focus

Foundational to discipleship is its inseparability from a locale, from a surrounding, from real people in a specific context. Followers of Jesus are always the people of some here and some there — which requires that we truly live in that here and there. We believe God has sent us into these Cities not generally or abstractly, but here in real neighborhoods and workplaces and third spaces among real people with real needs who need to know the real love and truth of Jesus. If we want to see the Twin Cities overcome by the gospel, then we have to start somewhere, and that somewhere, we believe, should be the places we live, work, and play.

3

Community Happens on Mission

Relationships matter when it comes to mission. If you’ve ever been on a mission trip, you know that it helps to get along with the people you’re working with. High trust and sincere compassion go a long way. But even then, a mission trip is called a mission trip, not a friendship trip. You are there with a goal in view — to serve a need, to fulfill a task. And oftentimes, without even meaning to, friendships are formed. That’s the nature of relationships. No two people become real friends by staring at one another, but by looking, shoulder-to-shoulder, at the same thing. That’s what Lewis is getting at when he writes in *The Four Loves*,

Friendship arises out of mere companionship when two or more of the companions discover that they have in common some insight or interest or even taste which the others do not share and which, till that moment, each believed to be his own unique treasure (or burden).

The common insight or interest or taste of a community on mission is to see the gospel advance. That’s what we want, and — not to overextend the application of Lewis’s quote — the gospel is very much a unique treasure.

We believe that when the gospel is central, and people share the desire to see the gospel advance, they will discover community. And, simultaneous to this kind of community, they can’t help but work for gospel advance. In sum, the gospel on mission builds community; and community with the gospel leads to mission.

Community Group
means Christians
would be teaming up
not mainly to care
for one another, but
to be a collective
witness for those who
don't know Jesus.





4

Day 1

Q1 Read 2 Peter 3:1-7. In the first verses of chapter 3, Peter reiterates his purpose for the letter. What is the purpose? Why does it bear repeating, not just for the original audience but also for Christians today?

Q2 What is one of the arguments Peter ascribes to the scoffers his audience will encounter? How has the situation with ridiculers of first century believers evolved in modern times?

Q3 Why does Peter bring up how the earth was formed?

Q4 After stating how the earth was formed by and through water, what's the significance of Peter saying how fire will be used during the day of judgment?

Q5 Even though there is still doubt and those who mock God, what hope can Christians find in the passage from 3:1-7?

Day 2

Q1 Read 2 Peter 3:8-18. Why does Peter bring in how God experiences time? What argument is this given to help Christians battle?

Q2 In 3:9 Peter writes, "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." Where else in the bible does this theme appear?

Q3 What is "the day of the Lord" that Peter writes of in 3:10? How should Christians' lives be shaped knowing that "the day of the Lord will come like a thief?"

Q4 What will arrive after the day of the Lord? What is so magnificent about these new arrivals?

Q5 How does Peter instruct his audience to live at the end of the letter? How do these instructions help us today?





Day 3

Study Revelation 21:1-8

Sermon Notes

July 24, 2016

History

76

Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn

Church



Dutch Painter Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn is born to a wealthy family in Leyden. Personal tragedies seemed to deepen the spiritual dimensions of his art, and he eventually created nearly 90 paintings and etchings depicting Christ's passion.







Jordan Larson

Story

81

My life has truly been outrageously blessed by God. There are so many good things in my life that had nothing to do with my choices, behavior, or knowledge. I don't deserve the life I have and I certainly don't deserve life everlasting. From the beginning of my life I have been graciously loved by the Good Shepherd. In fact, one of my earliest memories is my mom explaining the gospel to me.

Like all young children I disobeyed my parents daily and, in love, my parents disciplined me. Even though every child receives punishment, the LORD used a common experience to show me his mercy. Sometime around the age of four or five, I remember standing in

the kitchen of our house. I don't know what sparked the conversation or what followed, but I do remember being told that just as I disobey my parents and I deserve punishment for my actions, we all have disobeyed God and deserve punishment for our actions. However, Jesus has taken our punishment for us so that we can be with God when we die.

What amazes me is how I could understand some of the concepts in this simple gospel message. How did I understand who God and Jesus were, what death was, and how someone could take on my punishment? I don't know how I believed, but I did. The LORD was gracious to me.

But the fact remains that the gospel is not only this simple truth as explained by my mom, it is richer and deeper than we can possibly imagine. Throughout my life I have been shown more and more of how in Christ “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3). I have come to know and experience that the gospel is not just for the moment of conversion, but it is the very lifeblood of the Christian.

Throughout my childhood, my knowledge of the Bible and of God grew. Enrolled at a Lutheran School from K-12, I was taught Biblical history and was required to memorize Scripture verses as well as parts of Luther’s

small catechism. I learned a lot of information and understood the difference between the Law of God (His Commands) and the Gospel of God (His Grace). I even lived out what would have been considered a Christian life, but I still hadn't grasped the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ.

On the contrary, I thought I had everything pretty much figured out. I thought I knew the Bible well enough—at least better than most people. I knew arguments for the authenticity of the Bible and Christianity. I knew plenty of theological concepts, including the basics of the gospel. Certainly, I could sin less than I did, but I was sure that as I got old-

er I'd become more disciplined and that would solve most of my problems. Oh, how little did I actually know!

In the summer after my freshman year of college, I read *Crazy Love* by Francis Chan. This book opened my heart to the fact that, although I knew a lot about Christ, I barely knew Christ intimately and emotionally. This really shook my life's trajectory. Following Jesus doesn't mean I can only have knowledge of Christ's sacrifice, but I needed "to know this love that surpasses knowledge." Instead of focusing most of my time and energy to academic and personal achievement, I needed to focus on Christ. This drove me to seek out Christian

community at the University of Minnesota which I thankfully found in Campus Outreach.

This community changed my life. Through the relationships I made and the truths that I heard, my understanding of the gospel has deepened. Throughout my childhood I had always understood the gospel as a courtroom scene where I stand before God the Judge for a fatal sentencing, but Jesus steps in and takes my punishment instead and I can walk free. However, I learned that another way to look at the gospel is as a hospital scene where I lie before God the Healer with a fatal disease, but Jesus steps in and gives his blood for me so I can live again. This second view showed

me that sin is not bad behavior, but it is a brokenness of the soul. I needed Jesus not just for covering my bad deeds, I needed him to change my heart and mind, my very soul.

This deeper understanding of my sin problem prompted me to look at my desires and my emotional responses to the gospel. It pushed me beyond just knowing the truth, to loving the truth. This was truly transforming who I was. I realized the gospel was not just for life after death, but for my life now. The solution to my problems was not discipline, but Jesus!

Over the past several years, I have come to understand my desperate need to daily re-

mind myself of who I am by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Knowing Jesus is not like knowing physics and world history. Knowing Jesus is believing the gospel so well that I am changed to my very core, that I am continually being changed to image Jesus because his blood flows through my veins, through my very heart. I cannot truly live without him.

Now there are also many other things that Jesus has done, is doing, and will do in my life and in lives everywhere. I can easily say with John that “Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written”

(John 21:25), but for now this will have to be enough.





5

Day 1

Q1 Read 2 John 1-6. What is “the truth” John speaks of in verse 2? Why does this description fit?

Q2 How does the truth abide in us? Why does this matter?

Q3 With what commandment does John’s letter concern itself?

Q4 What does it mean that there are people “walking in love?” Why is it important?

Q5 How does a person “walk in love” in their daily life?

Day 2

Q1 Read 2 John 7-13. How does John describe “deceivers” in verse 7?

Q2 Why is John warning his letter’s recipients about deceivers? What’s the danger he’s trying to keep them from encountering?

Q3 In verse 9 John writes the statement “everyone who goes on ahead.” What does this statement represent?

Q4 How does John instruct his audience to handle a situation where they encounter false teaching? In what ways can you apply this to your life?

Q5 What reason does John give, in verse 12, give for cutting his letter short? How does this reason reflect God’s design for community?

I hope to come to
you and talk face
to face, so that
our joy may be
complete.

2 John 12





Day 3

Study 1 Corinthians 13:4-13

Sermon Notes

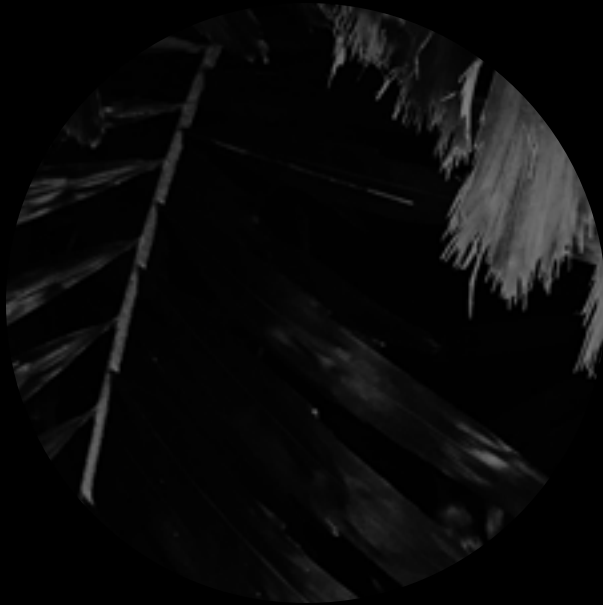
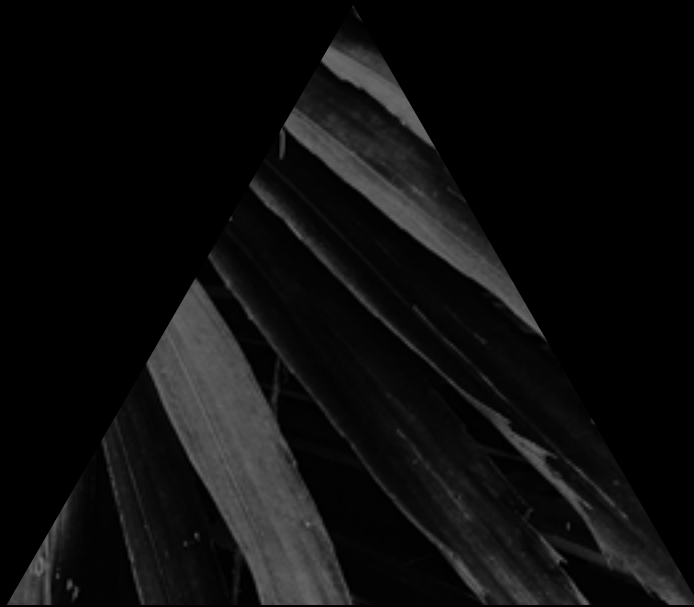
July 31, 2016

James I of England



James VI of Scotland becomes James I of England on July 26, 1603. Among his many acts affecting English religious life, it is he for whom the King James Version is named.





Let's Talk Face-to-Face

2 John

106



Jonathan Parnell

Love God, and love one another.

If the apostle John were to visit our church next Sunday and have only one chance to exhort us, there's a good chance he'd say something about love. Even the simplest reading through his three short epistles can catch onto this common theme. Reminiscent to the words of Jesus himself in John's Gospel, we as the people of Jesus are commanded again and again to be a radical community rooted in and characterized by love. "By *this*," Jesus had said, "all people will know that you are my disciples" (John 13:35).

So John's message to us would be about love, but there's something else about it that we shouldn't miss. It's that John himself would be delivering it to us. He'd be saying it to us in person. *Face to face*.

Okay, now, so we know that the apostle John can't really visit our church next Sunday, and he can't talk with any of us, at least not here, not yet. *But if he could, that's exactly what he'd do. He'd visit us. He'd want to be here.* And we know this because that's what he says at the end of his second epistle, in verse 12.

Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. *Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face*, so that our joy may be complete (2 John 12)

He actually says this again in 3 John 14.

Don't get me wrong — John would remind us — *writing has its advantages*, starting with the fact that it lives on long after we're gone. Indeed, God has

chosen written words as the ongoing revelation of his will and authority. But when it comes to ministry, to helping followers of Jesus "walk in the truth" (2 John 4), John would rather *be with us*. He'd rather be here — visible, hearable, touchable. He'd want to see our faces, and he'd want us to see his.

And this has implications for how we think about our own ministries, as individuals and as a church. I'll mention three.

1

The nature of discipleship is relational

The first thing that John's face-to-face preference tells us is that discipleship is fundamentally relational. It's important that John's hope for the church is not that they amass a wealth of theological knowledge. That's not what he says. Instead, he was thrilled to find the church *walking in the truth*. He wanted the church to be shaped by the gospel in how they lived. What matters more is not what they know, but how they act and react amid the complexities of everyday life. And this, of course, is not something that he could merely hear about; it's something he needed to see — something he had to *find*.

So what did he do?

Well, presumably, he went where they were and lived with them. For some stretch of time — we're not sure how long — he rubbed shoulders with the church to whom he writes. He saw their lives and they saw his. He built relationships. He did discipleship face-to-face.

We as the people of Jesus are commanded again and again to be a radical community rooted in and characterized by love.

2

You do what you can

At this point, though, we should be careful not to make a bigger deal about face-to-face ministry than John himself does. We know he preferred it — that’s what he says. And at the same time, he is sharing his preference *because it’s not possible*. He’d rather talk with the church face-to-face than use paper and ink, but he uses paper and ink to tell them that. He had a preference for the kind of ministry he wanted to do, but when that preference didn’t work out, he just did what he could. He wrote. He doesn’t abandon his ministry because it’s not in his ideal form. *I’d rather not use paper and ink*, he said, *but that’s what I’ve got, so here goes*.

And the only reason I can figure out why he does this is because his love for the church transcended his love for his ministry preference. When you love the people to whom you minister more than a particular type of ministry, you do what you can.

3

The gospel has a radical realness

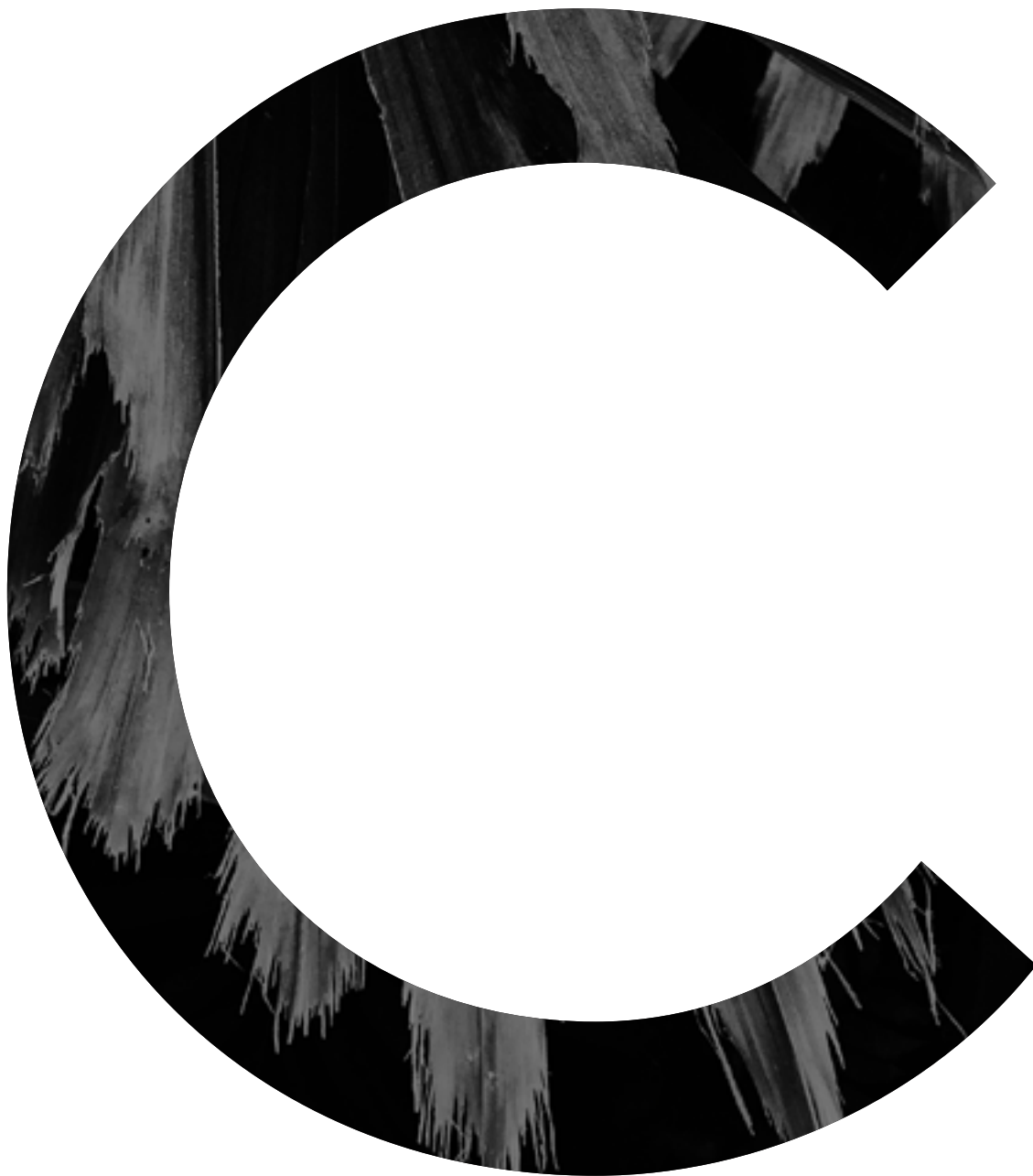
John says in verse 7, “For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh.”

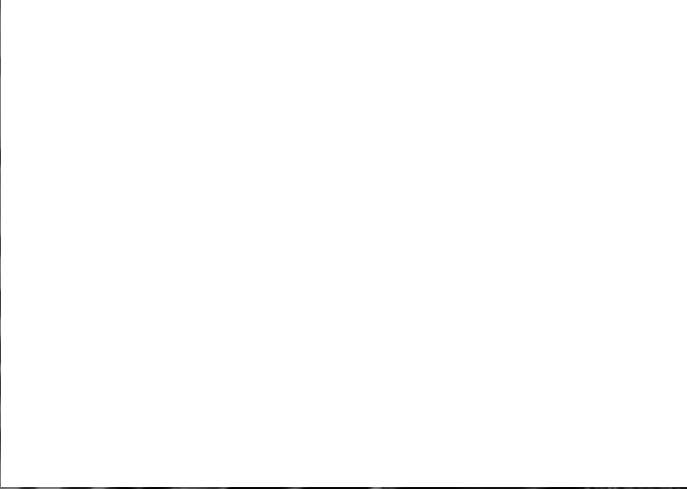
For John, the litmus text for Christian orthodoxy was whether or not you affirmed that Jesus came to earth as a real person. As he puts it in 1 John 4:2, “By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.”

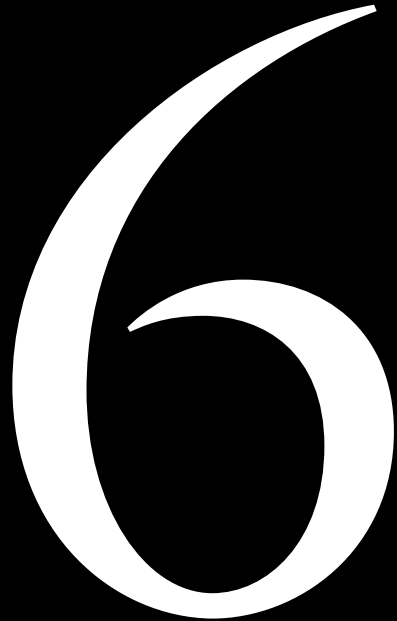
This is simple truth when it comes to us creedal Christians a couple thousand years removed. But in those days, to recognize that God had come to earth as a human, that he had walked among us as one of us, it would have set you apart from everything else known to man. It actually still does.

So John means what he says here. If you have the audacity to claim that God became a man, and that his name is Jesus, and that he walked and talked and ate with us here in this world, then yeah, it’s the Holy Spirit who’s behind that. The gospel has a serious earthiness to it, which takes heavenly insight to comprehend.

The gospel has real flesh and blood to it, which probably has something to do with John’s flesh-and-blood preference in ministry. The gospel was, at one point, looking people in the face as a carpenter’s son from Nazareth. It was so ordinary that even as people saw his signs and wonders, they couldn’t get past that it was Joseph’s boy everybody was talking about it. *Joseph’s boy. The carpenter’s kid* (and there’s reason to imagine he might have been called worse). Jesus was, and is, a scandal of realness. He was air-breathing, heart-beating, mouth-moving, word-speaking real. He was and he is. And one day we’ll see it all more clearly than we do now.







Day 1

Q1 Read 3 John 1-8. In verses 1 through 4, how does John greet Gaius, the recipient of this letter? How does John's greeting differ from how we typically greet people in modern times?

Q2 In verse 5, John refers to brothers that are also strangers. How is this possible? What does this say about the larger context of Christian community/family?

Q3 In what ways does the phrase in verse 7, "For they have gone out for the sake of the name" relate to Acts 5:41? What is the driving force behind the actions in both verses?

Q4 Why, in verse 7, would John mention that fellow Christian missionaries did not accept anything from the Gentiles during their travels? Read 1 Thessalonians to gain more insight into this behavior.

Q5 What does it mean, in verse 8, to be "fellow workers for the church?" In your daily life, how does this phrase apply?

Day 2

Q1 Read 3 John 9-15. Who is the person John has an issue with in verse 9? What is the issue John has with this man?

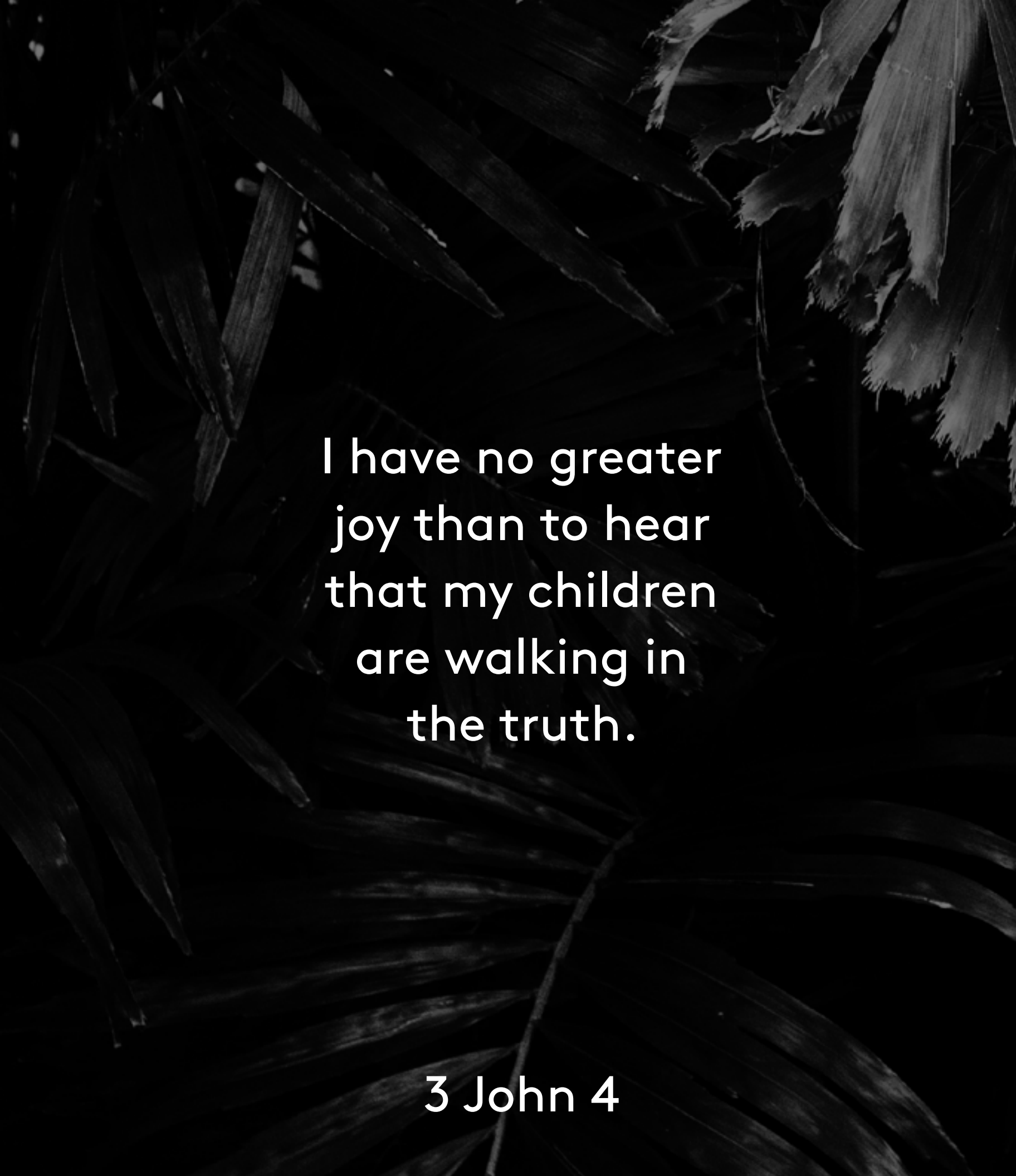
Q2 What are John's instructions concerning good and evil? In what ways do we ignore his instruction in our daily lives? How can we combat the evil doings of which John speaks?

Q3 How does the issue of ignoring the teachings of Jesus and the apostles continue today?

Q4 What can we learn from how John approaches the subject of another believer not following true doctrine?

Q5 Read Psalm 34. What further help does this passage provide in the fight against evil? How does it connect with John's instruction to do good?





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

3 John 4

Day 3

Study Galatians 6:1-5

Sermon Notes

August 14, 2016



William
Wilberforce

August 24, 1759 was the day William Wilberforce entered the world. Wilberforce was an evangelical Christian who strongly supported the abolition of slavery. As a Member of Parliament in the United Kingdom, Wilberforce took a Christian-backed stance against slavery. He was the lead voice in Parliament against slavery. Due to health issues, he retired from Parliament in 1826 but continued the campaign. The abolitionist effort finally found success in the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, which was passed through Parliament three days before Wilberforce died.





Michael Thiel



People Matter

3 John

125

The apostle John, in the short letter of 3 John, is doing a few things differently than his previous letter (2 John). First, this is a more personal letter. John is referencing specific people. In verse 1, John states that he is writing to the beloved Gaius. In verse 9, John calls out Diotrephes. In verse 12, John commends Demetrius.

Why this personal attention? Because it goes hand in hand with the nature of this letter, which is all about hospitality. Hospitality is heavily relational rather than generic, and this letter follows that principle by being personal. Here, John is commending Gaius for the hospitality he has shown to those who preach Truth. Furthermore, John is tough on those who do not practice hospitality to fellow believers. John really cares about the practice of hospitality. In 2 John the issue was showing hospitality to the wrong visitors while in 3 John the issue is not showing hospitality to your fellow believers.

Though John is being personal with Gaius, what is striking is that we know very little about Gaius. John is an apostle and one of Jesus's closest friends. But Gaius? We don't know who he is. Gaius was one of the most common names in the Roman Empire at this time so it is very difficult to identify this man. And yet John really cares about this person. What was so impactful about this friendship? John states that this friendship was based "in truth." The gospel was the rock-solid foundation of this friendship. The gospel framework is a powerful context to govern a friendship. Humility, repentance, and sincere love characterize these friendships, and it should be a model for us.

Practical and Ultimate

John loves these believers. He really cares about them. It is an interesting situation where John can pray for so many practical things such as good health, and yet he shows us by example what is most important in life. John lives in the contented reality that health and prosperity are important but not ultimate. Joy in people and in walking in Truth are more ultimate joys that should shape our lives. There are so many complexities and viewpoints on our life here on earth. Health, wealth, and prosperity are not ultimate, yet God does care about these things and they are something we can pray for. But we also know that there are temptations with money to make wealth an ultimate thing in our heart. That's sin. Anything in our hearts that is bigger than God is sin.

With a heart-change to love and trust Jesus we really enjoy Truth and we enjoy discipleship. John has great joy in discipleship. John has this personal connection with the people he leads and mentors. He cares about their health, but he cares most about their souls. He has great joy to hear that his people are walking in truth and living day by day by the gospel. Did this happen in a snap? No, it took time and energy for John. He was personal with them. He walked with them. He did life with specific men. And Gaius benefited from John. The apostle most likely showed Gaius what it was like to be a hospitable person.

Love the Stranger

Sometimes in the Christian life we feel compelled in our heart to do something good for someone. And at times we may have that nagging voice in our head whisper that it is a waste of time and that it's not worth our effort. Yet that is not true. God accomplishes many of his deeds through people. And John encourages Gaius by acknowledging that these people that he is hosting are strangers to him. Yet, Gaius is pouring out love and attention for these people.

John says it is a "faithful thing" when you give all this effort to other Christians, even when you don't know them. Evidently Gaius was really hospitable to some people and they gave Gaius a raving review in front of the church. These people were on a journey and Gaius welcomed them well. Verse 7 tells us a lot, namely that these people were missionaries and when they came through Gaius took care of them. These missionaries went out for the sake of Jesus' name. This tells us about the mission. The mission was to promote Jesus' name. These people accepted nothing from Gentiles, which probably refers to unbelievers. John is encouraging Gaius and the readers of this letter to support people who go out and spread Jesus' name. These visitors were traveling Christian workers. John is praising Gaius' actions. From a Biblical standpoint, what Gaius is doing is good. We do well to be hospitable and welcome fellow believers, especially those sent out to spread the gospel.

John is encouraging the service of sending missionaries on their way with goods to help them. These are

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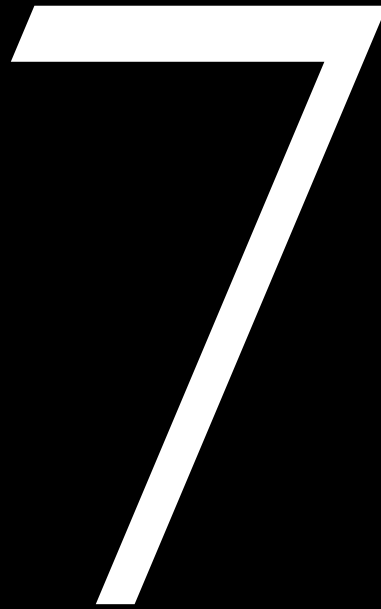
tangible things like financial support. These are the things that John prays for on behalf of Gaius in the welcome of the letter. And John calls us to send out people “worthy of God” — how well we support missionaries reflects on how much we love Jesus because it all points to how worthy God is.

Relationships and people matter. John displays the importance of relationship in how he cares so much about Gaius that he doesn’t want to hide behind ink and paper. He wants to see him face to face and do life together with Gaius. John cares about people in that he wants his church to be a people who are hospitable and welcoming.

3 John calls us to consider our day-in and day-out long-term mentorship relationships, and it challenges us to welcome “strangers” into our home to serve them.







Day 1

Q1 Read Jude 1-7. Who is Jude? Why does he introduce himself the way he does?

Q2 What does the pace of verse 3 tell us about Jude's mindset for the subsequent message?

Q3 In what ways could the "ungodly people" Jude mentions in verse 4 be perverting the "grace of our God?" How does this happen today?

Q4 Jude says, in verse 5, that Jesus saved the Jews from Egypt. How is this possible?

Q5 What example do the rebellious angels and Sodom and Gomorrah provide? How does it relate to the false teachers Jude is warning his audience of in this letter?

Day 2

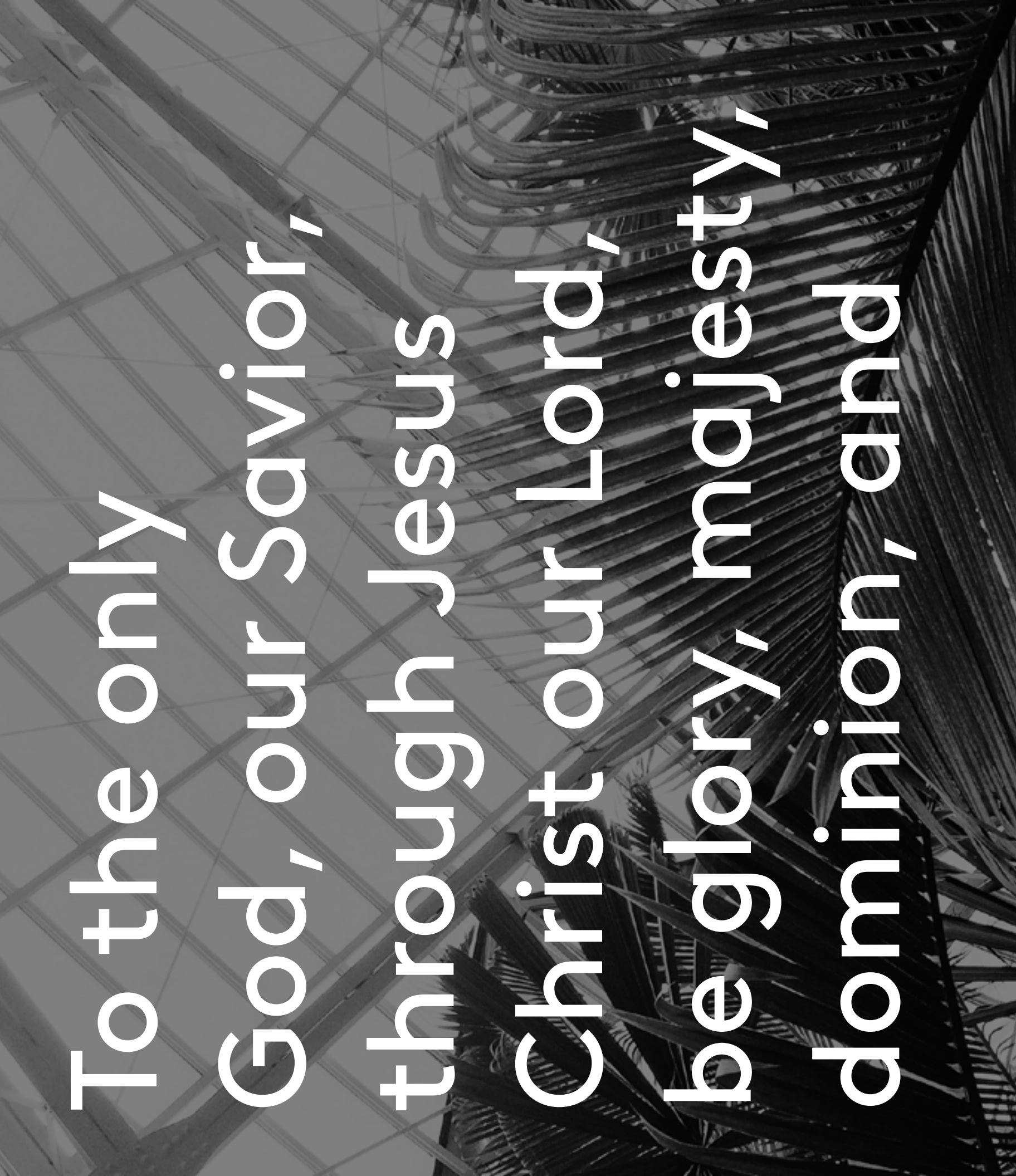
Q1 Read Jude 8-13. On the surface, relying on your dreams may not seem like rebellion yet Jude links the false teachers “relying on their dreams” to Cain, Balaam’s seeking of personal gain, and Korah’s rebellion. How do these things connect? What’s at the heart of each of these rebellions?

Q2 What is meant by “defile the flesh, reject authority, and blaspheme the glorious ones?”

Q3 In verse 9, Jude mentions how the archangel Michael addresses the devil. Why does he mention this interaction at all?

Q4 What is Jude implying when he writes that false teachers are “destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively?”

Q5 Starting in verse 12, Jude makes several analogies to the effects of false teaching. What is the ultimate effect of false teaching?



To the only
God, our Savior,
through Jesus
Christ our Lord,
be glory, majesty,
dominion, and

authority, before
all time and
now and forever.
Amen.

Jude 25

Day 3

Study Genesis 4:1-7

Sermon Notes

August 21, 2016

The March on Washington



The March on Washington happened on August 27, 1963. The march concerned civil and economic rights for African-Americans. It was at this event that Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. would give his "I Have a Dream" speech. The March on Washington was critical to the eventual passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.





Contending

Jude
Kevin Kleiman



The book of Jude, written by the brother of James and the half-brother of Jesus, is a call to fight. Jude, eager to write to those called in Christ about the glories of their common salvation, knows that the situation at hand requires a more urgent tone: these believers need to fight, to be on guard, to contend for the faith. There are false teachers that have slipped into the church, twisting the gospel into a do-whatever-feels-good lie, denying that Jesus is truly our Lord and master and thereby threatening to rip out the very power source of the faith. And so Jude is writing to teach these believers how to respond - and he directs them to two main solutions, one external and one internal.

The first truth that Jude calls attention to is that we have a great and holy king who promises to protect his own. When the wolves come in, as the apostles predicted that they would, Jude calls us to remember that Jesus is our great shepherd that has lain down his life for the sheep, who will protect us against false teachers. Jude proceeds to lay out several examples from the history of Israel that demonstrate God's unwavering commitment to defending the glory of his name and the spiritual health of his people. This is interesting because it's different than our natural response. When we or something we value is threatened, our natural response tends to be taking the problem into our own hands, brainstorming to figure out how we are going to solve the situation. Perhaps we fret and worry, projecting the possible bad outcomes and fearing the future. But Jude points these believers in a different direction - he points them outside of themselves first, and

We have a great and holy king who promises to protect his own. When the wolves come in, as the apostles predicted that they would, Jude calls us to remember that Jesus is our great shepherd that has lain down his life for the sheep, who will protect us against false teachers

asks them to remember how the Lord has contended for them in the past. Jesus, who saved his people out of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. Specifically, since Jude is focusing on false teachers here, this must be a reference to Numbers 14:37, where we learn that the men who spread the bad report of the promised land because of their unbelief were struck down by a plague. They were spreading false information among the people and threatening the glory of God, and thus the souls of the people, and so the Lord protected the rest of his flock. Jude goes on to talk about the example of Michael the archangel, who, in contending with the greatest false teacher of all (Satan, the father of lies), trusted the ultimate contending to the Lord, saying, "The Lord rebuke you." Again, we see that

Jude is pointing us towards examples where the Lord is the primary actor, and calling these believers to put their faith in the great hero. Jude continues, pointing them to the curses given to Cain (Genesis 4:12), Balaam (Numbers 22), and Korah (Numbers 16:1-3; 31-35), historical examples that display the benevolent actions of a kind but firm Father who does not tolerate direct attacks on his glory. Whether his protecting judgment comes during this life or the next, Jude calls these Christians to trust in the merciful judge rather than taking actions into their own hands.

In verse 20, Jude's tone begins to shift, and his focus for them turns to the second part of this call to contend for the faith. He says, "But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life." There are two main activities within Jude's call here: 1) build yourselves up and 2) pray in the Spirit, both of which result in keeping us in the love of God.

First of all, what does Jude mean by telling these early Christians to build themselves up in their faith? Elsewhere, when language like this is used in the New Testament, you get a picture of an active fight to remember the gospel and cling to grace. Paul addresses the Colossians and reminds them to never advance beyond the foundation of the gospel, "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith..." (Colossians 2:6-7). Paul also directs the Ephesian elders similarly in Acts

20:32: “And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” We can go to Jesus himself and find a similar theme in John 15 as Jesus discusses how we remain fruitful, “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.” So as we abide in Jesus and give ourselves to his word of grace, we are built up in our faith... But what does that look like in our daily lives?

One application of the call to build ourselves up would be the spiritual discipline of preaching the gospel to yourself. We are constantly listening to ourselves, and naturally, our selves will tend to speak anxieties, fears, envy, inadequacies, and the like. This is a battle that renews afresh every day. Like C.S. Lewis writes in *Mere Christianity*, “It comes the very moment you wake up each morning. All your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists simply in shoving them all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in. And so on, all day. Standing back from all your natural fussings and frettings; coming in out of the wind.” When we preach the gospel to ourselves, we are turning off the negative self-talk that condemns, holds to man-made standards, whispers that we don’t measure up. Instead, we use what God has said about us, and we drill that into our souls - we meditate on his truth to us personally. It can go something like

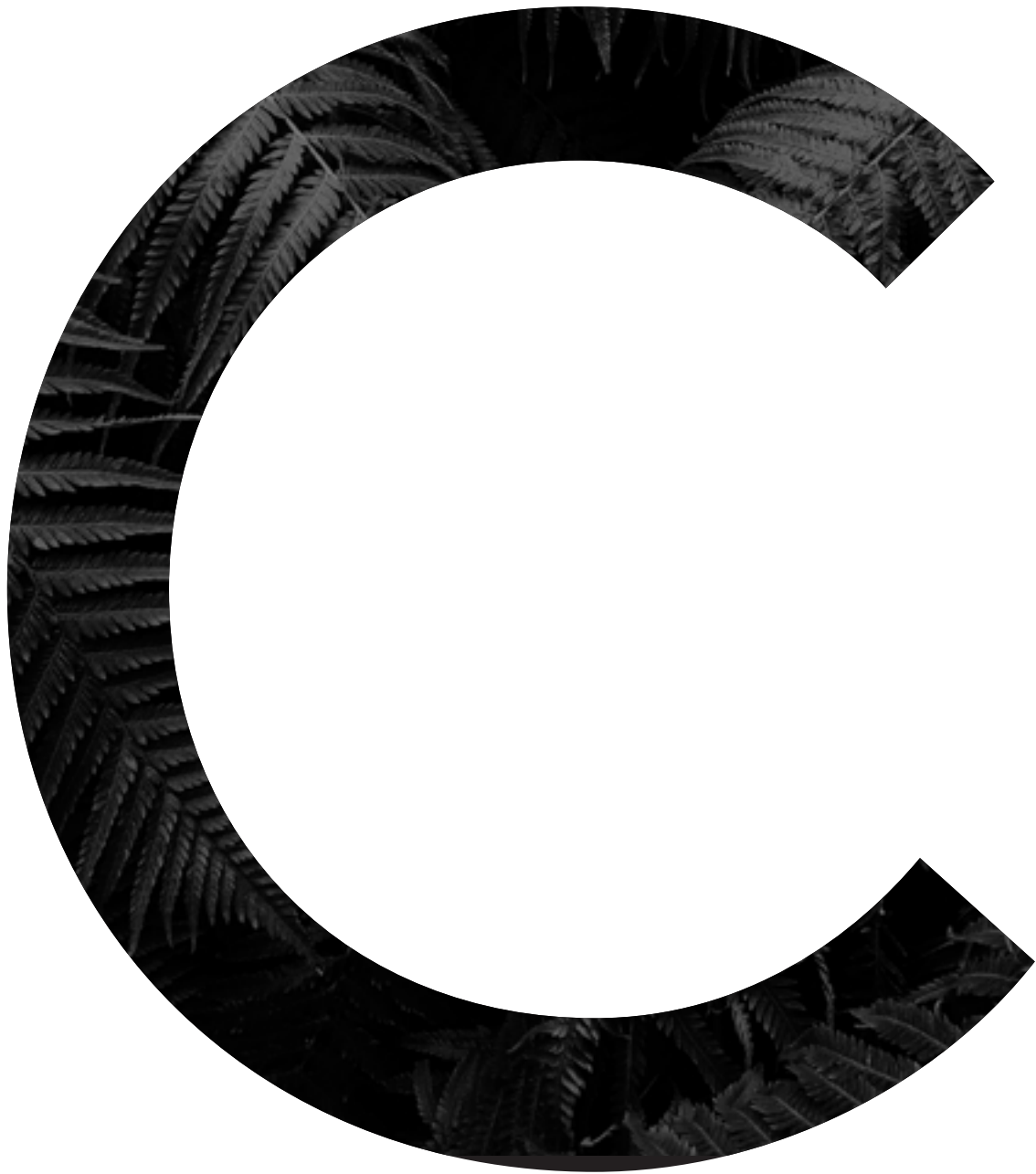
this, using Romans 8 as some example kindling... “Kevin, if God is for you, who can be against you? He who did not spare his own Son but graciously gave him up for you, how will He not also with Him graciously give you all things? Who is to bring any charge against you? It is God who justifies! Who shall separate you from the love of Christ?” When we begin to preach truth to ourselves like this, we are contending for our own faith, and trusting the Lord to build us up with his Word as he has promised to do.

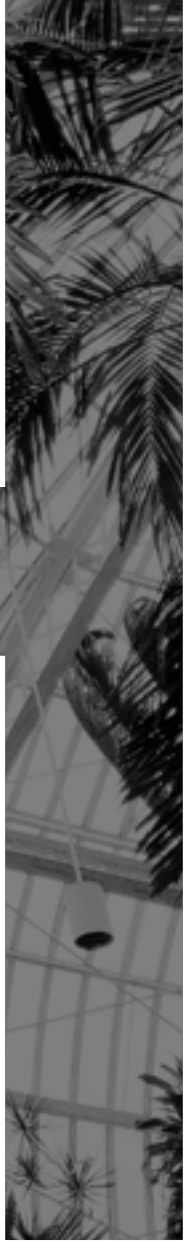
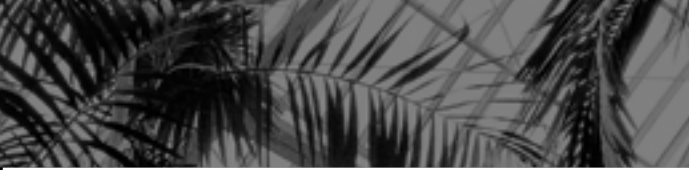
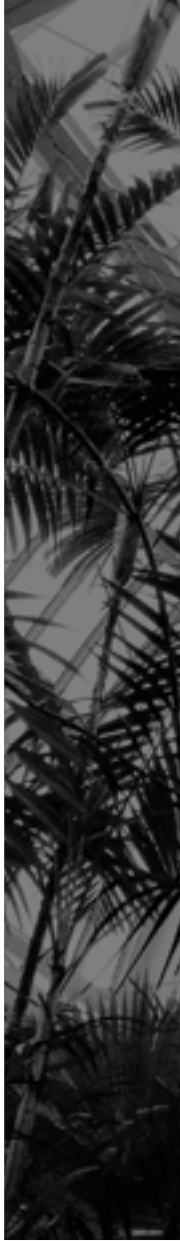
Secondly, Jude also commends them to pray in the Holy Spirit. As we are built up in faith by breathing in his grace, prayer is the way that we breathe out and communicate back to God. For any relationship to thrive, two-way communication is a requirement. In his book on prayer, Tim Keller writes that “Prayer is both conversation and encounter with God. . . . We must know the awe of praising his glory, the intimacy of finding his grace, and the struggle of asking his help, all of which can lead us to know the spiritual reality of his presence.” Prayer is how we ultimately experience on a heart-level the amazing truths of scripture, as we come face-to-face with the God who speaks them. What’s even more amazing is that God himself helps us in this effort when we can’t find the right words to express what we feel or what we need. “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groaning too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints ac-

ording to the will of God.” (Romans 8:26-27). Praying in the Spirit begins with understanding and trusting that the Lord himself is our advocate and defender.

The fruit of these two important disciplines is our being “kept” in the love of God. This is one way to understand sanctification—that we warm ourselves near the fire of God’s grace, placing ourselves in the path of his river of living water. We can’t create the fire or make the river run, but we can obey his call to come and drink. Lest we grow discouraged and think this part of the fight is all up to us, Jude ends with a very strong reminder of God’s sovereign love and powerful sustaining work on our behalf, “Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.” We can rest knowing that our fight has already been won by the great conqueror, who promises to make us holy and keep us in his love. Let us fight!

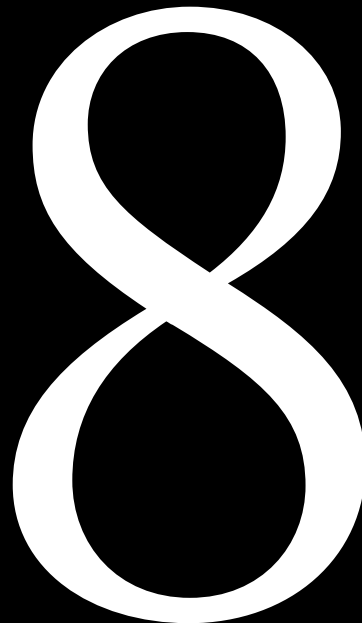
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158 How I Choose Songs for Cities Church
Nick Aufenkamp

164 My Life, My Words
The Enersons



Day 1

Q1 Read Jude 14-25. For what purpose does Jude mention what Enoch prophesized? Toward whom is Enoch's prophecy targeted?

Q2 What is the main accusation against the wrongdoers of Enoch's prophecy?

Q3 How does Jude tell his audience (and us) to protect ourselves from false teaching?

Q4 What behavior does Jude say believers should have toward doubters?

Q5 Who does Jude direct his audience toward at the end of the letter? Why?

Day 2

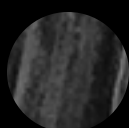
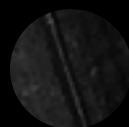
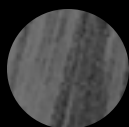
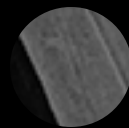
Q1 Read Ephesians 6:10-20. How does a person “be strong in the Lord” as Paul encourages the Ephesians?

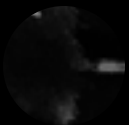
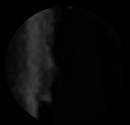
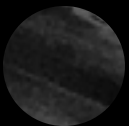
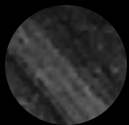
Q2 Why does Paul tell the Ephesians to “put on the whole armor of God?” Why does he use war language for this topic?

Q3 How does the armor of God work together with the warnings Jude gave in his letter?

Q4 Paul encourages the Ephesians to pray but not just for their own spiritual safety. What additional prayer request does Paul make? How can this instruct our prayer lives and prayer requests?

Q5 Why does Paul refer to the gospel as a mystery in verse 19?





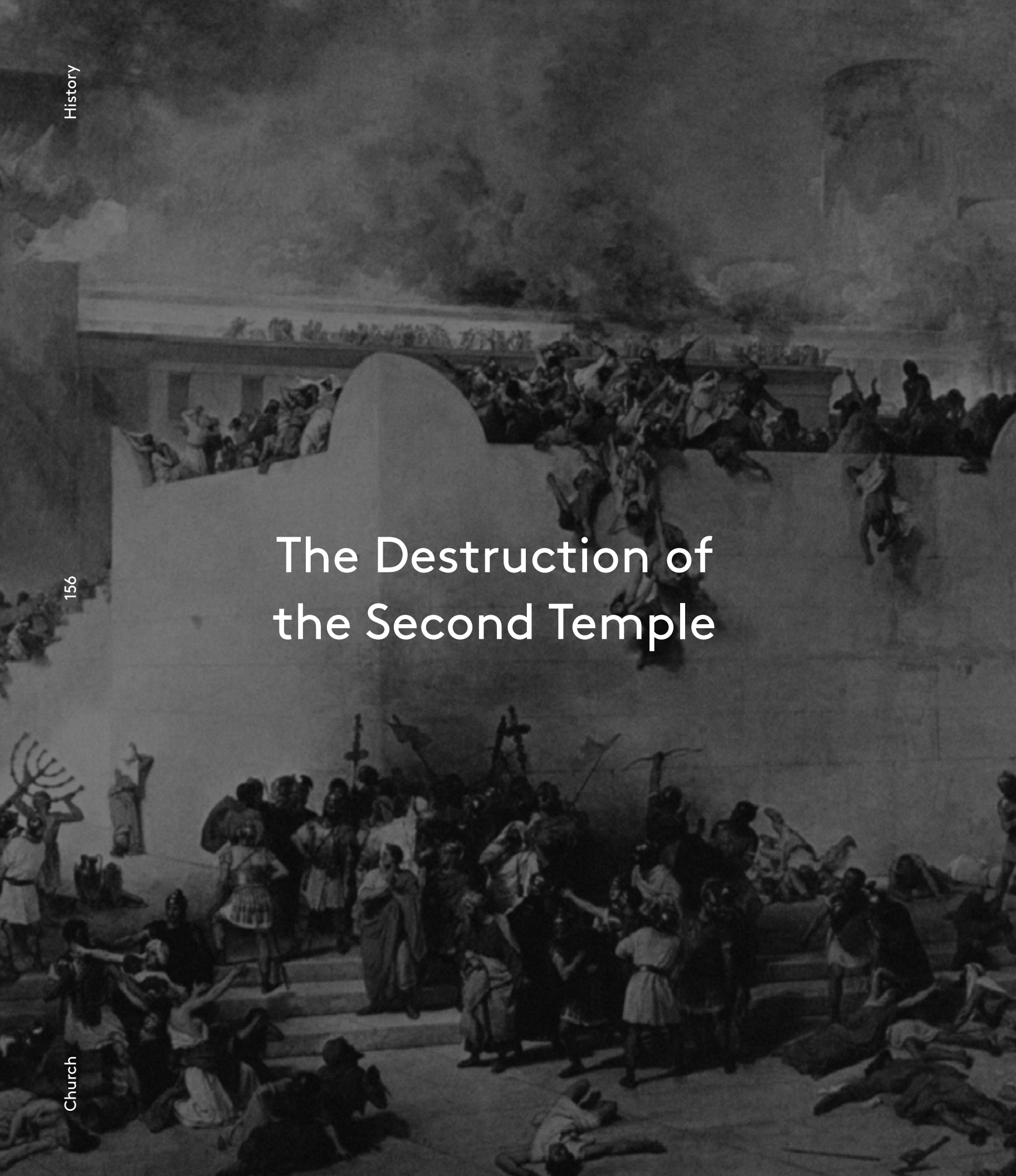
Day 3

Study Daniel 7:13-14

Sermon Notes

August 28, 2016

The Destruction of the Second Temple



At the end of August in 70 AD, the Second Temple was destroyed during the Siege of Jerusalem, the defining battle of the First Jewish-Roman War. The Second Temple was the replacement of the destroyed Solomon's Temple. This is the temple Jesus cleanses in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

How I Choose
Songs for Cities
Church

Nick

Aufenkamp



159

Leading our church in songs of worship nearly tops the list of the greatest privileges I have ever received. Without a doubt, my favorite part about my role on Sunday mornings is that I have a front-row seat to watch how God, by His Spirit, is moving among our people as I see your heartfelt expressions of adoration and enjoyment of Jesus. Unsurprisingly then, every Wednesday as I craft our Order of Worship, I pray that God would graciously use the songs we sing and the truths embedded in them to bring about that very response—adoration and enjoyment of Jesus.

Of course, no matter how good the songs are or how well the service is ordered, God is the sovereign one and ultimately our congregation's worshipful response to His person and character is a gift He must give. Nevertheless, I firmly believe that the songs we sing matter and are among the most valuable tools that He uses to fan into flame and sustain our affections for Him. One of my struggles then is, in an age when new songs are being published every day and when services like Apple Music, Spotify, and YouTube put me just a click away from thousands upon thousands of songs written across every musical genre to edify the Church, how do I choose the best songs for our congregation? What criteria does a song need to pass in order to become one we embrace at Cities Church?

While this short article is by no means the exhaustive answer to these questions nor does it work through all the complexities of the personal preferences of the individuals that comprise our congregation, I will summarize the most crucial elements

of my process when deciding on the songs we sing.

1. At Cities Church, we worship Jesus. As Hebrews 1:3 emphatically states, Jesus “is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power!” The author of Hebrews goes on then to argue for how Jesus is better than the angels, better than Moses, better than the Old Covenant and the human High Priests. And after reading his argument, all the people said, “Duh! Of course Jesus is better! Who else is the radiance of the glory of God? Who else is upholding the universe by the word of their power?”

There is none like Jesus, there is salvation in no one else, and there is no other name under heaven by which man must be saved (Acts 4.12)! So, of course, the number one criteria for any song that we sing at Cities is, does it clearly display the glory, power, and fall-on-our-faces awesomeness of Jesus Christ? If it doesn't, it is probably not worth singing.

Another practical way to phrase this question is, is this song worth having stuck in my head? One of the beauties of music is its usefulness for memorization (just think of how many choruses of songs from the 80's & 90's you can remember, even though you haven't heard the song in years). Another prayer I pray often with the songs that we sing is that you and I will remember the lines within them when we are pummeled by doubts or other trials. There have been several times where I've felt depressed or dissatisfied with my circumstances and I recall the lyrics

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to “The Solid Rock”: “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteous; when all around my soul gives way, He then is all my hope and stay! On Christ, the solid rock, I stand! All other ground is sinking sand!” And, upon remembering these words, my soul is refreshed. Sadly, many songs written today are so vague or abstract that if I did recall it in a season of depression or anxiety it would offer me no practical help. Thus, the best songs are the ones that get stuck in our heads and in doing so remind us of both the great power and immanent care of Jesus.

2. At Cities Church, we believe the most important voice during corporate worship is not the voice of any one individual but the collective voice of our congregation. That said, there

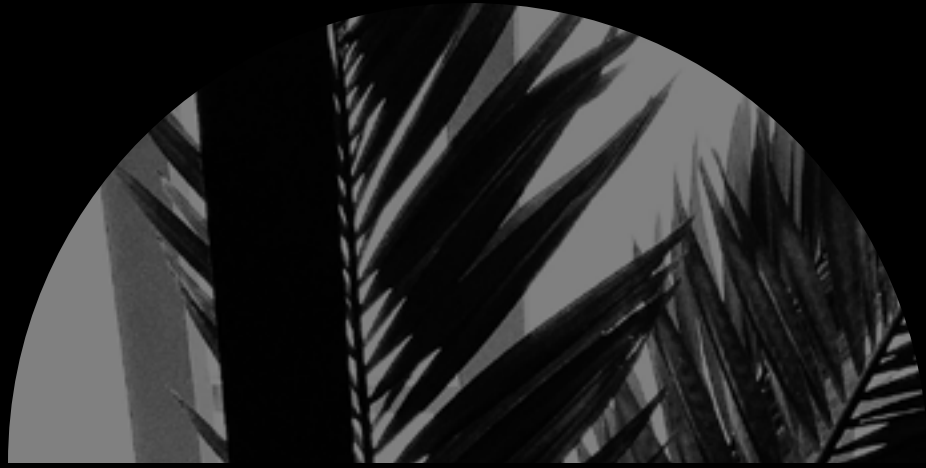
are several wonderful, Christ-exalting, affection-stirring, truth-filled songs that we will never sing in a congregational setting because they are too complex or difficult to sing together. Certainly, as a congregation we want to strive to grow in our musicality and in our ability to sing more heartily and beautifully, and there may be exceptional times in our services where we will have a soloist sing for us a special song to help us meditatively respond to the Gospel. However, my abiding principle is to choose songs that are sing-able for the vast majority of our church.

On a similar note, our church is comprised of men and women, young and old, those with different church traditions and upbringings, not to mention as many personal tastes and preferences as there are people in our congregation. How then do I find songs that we can sing together when we are all so different? For starters, the “test of time” serves me and our church well in helping me discern what songs have been most valuable to the Church. This is one reason why we sing many hymns at Cities. Hymns are not inherently better than modern songs, but they have endured so many generations because the timeless truths they communicate are often so clearly and beautifully said. We sing hymns not simply because they are old, but because they remain among the very best songs written for us to sing. From the stand-point of musical style, I pick and arrange songs that sound like what those in our congregation and in our city would likely be listening to on their commute or at home. The best songs are the songs that make the most sense in our con-

text. Nonetheless, as a congregation, I don’t want to avoid music that we and those in our communities would otherwise never listen to. While I’d love to say more of this in another article, part of this principle comes out of my conviction that our songs on Sunday morning are to be intentionally evangelistic. Thus, I pick songs that both lyrically and musically make sense, or fit within our cultural context.

3. After making sure that a song first and foremost displays the worth, uniqueness, and beauty of our Triune God as He has revealed Himself in the Gospel, and secondly determining that a song is sing-able, beautiful, and fitting within our cultural context, I pray earnestly that God would use the song(s) I’ve picked. As I mentioned in my first point, I believe that there is great value in carefully picking and planning what songs we sing and that God is pleased by intentionality and thoughtfulness, but I must reiterate the fact that our worship unto Him is always a gifted response. Prayer is what keeps me humbly and hopefully dependent upon Him. The reality is, on this side of Heaven, the songs we sing will always have been crafted by finite and fallible people, and they will always be played by musicians who miss notes, whose instruments go out of tune, and they will be led by leaders, like me, who are beset with weakness; therefore, I am under no false pretenses that there is a perfect worship song or set of songs for us to sing that will ensure we worship Jesus most passionately. Instead, I find my hope for the songs we sing at Cities not simply in the songs themselves, but in my Savior and in His Spirit,

who indwells us. The Spirit of Jesus is the one who takes imperfect songs, written and sung by imperfect people, and perfectly applies them to our lives so that we are edified, our affections for Jesus are stirred, and so our Father is glorified and pleased!







What I've Learned

164

The Enersons

Former missionaries to Belgium, former church planters, and current Cities Church members.

Julie: He was quiet but whenever he talked what he had to say was so worth listening to. I would just tune into what he had to say and I thought, "Yeah, this guy loves the Lord."

J: We both really had a heart for missions but starting our family kind of had us thinking maybe we'll never go into missions.

J: This missionary conference was one where missionaries came in to speak. They would talk to us and say, "Is God calling you?" We'd be like, "We have three kids, we own a home, we have good jobs. Probably not." But as the week went on, more and more and more, we could feel God tugging on us, that He was in fact wanting us to go wherever He wanted us to go. On the very last night of that conference the pastor said, "If you're feeling God is calling you, come forward." We didn't even look at each other. We just walked forward.

Dick: The call was so strong. We were completely convinced that that's where the Lord wanted us. It didn't seem hard at all.

J: It was just what we were supposed to do. I don't ever remember questioning if we were sure. But then it was interesting because the Belgian consulate put a hold on all missionary visas. So we had

our house sold, our vehicle sold. We sold everything!

D: We moved down to Whitewater to live with Julie's parents because we had sold our house. Time was going by and it got to be summer time. We were waiting several months to get our visa and one day the mission called and said, "You know, we don't even know when the Belgian consulate is going to start issuing visas again. What would you feel about going to Quebec to study French and wait for the visa?"

D: We didn't really understand how visas went. We just took off. We got to the border to go into Canada with the three little kids and the guy just looked at me and said, "No. You can't come in and stay a year without a visa." It was a flat no. I just looked at him and said in my heart, "Lord, change his mind." Then the guard said, "Well, let me see what we can do."

D: The teachers, from day one, only spoke French to us. I had a headache from the first of September until Easter. A headache every day because we would just sit there and concentrate to understand them.

J: We thought we were fluent in French until we got to Belgium and realized very quickly that we had a lot more to learn.

D: 4 out of 1000 people there are evangelical.

J: They would often say to us, "Dick and Julie know how to laugh. They're kind of like big children." Life was pretty serious to them because Liege was the first city the Germans overran in both World War I and World War II. So we really did seem light-hearted.

J: We moved a lot in Europe. We lived in three different places. In four years our oldest daughter went to three different high schools.

D: It was hard.

J: It was hard on them but we always knew if God was calling us He was also calling them.

D: We had always envisioned them coming back to America for university. There was an English speaking missionary school down in Germany.

J: She was the one who wanted to go because she wanted to improve her English. But it was like tearing my heart out.

D: It was extremely hard for our family.

J: It was the hardest thing I had ever done.

D: My dad had gotten really sick three years before he died. That's when we came back for a visit because we thought he was going to die. We really think he came to faith when he was 87 years old and he lived three more years. And he changed.

J: Dick sat there for a week and just read the bible to him. I came a week later and was sitting there with him. I had a discussion with him and said, "Oscar, we don't really need to say good-bye if you have the Lord." He said, "I want that but I've done some bad things." He understood his sin and knew [salvation] was nothing he deserved. I just said, "That's the whole point. It's not anything we do." He put his head down and said, "I just want that so much."

J: When we got back to Belgium we would talk with the nursing home and they said all he would do is talk about God.

D: Yep, at 87. It was cool. The coolest.

D: That was ten years we were gone.

J: It wasn't always easy in ministry in Belgium. It's a dark spiritual wasteland. It's called a graveyard for missionaries. Spiritual warfare is unbelievable there.

D: It was really hard to come back.

J: That was our life. We loved the people. We loved what we were doing but Dick's parents really needed us. It was very clear what we needed to do.

D: My parents were still living in North Dakota. I had a friend living in Minot and he was in the process of looking for an associate pastor so I put my name in. The church had been looking for a long time and they were almost ready to give up because they couldn't find anyone.

J: When we came to talk with the church in Minot to talk about working with them we went to the nursing home to see Dick's dad. We walked in the nursing home and there he was, a big Swedish farmer, sitting in his chair. He looked up and saw Dick. He put his head down then looked up again like it was a dream. He said, "Wickard [his nickname for Dick]? Is that my Wickard?" Dick said, "Yep dad, it's me." His dad said, "Are you coming home?" Dick said we might be and then his dad said, "I've been praying every day that God would bring you home." I was like, that's it! We're coming back! That made coming back easier because I knew God had answered his prayer.

D: My dad died three months after we got back. He was 90.

J: We were out in Minot, North Dakota. Going from Brussels, Belgium to Minot, North Dakota.

D: It was a big change.

J: We were there for two years. I could just see God's plan in sending us to Minot because any cross-cultural adjustments we made coming back, who would ever know?

Dick: As missionaries we were accustomed to doing whatever it took. You just did it. But at a church it's different. My attitude was, "We prayed about it, we've talked about it, this is what we want to do, let's just do it! What are we waiting for?"

Julie: We knew Minot wasn't a place we were going to stay real long. It was more for his parents. God provided us a place to live and minister.

Julie: When you're a pioneer starting church plants, you have to be fairly stable.

Julie: We had two options for the church plant: Monticello, Minnesota and Osceola, Wisconsin. We prayed about it and we felt Osceola was where we wanted to go. So God took us there and we planted two churches.

J: We really had a heart for the city north of Osceola. The Free Church didn't but the Baptist General Conference did so we switched organizations.

J: Eventually we realized it was 22 years of church planting and a lot of changes and a lot of moves. We were really, really tired. We never stopped. We went from one thing to the next and never stopped, by God's strength. We decided we needed to take a break and did with the blessing of the church we were with.

Julie: We put our house on the market, it sold, and with the money from that house we bought our current house outright. We didn't have jobs. We knew we were supposed to come into the city (Minneapolis). The city is where our heart is. Every time we came into the city we would just go, "We're supposed to be here."

Julie: We started attending Jubilee, a church plant of Bethlehem, for about a year and Dick helped start Jericho Road, which is a food shelf. The second year, we both realized that getting involved in that church plant wasn't really allowing us to have that break we needed. So we went to Bethlehem for three years after that.

Dick: I had heard about Hidden Treasures and how they worked with people and just drove over there one day. They were looking for someone and I started right away.

Julie: So the congregation has gotten smaller!

Dick: In a sense I'm still a pastor but we have a little congregation of ex-felons. Half of them are Christian and half of them aren't.

Julie: The thing about us that made us love missions is that we're out of the box. It takes a lot of faith. It takes a lot of trust in God. You know it's only going to happen if God makes it happen.

Julie: One of the things a mentor would say to us when we would call and ask for prayer is, "Are you taking refuge in the Lord?" I don't think I understood what that meant until five years ago when we moved into the inner city with no jobs. God has provided amazingly.