

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

Sunday July 25, 2021. "The Little Three: 3 John"

I Intro.

Welcome to the weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from the message this Sunday. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing and you can still use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. We're halfway through 2021 and fully committed to gathering in person. A growing group of familiar and new faces join us each Sunday. Our children's, youth areas and coffee spot have been fully open also and we're seeing a good response. We're so encouraged by your love and presence when you gather with us. If you're still joining us online, we love and so appreciate your presence also. We are 100% committed to our virtual attenders. We still are your church family, and if there is ANYTHING you need, prayer, ideas or suggestions, please pass them our way. We know the future is still uncertain, but we are committed to making our virtual congregation as central to NCC as our in person group.

II Sunday.

We finished up our look at three of the shortest, and rarely taught, letters in the New Testament. We've dug into Philemon and did a dive into what a maturing interpretation of scripture looks like. Kristen led us through Jude and helped us honestly evaluate the voices we let influence us. And on our last Sunday looking at another one of the shortest letters 3 John, we see what a personal, intimate, encouraging letter looks like. And also from this letter we see this progressive process, (I avoid the term strategy like the plague), of how to grow people in their relationship with Jesus. So, some jumping off generic questions.

What causes an interest in something you aren't familiar with?

What do you need to push yourself into new experiences and adventures?

The third letter of John isn't actually the shortest, (it's longer than 2 John by only one verse), but it's an interesting look into a relationship between John and his friend Gaius who he's writing to. So read it, and then see what you get out of it.

What jumped out to you from this letter?

What did it reveal about the relationship between these two people?

Kal found three things that John mentioned that seemed to be important values in a growing personal spiritual maturity, and what draws others into wanting a relationship with Jesus.

1. Taking care of our soul. We did a series awhile back about taking care of our soul. We believe the scriptures pretty consistently teach the soul is not that wispy ghost like image that leaves our body when we die. To be truthful, that really comes more from cartoons. The scriptures teach that our soul is the entirety of our being. It's what is created when our mind, heart, and spirit are all unified. It's simply all of who we are. So when our minds are filled with good things, our heart is full of truth, and our spirit is aligned with God, then our soul is healthy and strong. John is encouraging Gaius that in

order to be the person God has called him to be, there has to be this inner work being done. And when we are good on the inside, then everyone around us will benefit from it.

So, in considering your soul, made up of your mind, heart, and spirit, what makes you a better and healthier person?

2. Practicing hospitality. This one practice set the church apart from everything else in that day. And that was how they treated people outside of their circle or group. The scriptures often called these people 'the stranger'. All through both the Old Testament, (Hebrew Scriptures), and the New Testament, there was this constant call to 'care for the stranger'. To practice hospitality, to meet others where they were, and care for their needs. And in those days no one, I mean NO ONE, did it better than the early followers of Jesus. It was this practice of caring for those outside of their circle that set those early followers apart, and attracted people to the teachings and life of Jesus.

Where have you seen, experienced, been on either the giving or receiving end of hospitality? Not with friends, but with people you didn't know. How did it affect you?

3. Live honorably which is for the betterment of everyone. One of the most profound differences in people's personal ideologies and philosophies is the natural tension between our personal rights, and sacrificing some personal rights for the betterment of all. And you're going to feel that tension as we talk about this. A little history first. Our country was founded upon the principles of what was called The Enlightenment. There are a lot of specific elements within The Enlightenment. The belief in science, education, no God ordained succession of power. But most of all was the idea of individual autonomy. People should not be bound by group think, or being told what to do by some institution. Each person is capable of self-rule. The classic claim; "*I can make my own decisions*". This was a reaction to aristocratic rule by either the state, the church, or an unhealthy marriage between the two. So, woven all through our founding documents is this belief in individual rights. That's why we have a Bill of Rights. However, in excess, every principle can become destructive. And when it comes to the idea of 'the common good', we sometimes lose sight or desire to make personal sacrifices of our rights for the betterment of everyone. All through the scriptures, especially in Philippians, we see the importance of selflessness for the good of others, (Jesus gave up any claims of rights to give his life for others). And so there often exists a tension between these two often competing principles in the practice of our faith. Our civil rights versus the common good.

Here John is calling out a specific individual who is living more for himself than for others, and encourages Gaius to live honorably, which he defines as for others rather than for himself.

So, how do you see and feel the tension between these two values, and how do you find a Christ honoring place to practice living for others?

III Challenge.

The basic challenge is to learn how to do these three things well. No other explanation needed. **So, if this letter were written to you, what things could you incorporate into your life to grow these three skills of a prospering soul, ability to practice hospitality, and to live selflessly?**