

Loving the Church Beyond the Hurt

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[0 : 00] And now I have the joy of introducing again our speaker for the retreat and our speaker preacher this morning, Pastor Andrew Cavalich. For those of you who weren't here for the retreat, I joked on Friday night when I introduced him that Pastor Andrew has big biceps, but that he has an even bigger heart.

He's one of the most large-hearted people I know, period. Whenever you have a conversation with him, you are stirred up toward Christ to be nearer to him, and you're encouraged.

And he has really encouraged us and built us up as a church this weekend. And as I was thinking about how you've served us this weekend, Andrew, this passage came to mind in 1 Thessalonians 2, verse 8.

So being affectionately desirous of you, we are ready to share with you not only the gospel of God, but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

I feel like Andrew, you, and Christina have done that for us this weekend. Not just sharing the gospel with us, which is of utmost importance, but also sharing your life impacted by the gospel with us.

[1 : 13] And we have been praying in preparation for the retreat that there would be an impartation of the Spirit's power and his gift, so that we might become a church that is able to rebuke people and make them feel so loved in doing so, as you have done for countless people.

And so I pray that that continues. So please come and serve us, Pastor Andrew. Let's welcome him together. Thank you. All right, we got to get something cleared up right off the bat.

I have regular-sized biceps. And in fact, since my hospitalization, my biceps are getting smaller, and because of my high blood pressure and all that, I think my heart's getting larger.

But you know what? Our hope is, even though our outer person is wasting away, our inward person is what needs renewal the most.

If we're going to work out, if we're going to develop ourselves in any aspect of our life, may it be our inner person, our true selves. And that's where I believe God wants to minister this morning.

[2 : 24] But I have a few things we have to do. I apologize. I'm still in retreat mode. And so I've been giving gifts away. And that just kind of seems weird on like a Sunday service.

But I'm already committed at this point. So I have one last gift. I have another Dunkin' card. And I know it means less to you now. But here's who I'd love to give this away to.

If you are coming to church this morning, and you're like, I really want coffee. But if we stop, we're going to be late. And you decided not to stop and get coffee and be here on time, I would love to give this to you.

Anybody? Never stop. Yeah, yeah. So I'm going to trust you're all just really good planners. Okay, so let's just do it this way.

[3 : 25]

[4 : 31]

[5 : 39]

[6 : 51]

3rd John is the shortest by word count letter in the whole New Testament. But though these letters are both very short, they teach us so much about love and truth.

And the life and warmth we're meant to find there. So in the beginning of 2nd John, we talked about this craft. How do believers get good at rightly understanding how love and truth work together?

[8 : 09] What they are? And the critical place that obedience falls into with that. Then we looked at believers have a calling to promote and to protect the perfection of the gospel.

Over against our own thoughts of perfection or over against any kind of edits to the gospel. Through subtraction or addition. Last night we considered, what does it mean to love well in the church?

To love well in the church is to love one another in a holistic way. As whole people, not missing any avenues or areas of life. But this morning when we think about love and truth and their life and their warmth, we need to think about what loving looks like when it's hard and when it hurts.

The title of our time this morning is Loving the Church Beyond the Hurt. And if you would, let's go ahead and read all of 3rd John, but we'll be focusing our time together from verses 9 and 15.

The letter of 3rd John. The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth. 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.

[9 : 37] For I rejoice greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, who testified to your love before the church.

You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God, for they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles.

Therefore, we ought to support people like these that we may be fellow workers for the truth. Here we come to our portion this morning.

I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority.

[10 : 41] 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.

Beloved, do not imitate evil, but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God.

Whoever does evil has not seen God. 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. I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink.

I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. Peace be to you. The friends greet you.

[11 : 44] Greet the friends, each by name. I not only love you guys, I love these little letters. They are so sweet and rich, and I think we're going to find them helpful.

Because you may not be experiencing it here, because of the transient nature of your life, and because of the nature of sin, you will encounter hurt in the church.

You will be hurt by people who profess Christ, and that is a reality. But what I want us to embrace is not only hurt happens in the church, but hurt and healing both happen in this place.

So although there may be temptations to leave, the answer is not to leave, but it is to learn. And I believe there is much for us to learn, and John here takes another turn.

He did this in 2 John, where he's really warm, and then he comes with the warning. And now here again, we see this warmth over Gaius, but he's definitely concerned about Demetrius, and that's where our own text picks up.

[12 : 58] And we're going to consider this portion of 3 John in two points, and I believe there's much for us to learn here. The first point is this, for us to see lessons in self-love.

Not that we grow in being better lovers of ourselves, but these are warning lessons against it. So we come to this person, Demetrius, who John is writing about, seems like some kind of influential leader or person in that church.

And he's causing really significant problems. But when it comes to a point of, what do we do? You will all face this, whether it's the problems John faced, or the sin you will encounter in yourself or in others.

What do you do when you are hurt by people who profess Christ? What do you do when you are hurt in the church? Now, Proverbs 24 is actually talking about laziness.

But there's something very helpful about the wisdom here. I want to read it to make this point. It says this, What the Proverbs are saying is, Friends, when we see these things, this should be our disposition.

[14 : 48] This should be our learning, not our leaving. So when we come and we see Diotrephes here, we see some real issues that we can learn about.

So we see this in the text, and we need to realize that it's not just this guy. This guy, Diotrephes, is marked by self-love.

Because nothing hurts the church like love of self. Nothing hurts the church like self-love.

So what do we find out about him? We find out this. Number one, you put yourself first. If you want a lesson in self-love, put yourself first.

That's what Diotrephes is doing. And the text says, Who likes to put himself first. That's really, John is being so truthful there, isn't he?

[15 : 44] And isn't this what our pride does? It puts us first. Above others, and then eventually above the truth itself, as we have it in Jesus Christ.

And what's so sad, is it can happen in the church. The place that's uniquely designated, for God's glory and worship, gets perverted to become a platform for our own promotion.

Friends, it's actually larger than that. That is a reversal of the whole created order. We were never meant to be worshipped. We were only meant to worship.

And when that gets reversed, it is a serious sickness. But friends, God's plan for what he means the church to be, and his position on pride, have never changed.

Think about God's intent for us as a people. He says this through his word in 1 Peter. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him.

[17 : 04] Not ourselves. Him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. That's what the church was always meant to be and be about.

And God's position on pride, guess what? God hasn't changed his view about pride. Proverbs 16.5 says it so well, Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the Lord.

Be assured, he will not go unpunished. Friends, the desire to be first must die in us. But I must admit, it's sneaky in the church.

Because there's ways we can talk about glorifying Christ while wanting to siphon self-glory for ourselves.

Now, we'll say our Father is very faithful in stripping us of these things. And some of you know, you joining the retreat might have not heard this.

[18 : 12] I was recently hospitalized and I had some bites and they made my body go haywire. It affected my heart. It affected my body. I'm still not 100.

I'm so happy to be here. But I had all these teams of specialists looking at me. They didn't know what was wrong with me. That made me more scared and concerned.

And I will tell you, when you're lying in a hospital bed for nights, you have a lot of time to think and you have a lot of time to pray. And do you know what one of my greatest comforts was in that time?

That I'm not the main thing. That was a shelter. That was a comfort for me.

I mean, I don't, I'm a little bit of a hypo-contriac, so I might have inflated it in my mind, but God can use that. I'm like, I might die. And we all die. Like, listen, we're all gonna die.

[19 : 07] But I think sometimes God gives you moments when you're like, this could be it. And you know what made me okay with that? That's okay. Because I'm not first.

That's okay because I'm not the main thing. Jesus is. And friends, if I find my life in the one who life is about, I've lost nothing.

That's real life. And if my life ends, my life has already been found and kept, there is a security in this. Friends, self-first is never safe for our souls.

Self-first offers the illusion of security that if you're best and you're first, you'll always be secure. Security is not in self-first. No.

Security is in Christ first. Always, always, always. As John said, he must increase, but I must decrease. And he doesn't need to use hospital visits to do that.

[20 : 07] He's faithful, but may he increase that life-giving work among us. Here's another marker in self-love. Reject authority. People who love themselves and their opinions, they hate authority.

I know I'm like in the Boston area and you guys like to throw stuff over boats and other things. And I mean, we as a nation have pretty much an authority complex already built into our DNA.

But as Christians, we have a new disposition towards authority. We should be people who love authority, who welcome it, who see it as care and provision from God.

But it says in the text that Diotrefes does not acknowledge our authority. And I just, we gotta pause and just think about the audacity of this. John is the last living apostle.

And the more I read John, the more I wanna be like him. I mean, he really is like the Obi-Wan of Star Wars. No, I'm serious. When I was a kid, I liked Luke.

[21 : 12] You know, everybody likes Luke. But as I grow up, I'm like, man, Luke is a whiner. And I'm like, Obi-Wan really grows on me.

The apostle of love, the apostle of John really grows on me. If he's this loving in his letters, could you imagine what fellowship would have been like with this apostle?

So seasoned, so shaped by Jesus. But not only that, check out his resume. He walked with Jesus. He's one of the 12. He was one of the witnesses of the transfiguration.

He was at the crucifixion and he outraced Peter to the tomb and saw the empty tomb. I'm like, bro, I'm in.

John, what do you got? I'm with you. The audacity to come against an authority like this. Wow, that is crazy.

[22 : 07] But friends, our pride is crazy. It's deceptive. Obadiah 3 says this, the pride of your heart has deceived you. We can become so self-inflated that we don't submit ourselves to anyone or anything.

Now, I'll admit there's a tension here. Obviously, Diotrephes is a bad leader or a bad person in influence. And I'm not saying every leader's good.

That wouldn't be a true statement. There are some people who are maligning the name of Jesus Christ in what they call service. That's sick.

And I make no quarters for that. But when someone is faithful, we should be responding to that. So I think of Hebrews. I think of Peter.

Obey your leaders and submit to them. Why? For they're keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account. Good leaders, yeah, they should have our warm, loving, humble submission.

[23 : 18] But listen, leaders, they need to not be domineering according to 1 Peter. But they need to be examples to the flock. I'll just move to the next one.

I could say more, but we got a couple more categories under this first point. The next is slander. Look at verse 10 with me. The first part of verse 10. It says this, So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing.

Talking wicked nonsense against us. It's just kind of cool to hear John say he's talking wicked nonsense. I mean, almost, that kind of feels kind of Bostonian. So, I picked this up from John.

But what, what does it mean, wicked nonsense here? The Greek means babbling incoherently. So it's not just the idea of talking trash, but talking crazy.

Diotrephes is saying outlandish things about John. Outlandish. So if they're that outlandish, guess what they are? They're unfounded. And going back to what we've looked at in 2 and 3 John already, truth is so part and parcel to our fellowship.

[24 : 34] But if your pride, if your self-love distorts you or me so much that we start thinking and speaking of other people outside of reality, we have chosen our pride over truth.

Because Diotrephes isn't speaking true things about John. He's speaking false things. And that's how that works. Here's the other one we need to see. Look at the second part of verse 10.

It says this. And not content with that. So I guess his babbling wicked nonsense wasn't enough for him. Not content with that. He refuses to welcome the brothers and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.

We don't know precisely what's happening here, but it most likely has something to do with John's instruction about not receiving people that don't bring the real message and warmly welcoming and being fellow workers with the missionaries who are.

And it seems like Diotrephes is stiff-arming the good missionaries. He's not letting them in. And then the believers are like, come on, Diotrephes, they're with us. We want to support them.

[25 : 45] We've heard from John. He's shutting them out. And finally, the people that don't agree, guess what? They get the boot. They get kicked out. He puts them out of the church.

Do you know what that's referring to? Church discipline. Well, the final step, well, hopefully the final step is being redeemed, but that step of having to exercise that authority, friends, church discipline is meant to protect the purity of the church, not pollute it.

And this is the essence of spiritual abuse, taking something good and using it for something bad because of selfish motivation.

And friends, we can all be tempted to do that in different ways. That's exactly what's happening here. Friends, Diotrephes is not dead.

We still face these same struggles. But John, John is not going to leave us with Diotrephes. John is going to lead us back to the love and truth that are in Christ and that are still in the church because not only can our hurt be here, our healing is here as well.

[27 : 06] And I believe there is a better way to learn that John wants to show us. And this is our second and final point for the morning. It's this, learning a better way.

Learning a better way. And here again, there are sub points for us to learn from under this heading. The first is to imitate rightly.

Look again with me at verse 11. This, this is one of the most punchy, helpful, little verse in this letter.

beloved, beloved, do not imitate evil, but imitate good. When you see people acting inconsistent with their faith, sometimes in horrendous ways, what do you do?

Do not imitate evil, imitate good. Friends, there'll always be some shady saints among us. It's just the truth.

[28 : 10] If I told you anything different, I mean, I haven't met any here, but you know, maybe this is some anomaly, but I've been around enough to know the wheat always grows with the tares. That we don't always know the full story.

And I don't mean to sow suspicion like that. I mean to sow expectation. You will encounter these things. And you hear so many people leaving the church.

There's terms for this. It's kind of like gaining ground. And I'm just like, listen, I hear all these people say, I met some of the worst people I've ever met in the church. And I'm like, yeah, I could probably concede some of that.

But you know what? The very best people I have ever met have been in the church. And it's not because of who they were. It's because of how shaped they've been by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus had so redeemed their life and renewed in them that family resemblance that I'm like, oh my goodness. I want to tell you about some of these people from my church.

[29 : 08] My number one favorite follower of Jesus Christ is my wife. She is the most sincere and authentic person I have ever known. She has such a deep humility and a sharp wisdom.

You're my favorite saint. And the fact that I get to do all this with you is the best. I mean, I absolutely love it. I'll tell you about another family or in church.

You're like, oh man, he's just loving on his wife. This guy's tired and ready to go home. Sean, don't bring this guy back. What's going on? I'll tell you about the Diaz family. Diazes are a delightful family in our church.

They're well into their 60s at this point. Ken left a career to pursue ministry. Ministry didn't work out, but he wanted to stay in the church. I will tell you, they live in a very modest home in the town we live in.

It's one of the richest places you'll ever visit. That place is so warm with love. The letters they write, the way they're other-centered, I see Jesus so much in Ken and Myra.

[30 : 17] And there's many saints like that in our church that I'm just like, all these people, like these ex-evangelicals, I'm like, what are you talking about? Jesus has got Jesus people in every church.

Did you miss it? Did you miss it? Did you miss John's instruction when you see the mess? Don't leave, but learn. When you see the mess and you look at this, don't imitate evil, but imitate good, meaning that there's both in the church.

There's things that can really bother us and things that can really bless us. What are you setting? Not just your attention on, but what you're going to wrap your life around.

That's what imitation means. I want to conform to something. Instead, people are being deformed by all the negative things we're seeing, not transformed by all the gracious life that's happening in the church.

We're not called to do that, brothers and sisters. And let me just say this. This is my personal ambition, and I would encourage you in your own words to make it your own.

[31 : 26] I'm not going to be the best Christian in the world. I've given up on that. And being perfect or the best at anything, that's an illusion. But I can't be faithful.

I want to be honest. I want to be a healthy Christian. I want to be a mature Christian. If I can be that, that's enough. I love what A.W. Tozer once said.

He goes, my flame may not be big, but it is real. Are you content to be a real flame within the local church and where you live and work?

Because brothers and sisters, I don't think there's a higher calling than that. It doesn't give a lot of love, so I want to give it love here. Another thing under this second point, we reckon with the truth.

This is significant. It may take a little explaining, but let's first see where I'm getting it from the text. Look at the second half of verse 11. It says, whoever does good is from God.

[32 : 26] Whoever does evil has not seen God. Again, John loves his metaphors and he's working these in again. When John says they haven't seen God, what is he saying?

They're not actually Christian. They're not among us. They've missed it. They've been in our midst, but they've missed it. That's what John is saying.

And I think what's important here is sometimes you're just going to struggle with Christians sinning against you. And that's okay. By the way, that peacemaking thing you did, that's what we talked to our friends about.

We're like, okay, you got to talk to us about this peace five minute thing. Like, have you done that? Because we've never heard of it. And we're like, do you really reconcile in like three and a half minutes? And then, and then what, what if like is not done?

What do you do with that? But listen, that, that's regular Christianity. That is sinners. We're going to sin against each other. We got to work that out. But there's going to be some really crazy, grievous stuff.

[33 : 32] And what John's saying is, yeah, they might say it's Christian. It's actually not Christian. They've never seen God. A few summers ago, we were back in my home state of Wisconsin and I, I saw something that would never fly in New Jersey.

It was a Toyota Camry with no doors on it, spray painted, jacked up, and had Jeep labeling written all over it. So what I surmise is some poor person really, really wanted a Jeep, couldn't afford a Jeep, tried to Jeep out their Toyota Camry.

And you know what I was left with? It's still a Camry. And we laugh about that, but we need that kind of bold discernment that the apostle of love is sharing, that not everybody who says they're a Christian actually is.

And so a lot of the crazy nonsense that we get labeled with, I'm like, yeah, they've never seen God. It's just a Camry wanting to be more than it actually is, but it doesn't have a new nature.

And I am not ascribing that to Jesus or his church. I'm just saying, and John's just saying. All right. We're kind of, we got a couple more and we're bringing it to a close.

[34 : 46] You guys have been patient. Next one. Esteem trusted examples. We need this exhortation, but we also need real life examples to imitate in this way.

We've already talked about, John, I hope all of you love the apostle of love a lot more. And I really hope that you want to study all of his works together. That you want to study John's gospel, first, second, and third, and the revelation.

Because there's so much to be gained from going through those in kind of a conscious aware way. But we also have Gaius. We don't want to forget who he wrote this letter to.

This brother has offered faithful support. He is a faithful brother. And now, we have someone else mentioned towards the end in verse 12. It says this, 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. Granted, this gets confusing. My phone number is 856-685. You know how many people struggle with that?

[35 : 57] Demetrius and Deatrophes. Oh wow, that's a... Couldn't we give them nicknames, John? That's a little confusing. I think I actually even messed up when I first tried to talk about Deatrophes.

I said Demetrius. So listen, I'm even getting stumped and I studied this. So, but let's hang here. So there's a shady guy, Deatrophes. Okay, but we have someone else that's got a pretty similar name, Demetrius.

And what I love about Demetrius is what John is saying again about the truth. The truth. Yeah. This other guy really never seen God.

The truth itself bears witness to Demetrius. All the people in the church bear witness. And you know what? I, as the apostle, and those with me, we bear witness. Oh my goodness.

To be one where it is born witness of the truth itself that we are truly God's children. Is there any other greater standing we can have? It is just so good.

[36 : 55] And here's, here's what I want to close with with this morning. I said the other night one of the most fascinating things about the letter of 3rd John. It's the only document in the entire New Testament where Jesus is not mentioned by name.

But John being very kind of like into metaphor and the way he weaves things, he definitely wants to show us Jesus. So last night we considered for the sake of the name.

And I said name is going to have a reoccurring place in this letter. But so is the term friends. So when John uses these words in the close, we have to read them very carefully because he is giving us intentional echoes of Jesus in the use of the word friends and name.

I want you to see this. John says, the friends greet you. Greet the friends each by name. We could easily pass that off as just something he's doing to sign off.

He's not trying to sign off. He's trying to leave us with Jesus like any good leader would do. I want you to see this. This use of the word friends to describe believers is a callback to John's gospel.

[38 : 14] How about that? John's connecting things. John 15. Greater love has no one than this. That someone laid down his life for his friends.

You are my friends. If you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants for the servant does not know what his master is doing but I have called you friends.

For all that I have heard from my father I have made known to you. Like okay I hear that's beautiful. I'm not sure John meant to do that. Okay. All right. Hang with me.

The believers are to be greeted by name. By name. The only other place in the New Testament where that phrase by name is used is again in John's gospel.

The sheep hear his voice and he calls his own sheep by name. By name and leads them out.

[39 : 31] What is he saying? In all this if we're going to love well in the church beyond the hurt we have to refuse to imitate evil.

We need to learn to imitate good but most of all we need led back week after week to Jesus Christ. It is out of his love and his sacrifice that he calls his friends.

So out of that make sure you are communing your friendship and familial love for one another. Don't leave a believer unnamed in your congregation.

Greet each by name. Why? Because we are known by the great shepherd by name. He knows us and cares for us. So when we consider these letters and we think oh Lord how do you intend your love and your truth to be our life and warmth?

It is fully in the person of Jesus Christ. And I am so thankful that you are at a church that week after week that is where you are left and there is no greater ground for us truly to live and go forth in Jesus name.

[40 : 45] such a joy to be with you. Thank you for this weekend. We have a little Thanksgiving calendar where we put things we were thankful for over the year.

This weekend with you will be a highlight for us. And may the Lord bring us to one another again and I commit you not only to your faithful leaders and to your love for one another but to our great shepherd.

God bless you. Thank you.