

Sent Out for the Sake of the Name

3 John 1-8

Sunday, November 10, 2019

I'm going to assume that for many people the Scripture that was just read for us, the book we call 3 John is not very familiar. This single-page letter found near the end of the New Testament isn't as richly doctrinal as the book of Romans. Nor is John's third letter as deeply devotional as say the Psalms. But for its size, this tiny epistle packs a significant punch. It only takes a few minutes to read, but we only have time to unpack the first half of this letter. So if you haven't already, open your Bible and turn your attention with me to 3 John.

As you are turning there, let me remind you of where we've been in our current sermon series. Over the last two Sundays, we have been considering the topic of evangelism as Pastor Jerry has walked us through Matthew chapter 10. On the one hand, we saw that as Jesus' followers we ought to be compelled by compassion to share the gospel with our friends and neighbors. On the other hand, we also saw that our gospel message is disruptive to a world that does not know our Heavenly Father.

Jesus had called upon his disciples to pray and ask the Father to send out laborers into his harvest field. And if we were to continue reading, by the end of Matthew's Gospel, we would discover that Jesus was not only preparing his disciples to bring the gospel to their nearest neighbors, but also to go and make disciples of all nations. The task of disciple-making applies to both local evangelism and global missions.

One of those twelve men that Jesus sent out in Matthew 10 and then commissioned in Matthew 28 was a man he had called back in Matthew chapter 4, a disciple named John. Along with his brother James and their father Zebedee, John was formerly part of the family fishing business before he left his nets in order to follow Jesus. John was the author of the fourth Gospel, and years later John would write a series of letters, three of which make up part of the New Testament. We are looking at the one that has traditionally been known to the church as 3 John.

You'll notice that in verse 1 of this letter that John referred to himself as "the elder." John must have held some level of spiritual authority with the church that Gaius, the recipient of this letter, and his friends belonged to. We also get the sense from this letter that John and Gaius were dear friends and beloved brothers in the Lord. Their close friendship is evident in verse 2 where we see John praying for both Gaius' physical health as well as his spiritual well being.

I hope that you have had a chance this morning, or will have a chance after the service to visit with friends and to check in with one another. You may ask someone if they are

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doing well or if they had a good week. They may share about a successful week at work or a relaxing weekend at home. You may offer some sympathy and compassion if the week has been particularly challenging or if your friend is struggling with their physical or emotional health. Let me suggest that as you visit with one another that you take a page out of John's book and also ask about their walk with the Lord.

Reports had reached John that his dear friend was, as John says in verses 3 and 4, "walking in the truth." Gaius was faithfully living out the gospel. We'll see in a minute what gospel faithfulness looked like as it was lived out in Gaius' life, but first, notice John's response. John emphatically says in verse 4 that he had "no greater joy than to hear that [his] children are walking in the truth."

Though John wasn't speaking of literal sons and daughters, let me take a second and speak directly to our young people in the room. You need to know that the people who love you most--your parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, foster parents, Sunday School teachers, and youth leaders--these people want you to hear the words of verse 4. While they certainly want you to be healthy, to receive a great education, and to have thriving relationships, what they pray for above all is that you would be walking in the truth. They want you to know Christ and to faithfully live out the gospel.

Gaius wasn't John's literal son, but John may have been like a spiritual father. When John learned that Gaius had been faithfully living out the gospel, he rejoiced. **We ought to rejoice when we see one another faithfully living out the gospel.** Go ahead and celebrate new births and birthdays, weddings and anniversaries, accomplishments at school and promotions at work. Celebrate the joys of life together, but don't neglect to rejoice when we see one another faithfully living out the gospel.

But let's take a deeper look at *how* Gaius was faithfully living out the gospel. Let me read again John's words written to Gaius in verses 5-8:

"Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers and sisters, even though they are strangers to you. They have told the church about your love. Please send them on their way in a manner that honors God. It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. We ought therefore to show hospitality to such people so that we may work together for the truth" (3 Jn 5-8).

Gaius was faithfully living out the gospel by supporting those who had been sent out for the sake of the Name. In other words, faithful gospel living produces healthy gospel

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partnerships. That's the principle we should take away from our text this morning. **Faithful gospel living produces healthy gospel partnerships.**

As we look at this text, I first want to highlight three marks of healthy gospel partnerships and then I want to share with you about an upcoming opportunity that I will have to partner on our church's behalf with two of our Global Partners.

Gaius' example illustrates for us these three marks of healthy gospel partnerships. The first is found in verses 5 and 6: **Healthy gospel partnerships require loving discernment.** John mentions in verse 5 some unnamed brothers and sisters to whom Gaius had offered his hospitality. These are likely the same believers who reported in verse 3 of Gaius' faithfulness. In the verses that follow we start to piece together that these were more than just ordinary guests in Gaius' home. These believers had been sent out by their church, as it says in verse 7, "for the sake of the Name." Today we would call these people missionaries. Here at our church, we refer to them as Global Partners.

But take note of how else John describes these visitors in verse 5. From Gaius' perspective, these folks were strangers. We know from the report in verse 6 that Gaius' hospitality was marked by love. But in hosting these brothers and sisters, Gaius was not only under obligation to provide room and board, but it was also his responsibility to vouch for their character and calling before his own believing community. Healthy gospel partnerships require loving discernment.

In verse 9 John mentions sending another letter, one that he had addressed to the church. It's possible that this is the letter that we know as 2 John, one in which John had warned the church to be on the lookout for those who had *not* been sent out for the sake of the Name. Listen to the warning from 2 John:

"I say this because many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them. Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work" (2 Jn 7-11).

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Gaius' example of hospitality marked by love and discernment is something we as a church must adopt if we want to promote healthy gospel partnerships. Lord willing, we pray that no Global Partner of ours, present or prospective will ever be deemed to be deceivers and antichrists. But as a local church committed to the mission of making disciples, we must agree that healthy gospel partnerships require loving discernment.

What does this look like? In their book *When Everything Is Missions*, authors Denny Spitters and Matthew Ellison suggest the following:

“We believe missionary sending is meant to be carried out in partnership with the local community of faith, working together to prepare, train, assess, and confirm believers for the work to which God has called them. Part of this sending process includes testing a calling, since, as experience suggests, not everyone who wants to be sent as a missionary *should* be sent as a missionary.”<sup>1</sup>

Whether our role is that of sending church or supporting church, if our partnerships are to be healthy, then they must be marked by loving discernment. Once we've discerned the character and calling of those sent out for the sake of the name, what should the next phase of that partnership look like?

We can identify a second mark of healthy gospel partnerships in verses 6-8. **Healthy gospel partnerships are backed by generous support.** In John's call for Gaius' generous support, I think we can make two observations that can guide our own generous giving. First, John says that supporting missions is to be an offering of worship. He invites his friend Gaius in verse 6 to support this ministry “in a manner that honors God.”

One of the best little books I've found on the topic of missions is a book that we used with one of Formation Groups last spring, a book simply titled *Missions: How the Local Church Goes Global*. In it, Pastor Andy Johnson says on this topic:

“Not only should our churches send missionaries wisely, but we should support them appropriately. And our support for workers should be as ample as God's Word enjoins. As we commit to send or support missionaries, we should expect our giving to be serious, significant, and sacrificial. Whether we give directly to

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<sup>1</sup> *When Everything Is Missions*, by Denny Spitters and Matthew Ellison, BottomLine Media, 2007, p. 86.

missionaries or through some cooperative sending agency, our goal should be workers amply supplied so that they lack nothing.”<sup>2</sup>

The spirit of generosity called for in these verses is only possible if we are people who are faithfully living out the gospel. If you find that you’re someone who is reluctant or hesitant to generously support the ministry of our Global Partners or even generously give to the local church, perhaps you need to return to the Scriptures and reconsider God’s gracious and generous nature towards us in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The other observation I’ll make from John’s words about supporting those sent out for the sake of the Name is that this is our obligation. I know this sounds like the opposite of support given as an offering of worship. But the text does say in verse 8 that “we *ought* therefore to show hospitality to such people.”

I don’t think the phrase that our NIV Bibles translate as “show hospitality” needs to be understood as narrowly as hosting visiting missionaries in our homes. It can include that idea, but it may also include other expressions of missions support. In saying that Christians ought to offer such support, John wasn’t trying to twist his friend’s arm to give ‘til it hurts. I believe that John was trying to emphasize the nature of our partnership in the gospel. We are to see John’s “ought” in verse 8 as a natural outflow of faithfully living out the gospel.

And that leads us to our final point. **Healthy gospel partnerships produce a shared sense of mission.** The third mark of health gospel partnerships is found at the end of verse 8. John says that the purpose of such support is “so that we may work together for the truth.”

Over the years I’ve seen a tendency to make one of two errors in the area of missions. Christians can easily drift toward an attitude that looks a lot like outsourcing missions. While we wouldn’t call it that, the so-called partnership becomes one sided with those on the field doing the work of missions, and those on the homefront bankrolling the project from a safe distance. These partnerships are often measured by the distribution of dollars in a budget and dots on a map.

The other tendency is to erroneously define the scope of missions too broadly and to identify every Christian as a missionary. Stephen Neill is often quoted as stating,

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<sup>2</sup> *Missions: How the Local Church Goes Global*, by Andy Johnson, Crossway, 2017, p. 49.

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“If everything is mission, nothing is mission. If everything the church does is to be classified as “mission” we shall need to find another term.”<sup>3</sup>

Neill’s point is that our good works and acts of love, even our evangelistic efforts as Christians need to be distinguished from that specific ministry we call missions, lest we fail to see the unique calling of God on those who, as in verse 7, are sent out for the sake of the Name. I think authors Denny Spitters and Matthew Ellison helpfully clarify this point:

“[E]very follower of Christ is a disciple who is to make disciples... You could say that every disciple is “on mission” for the proclamation of the gospel. Does that make everyone a missionary? Or are missionaries in any sense unique or set apart--as pastors and elders are? ...[W]e must be careful to distinguish between God’s commission to all Christians and that which He gives to the Church as a whole or to specific people.”<sup>4</sup>

Regardless of how you define the term *missionary* or what you consider to be your mission field, let's not lose sight of John's larger point in this passage. As the church, we have committed ourselves to send out and to generously support those who have been called for the sake of the Name to make disciples in places where the gospel has not yet been preached or where it is not yet sufficiently known. These are our Global Partners, and while we are here and they are there, together we share in the mission of making disciples. So let’s do more than pay for missions, and let’s do more than read through prayer letters. Let’s allow the gospel to form healthy partnerships and a shared sense of mission.

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<sup>3</sup> *Creative Tension: The Duff Lectures*, 1958, by Stephen Neill, Edinburgh House Press, 1959, p. 81.

<sup>4</sup> *When Everything Is Missions*, p. 66.