

Title: The Fruit of Joy  
Text: 3 John 1-4  
Theme: Loving one another  
Series: 3 John  
Prop Stmt: Joy is the fruit of truth and love

The four gospels were designed to tell people about Jesus and lay out the case of why you need to trust him and follow him. The book of Acts tells the story about how the Christian took root and began to spread. Everywhere the gospel went, churches were formed and those churches helped start more churches. The general epistles are letters to believers in general and then there were specific letters written to specific churches. Even the book of Revelation was originally written to specific churches. Finally, there are these personal epistles that are written to individuals who are members or leaders of these churches. 3<sup>rd</sup> John is a personal epistle. This letter is written by the apostle John to a beloved colleague and trusted brother in Christ named Gaius. This letter gives us a window into what a relationship between believers can be like and should be like. Christianity is based upon Christ but if Christianity is a “relationship and not merely a religion” then what should our relationships look like? We all know the stories of how giant egos on sports teams, corporate boards, city councils, and school boards can collide and create a hostile environment that threatens everything else. Should the gospel make us different? Yes! Does the gospel make any difference? Yes!

When you witness a relationship like this in 3 John, it is beautiful and refreshing. Here is a wonderful relationship that influences a local church that is having a good influence in its region for the sake of the gospel. But John does not sugarcoat things. All is not well. Diotrephes is trying to cause problems, and yet, John is encouraging and hopeful. I pray that our 4 Sundays in this book will encourage those kinds of relationships and help us to be that kind of a church.

Read Text:

1. **Genuine love is a necessary fruit of the gospel.** (1)

This letter brings us into the inner circle of John. Here is what his life was really like. What do we see? We see an old man who is both loving and convictional. He grows older and sweeter, but at the same time he remains steadfast on the truth. John is a gift to Gaius and Gaius is a gift to John. We do not know if Gaius is an elder in his church, the teaching pastor perhaps, or a member who is known well to John. I think that we can assume that he is in some kind of a leadership position because of how the letter ends. “*The friends greet you. Greet the friends, every one of them.*” 4x John refers to him as “Beloved.” You hear me use this word to address you and here is why.

Beloved means, “the one who is loved.” This term is a form of the Greek word for love – agape and is the word that the Father uses when describing Jesus at his baptism and at the transfiguration when the Father speaks and says, “This is my beloved Son.” This is the one who

is the focus of my affection. I am pulled toward him. When the Father calls Jesus his beloved Son, he is expressing the inclination of his heart.

In Ephesians 5.2, Paul writes, “Therefore (in view of our position in Christ) be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us....” We are beloved by God. We are the focus of the affection of God. The heart of God is pulled toward us. As the beloved children of God, the heart of God (Father, Son and Spirit) is inclined (flows) toward us.

Therefore, this word “beloved” is used all over the NT to describe the affection that believers have for one another. The gospel rescues me/us from self-love (an inclination towards myself) and gives me an agape love which is an inclination towards others, that is, I seek the best interest others. But, you ought to know this. This love (agape) is a costly love and sacrificial love. The agape that God has for us cost him the dearest thing to him (his beloved Son). So, when John calls Gaius “beloved” or when we use that term, as we should, we should know that we are expressing an inclination toward one another that costs us more than convenience, it is sacrificial.

#### A. **Love focuses upon others.** (1a)

Keep this in mind.

- An old man is writing this.
- An old man is writing this because he desires the joy of others.
- An old man is writing this who desires the joy of others because he, himself is full of joy.
- An old man is writing this who desires the joy of others because he is full of joy because he knows God.
- An old man is writing this who desires the joy of others because he is full of joy because he knows God who is full of joy because God enjoys his relationship as God.

John knows Christ and because he knows Christ, he knows God. John knows that God is love. John is the one who wrote these words:

*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son in the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loves us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (1 John 7-10)*

We have all met grumpy old people who outlived their life. The fruit stayed a little too long on the tree. I told one of my kids that if I ever get that way that you can run me over with a bus. It's okay. The Lord would understand, we would all be better for it. Just make sure I was facing the other way. But it does not have to be that way, does it? Here is an old man who not only is

not grumpy, but this guy is full of joy and he is jealous for the joy of others. He is not grieving the loss of strength, agility, stamina and youth. He is not wasting his age longing to be young because that's not what life is about. This man knows God and he knows what God is like and what God is about and he knows that God is generous with his fellowship. John writes with this glorious vision of God and a longing for you to be captured by it and he wants to promote this biblical vision of life so that it is captured by, expressed and experienced in the church. He also wants to protect the church from anything that would destroy this vision or distract us from it.

The fruit of joy grows on the tree of love planted in the soil of truth.

How do you protect yourself from ever being hurt or disappointed? Don't love others. Don't care about others. Don't pray for others. Don't encourage others. Don't open up your heart or your home to others. Don't spend time with others. And above all, do not believe in the Lions.

Now, with the exception of the last one, if you live that way, you may protect your heart from being hurt only to discover that you don't have a heart. Sacrifice and suffering and love all go together. You cannot truly experience love without sacrifice and suffering. That is why in marriage vows, we don't just say, for better, for riches, for health, we say, for better or for worse, for riches or for poorer, for sickness and in health. It all comes from God, who so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, who so loved the church that he gave himself up for her. But, sacrifice and suffering are not the only thing that goes with love. Joy is the fruit of love planted in the soil of truth.

#### **B. Love is grounded in the gospel. (1b)**

John loves Gaius in truth, which is a word that John uses as shorthand for the gospel. John is reminding Gaius that they are eternally bound together in Christ. Perhaps you have heard people refer to others as someone that they love "in the Lord." It is almost as if loving someone "in the Lord" means that you really don't have to care for them at all. But, loving someone in the Lord actually means to love someone deeper than how our world loves.

When you read this greeting and feel the affection and bond that John has for this man, don't you think of 1 Cor. 13?

*Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Cor. 13.4-7)* We tend to think of these verses in relationship to weddings and marriage, but this was written to believers in a local church. This is the kind of love that we are loved with by Christ. This is the kind of costly, sacrificial love that Christ displayed by his willful and intentional humiliating love for us when he was crucified on our behalf. This is the kind of love that has captured our hearts and now calls us to display toward one another. To love in the truth is to love in the Lord which means to love like Christ.

## 2. Love desires the best for others. (2)

For the second time, John calls Gaius, beloved tells him that he prays for his body and his soul. He is praying in a manner that reflects how Christ taught his disciples to pray. We ask for daily and circumstantial things like daily bread and we pray for spiritual matters like not being led into temptation. The point is, loving others means that our desires for the best of others is going to be expressed in us praying for them.

### A. **Love for others is displayed by praying for their well-being.** (2a)

John sees Gaius as a whole person. He prays that all will be well for him and that he would be in good health. It is certainly possible that Gaius had some health challenges, and John was praying for those, but either way, John is appealing to God to keep Gaius in good health or to help him. I love how personal and practical this is. John remembers his friend. John prays for his friend and he prays that good things will happen to his friend. If something happens to Gaius that is favorable, we know for certain that John would rejoice in that, even if that doesn't happen to John. He loves this brother and Gaius knows it.

I suspect that when we pray for others, praying like this is not difficult for us. But my observation is that we find it easier to pray for circumstantial things rather than matters of the heart. John prays for both.

### B. **Love for others is displayed by praying for their souls.** (2b)

This is a really good place to park the bus and get out and explore this for a bit. Let me ask you some questions:

#### 1) Do you pray for others?

Is praying for others a normal part of your life like breathing? How we pray and how often we pray reveals whether or not we actually believe in and trust God. Praying for others and how we pray for others reveals whether or not we love others. Is praying part of your life?

Now, for those of you who are married and you find yourself in a season of conflict, you know what I mean, right? You look for reasons to be agitated and when you do, you can find them. But what happens? You find yourself in a posture where you interpret everything that they do as being against you and you give the other person no slack at all. If that is where you are, this is particularly needful for you. Do you pray for your spouse? Your spouse needs Jesus. Now, before you say, "Amen" I need to point out that your spouse needs Jesus because they live with you. Now, you can say, "Amen". Pray for your spouse. Pray that life would go well for them, that they would be in good health and that it goes well for their soul.

#### 2) What if this prayer was made for you?

If I prayed that all would go well for you and that you would be in good health, I think that many of you would have a pretty good idea of what that would look like. It's similar to answering the question of, how are you doing, how's life, how's the family. You take a quick inventory of the major touch points or pain points of life and you think, well, we have food on the table, we have a roof over our heads, we have income, we have a health, we do not have any looming challenges or immediate challenges. Now, of course, you may in the middle of some difficulties and perhaps some deep griefs, but my point is that you have a means of being able to answer that question.

But, if I prayed for your soul, and the Lord answered that prayer, what would that look like? What would it look like for it to be well with your soul? Now compare the two: Compare the health of your body to the health of your soul. Which one really matters? How much attention do you give to them? Is something out of balance? If I tend to focus on my own physical health to the neglect of my soul, I will not faithfully pray for the soul care of others.

John models this well for us. Beloved, let's cultivate a love for others by praying for others body and soul. And spouses, pray for one another. Parents, pray for your children, not just their academic, musical, social, and athletic success, but pray for their souls.

### **3. Love rejoices in the faithfulness of God's people.** (3-4)

How do you define happiness? What makes you happy? A related question is: how does a church measure success or health? I think we have our answer here in verses 3 and 4. John received a report about Gaius. The brother was faithful to the gospel. He still believed the gospel and his belief was clearly seen in how he lived. And John was thrilled! John was thrilled because John knows what ultimately matters in life. He knows that even if Gaius was facing some adversity in life and even if his health was not great, the fact that Gaius was faithfully believing the gospel caused John to be full of joy. Love rejoices in the faithfulness of God's people.

This year our average attendance may be a little lower or a little higher. Our giving may be a little lower or a little higher. Our membership may be a little lower or a little higher. The number of volunteers may be a little lower or a little higher. Some of that is affected by things that are beyond our control, but no matter what we face, we can be faithful to the gospel and when we are faithful to the gospel that brings incredible joy to others.

The fruit of joy comes from a tree planted in the soil of the gospel. I wish that I could impress upon you how deep the encouragement is that you are to so many people because of your faithfulness to the gospel. You, like me, are tempted to believe, when faced with adversity that it really doesn't matter if I just sort of pack it in, and fade away. First of all, it matters to every single one of our missionaries. We think that what they are doing is important, but they face seasons of discouragement when they aren't so sure. If we pack it, why shouldn't they? And when we weather storms and stay true to what matters, it only adds ballast to their boats to keep sailing. Our faithfulness matters to other churches. I had long conversations with 3 pastors

this week who serve in this area. They look to this church as a source of encouragement and to some degree as a compass. Do you know why? Because you are faithful. If you were not faithful, we would not have a church and this local witness of the gospel would be gone and that would affect missionaries, pastors and other churches alike. But, your faithfulness is paying it forward. We stand on the shoulders of the faithful before us and by God's grace the next generation will stand on ours. That is a beautiful thing. If I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth, how much greater is the joy that we bring to the heart of Christ.