

Title: Keep the Main Thing the Main Thing  
Text: 2 John 4-6  
Theme: the joy of seeing believers walking in truth  
Series: 2 John #2  
Prop Stmtnt: Walking in truth by loving one another brings great joy

#### Read Text:

How you live is what you believe. Everything else is just words. That sums up our text. These 3 verses display the heart of this letter and these 3 verses build on each other, which is why there are 3 points and the 3 points build on each other. 1) Our faithfulness produces joy - v.4 2) Our faithfulness is displayed in our love – v.5 and 3) Our love is displayed in our obedience – v.6.

Let me set the stage. God has called each believer to live in community with other believers. This community of believers is called a local church. A local church is one of the primary ways in which you know that you are actually following Christ. In fact, you cannot follow Christ well without being an engaged member of a faithful, gospel, local church. The local church is not an option for believers, it is ground zero for our growth. That is inescapably clear from this text, but that is not how many believers view the church. If I asked you the question: how was church? How would you answer that? As I listen to how people talk about the church it seems that most view the church as an event to attend or an event to experience. Let's call that the event/experience view and I am going to contrast the prevailing and popular event/experience view with a more biblical view. But first, the event/experience view.

Those who see church as an event or experience can fall into a couple of categories. The first one is the Evangelistic event/experience. The service is designed to appeal to people who are not followers of Jesus and is supposed to connect with them and hopefully attract them to either making a commitment to Jesus or appealing enough to them for them to come back. This is a very popular view of church. Therefore, the "success" of church is determined by how well did the event meet its objective. The success of church is evaluated by whether or not outsiders like it, did anyone "make a decision for Jesus?" Did we get results that we can number?

The second one is the Worship event/experience. Once again church is viewed as an event and is therefore evaluated by the participants, who judge it based on: did it move me emotionally, did I feel something, did it help me feel connected to God, did I cry, laugh, feel something significant happen, etc.? Therefore, the success of church is evaluated by whether or not the participants felt something emotive, nostalgic, sentimental, familiar or impressive?

Both of these views miss the point because they start with an incomplete view of the church. If you start with a better, more biblical view of the church, you will have a better view of what is supposed to happen when we gather together.

What is the church? The word for church, ekklesia means a gathering of people. A local church is a group of followers of Jesus Christ (often called a family – brothers and sisters) who are

committed to helping one another look more like Jesus. The pattern in the NT is that the believers gather to help one another follow Jesus better and they scatter in order to make Christ known and share the gospel with others. We love Jesus and we express that love for Jesus by loving one another (beloved) and the way that we love one another is by helping each other follow Jesus better. An event for seekers, an experience designed to attract people to the message, or an experience designed to give people a Spirit-buzz, misses the point. In recent years the seeker event has been gradually replaced by the worship event, but even then, the success of the service is now based on whether or not I felt something in the “worship time.” When this view holds sway, there is immense pressure on the worship leader to pick songs that put people in the mood. So now, ironically, worship, which is supposed to be focused on God, is actually focused on me and whether or not I got a Spirit-buzz.

A better way to view the church is the family/gathering meal view because our gathering is our family coming together. Our Sunday gathering is when we come together to eat together (be fed God’s Word), to encourage each other, to pray for each other, to comfort each other, to rejoice with each other, to worship together and to challenge one another to be faithful. Therefore, we should evaluate the church based on how well we are loving one another by helping one another follow Jesus better. And when we are evaluating the church, we are evaluating our own lives. If I ask you, how was church, I am asking you, in a very real sense, how is your heart and how is the heart of your brothers and sisters?

If someone asks you, how was church and you say, “well, the worship was a little lame today, we did too many hymns, or too little this, blah, blah, blah, no one around me raised their hands, no one clapped, the slides were a little off” that is like someone asking you how your family is and you saying that the broccoli was cooked a little too long. How was church should mean, how are you and your brothers and sisters doing? When you ask someone about their family, you are essentially asking them if they love one another. Church is a family, not an event. But since we are a family we make it a priority to gather together in order to carry out the commitments that we have made to one another. That is what the NT means when it talks about a local church. If you don’t understand that, then you will not understand this text and you will not really understand our gathering together on Sundays. But, when you do understand this, it makes all the difference.

The apostle John is older and is probably in the city of Ephesus and is writing this letter to another church. John probably ministered to the churches of that region. He has received news of this church and he is encouraged by what he hears. The faithfulness of that local congregation has caused him to rejoice.

### 1. **Our faithfulness produces joy.** (4)

John is rejoicing greatly because some of the members of that local church were walking in the truth (gospel). The fact that John says “some of your children” does not mean that only some were walking in the truth and that others weren’t. There is nothing in the rest of this letter to indicate that there was a problem in this local congregation. It simply sounds like John heard

about some of the members of this church and what he heard was hugely encouraging because it was obvious that they were believing the gospel and were living it out. And John is thrilled about it and he should be. He lived with Jesus. He talked with him, ate with him, walked with him and watched him die. He saw him and ate with him after his resurrection and watched him ascend into heaven. But these people didn't and yet, they were believing and their faithfulness gave John so much joy because he knew that this would bring them joy forever and ever!

Walking in the truth is what God commanded, but just because God commands it, we all know that a lot of people don't do it. But here are some people who have taken God's commands seriously and are living them out and John is excited because here is evidence of gospel fruit. John knows how important and valuable that is and he delights in it. The gospel is the ultimate issue of life. There is nothing more important than the gospel. We are people of the gospel. We are people who believe that Jesus died on the cross in order to pay for our sins and because we trust in Christ, we are forgiven, we are declared righteous, we are redeemed, we are adopted into his family, we are guaranteed life with Jesus forever. And, we want others to know this.

Marjoria called this week and requested prayer for a family member who was facing a difficult surgery, but Marjoria's biggest concern was for this person to come to faith in Christ. Her love, concern and desire for others to know Jesus is a joy to me and many others. When we hear of the faithfulness of others, like we will from Rob later today, it is an encouragement. Beloved, I tell you over and over that Jesus is worth a beautiful bride. Jesus is worth our faithfulness. But know this as well, your faithfulness (our faithfulness) produces joy in the lives of others who hear about it and ultimately God delights in and enjoys our faithfulness since our faithfulness is evidence of the fact that we really treasure him. But what does that faithfulness look like?

## **2. Our faithfulness is displayed in our love. (5)**

After "catching them" doing what they ought to be doing (v.4), John now encourages them to keep it up. He doesn't have a new revelation for them. He doesn't have some new hidden secret that unlocks the mystery of how to get wealth, power, health and influence in this life. This is what the false teachers do. They always have something new. John simply reminds them to keep the main thing the main thing. John does not use complicated words or sentences. But even though his writing style is simple, it is deeply profound. He lights these grammatical fireworks that seem to have long fuses. For example, in verse 5, John, illustrates the very truth that he is challenging them with. He has just encouraged them and now he once again refers to them with an affectionate expression (ESV translates it as "dear lady") and he reminds them that faithfully loving one another is exactly what we are commanded to do. There is no new revelation or new secret sauce. This is the main thing. Keep the main thing, the main thing.

Next week, we will look at verse 7, where John warns them about the deceivers who are going to come and try to change and corrupt the doctrine. They are going to bring new revelation and views that are not compatible with what the apostles taught. By calling us to stay faithful in displaying love for another, we are helping defend ourselves from evil influences.

Last week I pointed out from verse 3 that grace will be with us from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love. Grace marks our lives. Since grace is being given what we do not deserve, we should all live with a profound sense of humility and surprise at the kindness of God to us. Instead of treating us like we deserve to be treated for our sin, Christ was treated that way in our place so that we could be treated like Christ should have been treated. By biggest need by far is forgiveness and I have that. Everything else is gravy! The grace that saves us, is the same grace that helps us live in a way that displays the gospel. The gospel humbles us and keeps us humble. We have been so deeply, so personally, so profoundly loved by Christ, that we can deeply, personally and profoundly love one another. Christ set aside his rights in order to come and live and die for you. Therefore, living like Christ is the continual setting aside my rights in order to live for the good and joy of others. Since we have grace (v.3) love for one another is to mark our lives. Last week I said, this grace is like grease that you apply to your relational arms and shoulders so that when you bump into a person or rub against them, there is no friction. I need to drive with gospel grease on my car. When someone cuts me off, I, generally think that it is my responsibility to teach them some driving etiquette. And whenever I do that, the response is always one of gratitude for me taking interest in correcting their idiocy, right? But, if I drove with gospel grease on my car, then I would drive with a sense of humility and not entitlement.

We have a great opportunity and need right now to apply some gospel grease. There are some people in our church who have been vaccinated against Covid. We have some people in our church who have not been vaccinated against Covid. We have some people who have been vaccinated against Covid who think that everyone ought to get vaccinated and we have some people who have been vaccinated who really don't care. We have some people who have not been vaccinated who think no one should get vaccinated and we have some people who have not been vaccinated who really don't care. There are differing views on vaccination and those who are a little more convictional have their reasons. And this is what I get: "you need to tell people to get vaccinated." "You need to tell people not to get vaccinated." And I say, "no I don't." Satan does not care if you go to hell vaccinated or not. He cares that you don't hear the gospel. So, I ultimately do not care whether or not you get vaccinated. I am going to keep the main thing the main thing because if he can get vaxxers to fight against non-vaxxers, then we will get our eyes off the main thing and the church will lose sight of her mission. Heaven will not have a vaxxer section and non-vaxxer section, right? Ford owners will not be over here and GM over here and (whatever Chrysler is called) over there. There is no U of M section and MSU section since you will all be Buckeyes by then. Put some gospel grease on your relational arms and shoulders so when you rub against someone who has a different view that you do, it reduces the friction. When you do that, then your love for that person will be more important to you than trying to convince them of your view.

When we elevate non-gospel issues to convictional levels, the friction that results fractures relationships and is profoundly discouraging to people. People leave churches, unnecessarily because in some cases, they are treated as second rate if they don't hold the same non-essential views on these things. And it's a quandary. They want to love Jesus, but they are hurt because of a view on musical styles, who to vote for, vaccinations, to mask or not to mask,

homeschool vs. other options, organic eating, there are always non-gospel issues that will be occasions for the church to unnecessarily divide over. That is why, this commandment to love one another, to prefer one another, to truly cherish one another is always needed! But what does this love actually look like?

### 3. Our love is displayed in our obedience. (6)

How you live is what you believe. Everything else is just words. Look at verse 6. John gives a very clear definition of love and then he applies it. You can say you love Jesus. You can sing it fervently and get emotional in the car when your favorite song is played. But, do you? Do you love Jesus? There is an eternity's worth of difference between loving Jesus and loving what you think Jesus will do for you. The person who truly loves God walks according to his commands. Do you consider God so important and valuable that you obey his commands or do you have excuses when you don't have to? The pre-eminent commandment that we have is the command to love one another and loving one another means to walk in truth. Look at the end of v.6, "just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it." John is referring to the truth. Our love for another is displayed in how we, together walk in the truth. John is commending them, reminding them and exhorting them to keep walking in the truth. If our church has a reputation of knowing the truth and walking in the truth, we can become impressed with ourselves which means that we will stop walking in the truth. Walking in the truth is a community project. Everything in this verse is in the plural. "we walk" "y'all have heard" "y'all should walk". In order to love another and walk with one another, you have to be in fellowship with one another. How you fellowship in a church, (that is, how you love and serve people who aren't exactly like you) helps you know whether or not your faith is real. We have 1 granddaughter and 4 grandsons and 2 more grandsons on the way. Our grandson Judah, at the moment is an only child. He loves Cathi because, she does just about anything that he wants. So, does he really love Cathi? Well, we will find out after his brother is born, because after Levi is born, Cathi will have to share her attention with Levi and my guess is that Judah will not find joy in the love of Cathi for Levi if it costs him the attention that he wants. It only takes siblings to reveal the depravity that has been there all along. How do you know if you really get along well with others if you are not in a relationship with others? How can you obey this command to love one another if you are not part of a church? You can't!

What gives me and Cathi joy as a dad and mom, grandfather and grandmother, aunt and uncle? We love to not only be with our family, we love for our family to be together and to love and enjoy one another. We know that being together, loving and enjoying one another is not automatic and not the experience of many. So, we work hard to create that and protect that. I want my kids to love each other, because it is right, it is beautiful, it is so good for them, and ultimately it reflects Jesus. Isn't that what parents and grandparents really want? We want the family to love and enjoy one another. That comes from God because when we love and enjoy one another, we are experiencing and expressing a preview of what eternity is going to be like. If you don't love people whom you can see, what makes you think that you love God, whom you can't see? But, if you love people whom you can see, then the God who is not seen is displayed so that others may know him too.