

Title: For the sake of the Name
Text: 3 John 5-8
Theme: How the gospel creates generous people
Series: 3 John
Prop Stmt: A gracious God provides a generous gospel that makes a generous (and genuinely happy) people.

Read Text:

C.S. Lewis wrote a very insightful book called, the Screwtape Letters. In this book, Screwtape is the name of a higher-ranking demon who is corresponding with a lower ranked demon named Wormwood. Wormwood is being coached by Screwtape so that the guy that Wormwood is assigned to, does not become a follower of Christ. When Wormwood fails on that assignment, Screwtape then mentors Wormwood on how to render the new believer as ineffective as possible. When Screwtape talks about God, he refers to Him as the Enemy. In one of his letters to Wormwood, Screwtape says this about God.

“One must face the fact that all the talk about His love for men, and His service being perfect freedom, is not (as one would gladly believe) mere propaganda, but an appalling truth. He really does want to fill the universe with a lot of loathsome little replicas of Himself—creatures, whose life, on its miniature scale, will be qualitatively like His own, not because He has absorbed them but because their wills freely conform to His. We want cattle who can finally become food; He wants servants who can finally become sons. We want to suck in, He wants to give out. We are empty and would be filled; He is full and flows over.”

The story of the Bible is the story of a sovereign and gracious God who provides a generous salvation that creates a generous people. God so loved the world that he gave. He gave that which is was costly and dear to him. The love of God is a sacrificial love that secured the salvation of his children which results in the spread of God’s glory and joy.

God calls us children, because, as Screwtape says, “He really does want to fill the universe with a lot of loathsome little replicas of Himself – creatures, whose life, on its miniature scale, will be qualitatively like His own.” Again, in 1 John 3, John links the amazing, overwhelming love of God for us to our being called the children of God who will one day reflect him. We are called children because we grow up to be like our Father. Our Father is generous. He loves us with a generous love. We are saved from a disastrous and damning life of self-love to a glorious and eternal life of love of God and others. 3 John is a personal epistle. It is a letter from the apostle John to his dear brother in Christ, Gaius. Gaius is a generous believer who is described as one who walks in the truth. Therefore, ...

1. **Walking in the truth is reflected in a generous life.** (5-6a)

In the book of 1 John, John writes about 3 evidences of saving faith or authentic faith: 1) Loves God 2) Keeps God’s commands and 3) Loves God’s people. These are the marks of the real deal

and it is obvious that Gaius is the real deal. John could say that if you want to see what a genuine Christian looks like, look at Gaius. This brother is the real deal. In verse 1 John loves Gaius in truth. In verse 3 John tells Gaius that he rejoiced to hear that Gaius was walking in the truth. John goes on to say that there is nothing that delights his soul more than to know that his children are walking in the truth. Gaius is a great example of that. But, what does that mean? These verses help us understand what that means. Gaius is a generous man. Gaius is a big-hearted man. Verses 5 and 6a make it very clear that walking in the truth is reflected in a generous life.

It sounds like some missionaries or church planters were in the area where Gaius lived and even though Gaius did not know them, he received them, gave them accommodations and took good care of them. These brothers either came or returned to the church where John was and they gave a very encouraging report to the church about how they were treated by Gaius. John is commending Gaius. He is publicly thanking this brother for taking care of these other brothers.

It's not like they called ahead, or made reservations on-line. Gaius was prepared to be hospitable. Gaius was a generous man who was ready to be generous. John is telling us that this is part of what it looks like to walk in the truth. Again, the truth is shorthand for the gospel. What is the gospel? It is the good news that God sent (gave) His Son to us to live in our place and die in our place so that our sins could be forgiven, so that we could be declared righteous and live with and enjoy God and his people forever. God gave, God sent, God loved. God's glory is seen in God's giving and loving. Therefore, one of the chief ways in which we put God on display is by giving of ourselves for the sake of others. That is how many of you are. My perspective is similar to John's. John did not write this in order to admonish Gaius to be generous, he wrote this to commend Gaius because he was. I am not preaching this with a view of challenging you to be generous, but to commend you because so many of you are. A couple of weeks ago, we prayed for Timmy and told you about the opportunity to provide Timmy's family with some meals and you took care of that. This week I visited a family in order to pray with them and encourage them as they go through a valley and they know they are not forgotten. They have been receiving meals and other encouragements as well. I know that some of you plan your grocery shopping in order to make meals for others. Some of you plan your budget in order to buy meals for others or help people with needs as they arise. Your generosity is overwhelming. Walking in the truth is reflected in a generous life. But, there is more. Generosity is worthy of God because it reflects God.

2. **A generous life is worthy of God.** (6b)

That phrase, "you will do well" is actually a polite way of saying, "please." John anticipates that these missionaries or church planters will be coming back through the city where Gaius is and Gaius will have an opportunity to care for them again. John is encouraging Gaius to support them in a manner that is worthy of God. Take care of these gospel workers in a manner that is worthy of God. What do you think that is? Think of it from the perspective of the gospel worker (missionary, church planter, ministry staff member of a church) what would being sent on your journey in a manner worthy of God, look like? If someone was being generous to you, that

would be humbling and encouraging. Related to that would be this. If you were generously being sent on your way, you could then be generous toward others. What does supporting someone in a manner that is worthy of God look like? I think it is supporting them generously so that they know how much we value what they are doing and so that they are free to be generous.

Excursus on Prosperity Theology: I want to stop and clarify this because I am concerned that some of you may not hear exactly what I am saying since you listen to things through a filter. We all listen to things through a filter and we need to have the wisdom and humility to examine our filters. In western Christianity, we tend to be influenced by prosperity theology, which is the idea that following Jesus is the ticket to getting a better life now in terms of money, health, and circumstantial favor.

John is commending the generosity of Gaius and John is encouraging Gaius to continue to be generous. But, notice the end of verse 6. He commends Gaius to be generous so that these brothers are taken care of in a manner that is worthy of God. Please note this: The generosity of Gaius is driven by a God-centered vision. That is what the poison of the prosperity gospel misses. Here is what I mean.

How does the Bible describe conversion? Conversion is the word we use to describe how a person turns from their sin (repentance) and trusts (belief) in Christ. What is the sin that we turn from? We turn from the sin of self-love. Instead of loving God, worshiping God and obeying God, we love ourselves, worship ourselves and follow our own rules. A sinner can be described as “one who loves self above all”

- He/she seeks to use anything and anyone in order to pursue that goal. But, life has a way of making a mess of that goal. You lose a job, you lose a marriage, you get sick, someone in your family gets sick... and your self is not getting the love and adoration that you think you deserve.

Along comes the prosperity gospel preacher and he says stuff like, God loves you and wants you to be happy. And you think, well of course he does. I love me, of course God loves me. And the appeal of prosperity theology is this. God wants to give you everything that you want in order for you to love and advance yourself as you think you deserve. So, conversion according to prosperity theology is:

- Instead of using anything and anyone to advance the love of self above all, now you are seeking to “use God to pursue your aim”. Your heart has not changed, but the means you are using has changed. Instead of using the rules of the world to get rich, you are using secret formulas from the Bible, or special prayers, or giving seed offerings to blessed preachers and ministries that will promise a hundred-fold return. If you get sick, do not talk about it because that would be giving the devil ammunition. What is repentance according to prosperity theology? You stop using bad things to get what you want, now you use God to get what you want. But, there is no change of heart. How is this supposed to be attractive to the world? How

is this supposed to showcase the gospel? Well, if people see how wealthy, healthy, successful and happy I am, then they will want in on the formula. They will want to “follow” God (use God), like I do. But hold the phone! There is nothing supernatural about being wealthy, healthy, successful and happy. What is supernatural is being happy in the midst of adversity, being generous in the midst of difficult and being focused on others even when you have plenty of challenges yourself. The prosperity gospel is selling you a puny god who is not supernatural and the prosperity gospel is actually not prosperous enough because it never changes your heart. The person who lives loving self above all will find that his/her heart shrinks over time. There is nothing big-hearted, generous or Christ-like in that at all.

Conversion according to Jesus is a change of heart.

- Instead of loving self above all, I love God above all. I live for the advancement of the fame and glory of God. My life exists for Him.

3. **Generosity for the gospel helps protect the reputation of the gospel.** (7)

A. For the sake of the name

John describes these brothers as those who have “gone out for the sake of the name.” These brothers left what was familiar. They left what was comfortable and convenient. Going out for the sake of Christ and the gospel is challenging and difficult, but it is part of our mission. As believers we care about others, not just ourselves. As a local church, we care about other churches, not just ourselves. We care about church planting locally and globally. Therefore, we value and esteem those who go out for the sake of the name. How do we do that?

Be informed – we really try to inform you about our missionaries and the church planters we support. Read the blogs, come to our member’s meetings, attend the mission’s luncheons so you can be informed.

Missionaries and church planters are grateful for our financial support, but if no one cares about their ministry enough to learn about it and stay informed about it, then our financial support is hollow.

Be engaged – talk with our missionaries when they come into town. Take them out to eat, or better yet, have them over. Some of you would do a commendable job serving on the mission team. You need to find out how you can be equipped to do that and look for ways to serve in that capacity.

Andrew and Stacy are going to be, Lord willing, starting a church somewhere north of here in Macomb County. There is no job waiting on them. We are going to be sending them. Right now, we are equipping them. If Andrew was your son or if Stacy was your daughter, how would you want them to be cared for by this church? That’s what I mean. Let’s say that Andrew and Stacy have family members who are not believers, who think they are a little weird anyway for

following Christ, and think they are crazy for trying to plant a church. What kind of a career track is that? If Andrew and Stacy (and by God's grace others who come after them) are loved deeply by this church, and supported and encouraged and cared for, it makes a very strong statement that we care about them, because we care about the Name they are advancing.

Be intentional – plan to be generous with your time and resources. Here in the west and in an urban setting, many of us pride ourselves on efficiency. We have ambitious “to-do” lists, and think that multi-tasking is next to godliness. We tend to plan so much of our lives, that we don't make room for others. Part of our growth as a congregation in generosity, is building in some flexibility.

Again, while this may be a challenge for some of you, for some of you this is an encouragement. There are many of you that I can call upon and ask to house someone who is coming through, pick someone up at the airport, loan someone a vehicle and things like that. Your generosity is like Gaius. John brings up another related reason for being generous.

B. Not depending on unbelievers

What does it say to the world if we send someone out as a missionary who has to get government assistance for food? It says that we do not really value them or what they are doing. It is not the job of the government (unbelievers) to support the work of the gospel. Contrast that with this. A few years ago, a missionary that we knew about, whom we did not support, had to come back to the states for some medical care. Someone in the church loaned him a vehicle to use. He loaned him a nice car. He loaned him a car that was nicer than what most of us drive. Instead of thinking, “oh, you're a missionary, you should be grateful that you get anything”, his thinking was, “you're a missionary, I want to esteem you.” Honestly, that missionary was not used to be treated like that and he teared up as he told me how overwhelmed he was that someone would be that considerate of him. Well, isn't Jesus considerate of us?

4. Generosity creates genuine fellowship. (8)

When we have people in our homes, when we have meals with them, when we take the time to care for them, pray for them, ask them questions and provide for their needs, when we do extra things that are above and beyond, we really bond with them. I know that being generous brings dangers and we must be discerning, which is part of our text for next week. But, we do not have to choose between being discerning and being generous. We are discerning so that we can be generous.

Fellow workers (all of us – we) What stories will you have in heaven?