

Well, today is exactly one week to Christmas.

When it comes to “Christmas”, possibly half of what we think we know as “The Christmas Story”, is only folk-law – it’s legend that’s built up around the little bit that the Bible actually tells us. The picture we have of Jesus in the stable and all the animals; The cattle are lowing...

We actually don’t know where Jesus was, apart from the fact that he was laid in a feed trough.

What we **do** know, is because of a census that was taking place, Joseph and his wife had to travel to his ancestral home (Bethlehem). And they weren’t the **only** ones who had to do that – town had lots of visitors, and so there was no room at “the inn” or “the guestroom” (the Greek word can mean either). And so they laid Jesus in a feed trough. They might’ve brought it inside; It might’ve been in the courtyard... Who knows....

Whatever the case, no one welcomed this birthing mother into their home... No one gave little baby Jesus a cot or a cradle to sleep in...

What would we do? Now that we know Jesus, would we hesitate to do that for Him??? If Mary and Joseph came to your home or my home, with baby Jesus on board (Mary’s about to pop), we’d do everything we could to welcome them, wouldn’t we???

I know I'd give up my bed. I wouldn't need it, because I'd kneel down and worship Him until I fell asleep on the floor...

Today's message is partly about hospitality. When Jesus came to Planet Earth, no one offered Him hospitality. But today, you and I can offer Jesus hospitality and welcome Him into our homes.

Last week I read from Matthew 25, and I'm going to do it again. It's a picture of Judgment Day, and Jesus gives the image of a great separation of people, like drafting the sheep off from the goats.

Matthew 25: (ESV)

³¹ "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. ³⁴ Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and

you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'

³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸ And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹ And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?'

⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

Whenever we welcome our brothers and sisters in Christ into our homes (even if they are strangers, they are still our brothers and sisters in Christ).... And when we welcome a stranger such as this, into our homes, we are welcoming Jesus...

Of course, Jesus then goes on to tell those on his left (the goats), "Get away from me. You're going to the eternal fire (along with Satan & his demons), because you didn't do that?"

Matthew 25:42-43 (ESV)

⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.'

That's a very confronting picture of judgment...

Let's come back to today's letter:

In the 3rd letter of John, we meet 2 very different characters (Gaius & Diotrephes).

- One's a sheep, and the other is a goat...
- One is full of truth and love and demonstrates the truth of his faith with hospitality and love...
- The other one, is self-centred; looks out for himself first; and rejects the Brothers, who visit, preaching the truth of Christ....

We probably couldn't get a better contrasting example of sheep and goats...

So, the Apostle John, is writing to a bloke by the name of Gaius. And like 2nd John, we have the words "Love" and "truth" coming through over and over again. And Gaius is a shining example of both of these.

In his greeting, John tells Gaius, that he **loves** him in truth. That's like saying, "I love you in Christ"... And then he basically says, "I know that your spiritual health's all good, I pray everything else is OK."

How does he know that his spiritual health is all good? Because he's walking in the truth. The Brothers (as John refers to them) had visited Gaius, and he had welcomed them.

And when they returned to John, they said, “Hey, this bloke doesn’t just **know** the truth. He’s **living** it.”

And that, is what gives John no greater joy – to hear that disciples of Jesus, are walking in the truth...

This is what’s most important. He’s prayed that things would go well for him. He’s prayed that his health would be good, but the most important thing, is to be walking in the truth...

That caused me to think about the things **we** pray for. The most common prayer requests I get, are prayers for healing; During a drought, it might be prayers for rain....

And yes, let’s continue praying for these things. But they shouldn’t be our priority. Let’s begin praying more for our brothers and sisters in Christ, that they would walk in the truth. Let’s pray for those who are not yet saved, that they would be saved – that they would come to the knowledge of “the Truth”, and that they would begin to walk in the truth...

Anyway, when these travelling missionaries came to town, they immediately recognised in Gaius, truth and love. How? By the hospitality he showed them.

Last week in **2nd** John, the message was essentially to be really careful **not** to welcome travelling false teachers into the church. And basically anyone who welcomes a false teacher into the church, is joining them in their evil.

But here in 3rd John, the message is to make sure we **do** welcome and care for and provide for, visiting preachers and missionaries, who are teaching the truth of Christ.

And so, when preachers of truth come to our town, we are to welcome them with open arms and open doors. Even if they're strangers, whom we've never met, it is a beautiful thing;

- to welcome them into our homes; and
- to provide them what they need while they're here; and
- to fill their car with fuel; and
- provide a packed lunch to see them through to the next town

Christian missionaries should not be having to beg from unbelievers to fund their service of our Lord. That's what we Christians should be doing.

It seems today, there's a lot of models of ministry, that basically survive on Government grants... But as Christians, we must be funding Christian mission. And it's a blessing to do that.

When we support missionaries, we become their fellow missionaries. John says: You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. ⁷ For they have gone out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. ⁸ Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

I've probably said it numerous times: "God doesn't call every one of us to be missionaries", but in this sense, He does. God may not be calling you to be a preacher and a teacher in the church. But when, for the sake of the Gospel, others have left behind their employment, and they've gone out for the sake of the Name of Jesus, we ought to support people like these. And when we support them, we become **fellow workers for the truth**.

I love the way the teaching of John echoes the words of Jesus. Every bit of the teaching of John, is him passing on the words of Jesus...

Jesus said to his disciples:

Matthew 10: (ESV)

⁴⁰ "Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. ⁴¹ The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. ⁴² And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."

Sometimes we wish we could do more, don't we? – we feel terribly inadequate. We don't feel we're gifted enough to serve God in ways that others do. But we are, and we can,

simply by welcoming and supporting those who are called to mission, and to preach the truth.

So, there's Gaius. **Let's be like Gaius** – Let's be a people of truth, who **walk** in truth and love, welcoming workers of Christ (even strangers into our homes). And supporting them; and providing for them. When we do that, we welcome Jesus... Did you know, that when you give your tithes and offerings to support those who preach and teach the truth, you are joining with them, in serving the Name of Jesus...

But the 2nd bloke, he's a silly old goat. Diotrephes. This man is so full of himself. John says, "He loves to put himself first"... So much so, he won't even listen to the Apostle John. When John wrote a letter to the church, Diotrephes wouldn't let them read it.

And so John is hoping that he'll get a chance to come in person and set things straight. He says he's been **talking wicked nonsense against us** – sprouting "slanderous gossip".

And when the Brothers (who **were** preaching truth) arrived in town, Diotrephes wouldn't let them into the church.

Remember last week, we talked about, "If we are a church of truth, we'd better make sure we don't welcome false teachers into the church"... Well, it works the other way too. This week, in 3rd John, we have an example of a false teacher. And

false teachers do not like it when preachers of truth come into a church. And that's what's going on with Diotrephes.

In fact, those who **did** want to welcome the true missionaries into the church, Diotrephes excommunicated them. He was kicking anyone out, who welcomed truth into the church.

Can you see why I'm describing him as "a goat"? Not only would he not welcome Jesus' missionaries, he was kicking out anyone who did.

And so, the message of 3rd John, is "Choose who you model yourself on carefully". Most of us (at some time or other) are mimics. Do you ever find yourself mimicking another person?

I used to have an Uncle Neville, and he talked really slow, and had this drawl, just like this ...

And within minutes of being in his company, I too would start to talk real slow ... It was addictive... Not to mock him – I just did it...

And that's the thing – it's so easy to mimic those we're with, and we find ourselves modelling ourselves on others.

- If you spend a lot of time with people who use bad language all the time, you might find you start doing it too;
- If your mates are big drinkers, you'll probably start drinking too much too;
- If I spend a lot of time with gossipers, I might start gossiping too;
- I might model myself on the rich and the greedy, and start craving that stuff too;

And even in the Christian church, there are sheep and goats... If I start imitating a goat, guess which side of the drafting race I'm going to come out of – and I'll tell you what, I don't want to be there, because that's the place of eternal damnation of the Devil and his Demons.

John says, don't imitate evil – imitate good. And there's a positive and a negative to this: **Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God.**

I'm reminded of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount,
Matthew 7:21-23 (ESV)

21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. What's he talking about here? He's talking about **walking** in the truth.

Not just believing the truth – Walking in it... Living it.
Doing the will of our Father who is in heaven.

²² On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' [Who's he describing here? People who are acting the part of Christians] ²³ And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God.

Who are we going to imitate? Those who do evil, by not walking in the ways of God? Or are we going to imitate those who walk in the truth – who demonstrate the truth, with the love and the hospitality that they give, in the Name of Jesus.

Righto:

So, if 2nd John is telling us, don't give any welcome to false prophets. And 3rd John is telling us to make sure we **do** welcome Godly missionaries, how can we tell them apart?

Well, Jesus told us we can tell them by their fruit. You don't pick figs off of thornbushes, and you don't get grapes from brambles... And that is exactly what John is teaching us here.

It's not only about what we believe. It's not only about what we say. To walk in truth, is to put truth into action, and in this case, with hospitality and love.

Whoever does good is from God. Whoever does evil has not seen God.

That's true for us. And it's true for preachers and missionaries.

So, let's choose our model carefully.

To be able to recognise and to sort between what is true and what is untrue, we need to know the truth ourselves, and walk in truth.

¹¹ Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good.
Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God.

Peace be with You
Amen.