

10.22.2023

Receive the Message and the Messengers

(vs. 9-10)

3 John 1:9-10: “I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either, and he forbids those who desire to do so and puts them out of the church.”

Well, the more we read this particular epistle or letter, the clearer it becomes. What was the purpose of it? It seems kind of strange that John would not write to a church at large, but that he would write to individuals. We saw why he wrote to the lady. Now in this particular letter, he writes to an individual by the name of Gaius. If you look at the very top of the passage, he addresses him this way in 3 John 1:1, “The elder to the beloved Gaius.” One of the statements that we made was that this is a Latin name. So, we know that he’s probably from a Roman background which is interesting because we see John who’s a Jew feeling very close to him; which is another wonderful thing that we realize. This is a new family and that neither Jew nor Greek nor bond or free, but all have been made one in Christ. How wonderful it is that as Paul would say, we don’t recognize any man according to the flesh any longer, but according to the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 5:16) There is something thicker than blood, and that is the Spirit of God; and how wonderful it is that He unites us and joins us. Jesus will put it this way, “Who is My mother, My father, My brother? The one who obeys and keeps the commands of My Father.” (Matthew 12:50) So, we see a family that is coming together, and the love that is expressed towards him is very sincere and transparent in this letter.

By the time we come to verses 9 and 10, we begin to realize that there is a bigger problem at hand. The bigger problem is that within the church, there is one that is not receiving the letters from John. Now, we know that John is an apostle of Christ. I think that sometimes we kind of scratch our heads and think, “What gives him the right to boss people around?” People have these ideas. So, just for that sake of thinking and understanding this correctly, if you just take a moment and look with me in Hebrews 2. We’re not going to get into a long explanation about this, but the way that it’s written here in Hebrews 2:1, “For this reason we must pay much closer attention....”

Now, he’s talking about that we have a message in Christ that’s far greater than the message of the law that the angels gave.

“For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.

(Hebrews 2:2) For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty,

(Hebrews 2:3) how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord...”

So, the witness of Christ Jesus on the earth, the Resurrected One, the One that did miracles throughout; we could see that He had clout. The power of God was behind Him.

“... it was confirmed to us by those who heard.”

Who were those? His disciples.

Now, if you look,

(Hebrews 2:4) “God also testifying with them...”

How do we know that they were the disciples? “God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.”

So, why did God send His disciples out to do the various signs, wonders and miracles? It's because they would be overseeing Scripture. In order for them to be legitimate in the eyes of those, they would have to see the power of God in a very unique way in the lives of these that were going to oversee Scripture. So, John is writing Scripture as he writes these letters. The unfortunate thing is that not everybody receives Scripture. There's a lot of reasons why that's true, but man has his own ideas. Romans makes it very clear that man has a tendency to suppress the truth in unrighteousness because he has other things and another agenda that he wants to pursue. So, they think, “I don't want to hear the truth. Don't confuse me with the facts, my mind is made up.”

As we look at this, we not only see his attachment to Gaius because he really loves the truth and he's walking in the truth, but we now begin to see that there is somebody that's not allowing him to send a letter to the church. So, he went around and sent the letter to the one he knew would receive it, Gaius.

As he writes in verse 9, “I wrote something to the church.” See the phrase? What happened? Well, somehow it got thwarted. Diotrephes began to move it away and shunned it. He kept it from being read in the church. You would have to ask yourself, why wouldn't somebody want to read about the love of God? I don't think they as much mind about reading about the love of God, but when you begin to talk about the love of God being about righteousness, then they start having a problem. When somebody starts talking to you about the reality of your righteousness, then we have a big problem. People will talk about righteousness all day long, but when you start saying, “You do know that you have to stop this” and “You do know you

have to do this”; that’s when they start getting a little upset at you. They say, “I don’t want to hear that” and put their fingers in their ears and make noises. So, we’re seeing an individual such as that.

One of the things that I was talking about in the New Member’s class is how fast the church began to detour. We know that most of the letters or epistles that are written were written to the churches and correcting them. In fact, just to clarify, there’s a word that is used to refer to a letter in general. That’s not the word that is used when we’re talking about “epistle”. An epistle is a letter with the view to correct or to direct. So, there’s a direction that is given, and it’s written for a specific purpose. We’re going to see a correction as well with this particular thing that’s happening in this church. This letter is now written by the authority and power vested in him by God alone, and he begins to point out certain problems. Well, when you point out certain problems, people are going to not want those problems revealed; which is what’s happening in this case. As I had mentioned in the class, when you look at the seven churches of Asia Minor, most of them had some major problems. When you think about whether it be the church at Corinth, the church at Ephesus, the church at Thessalonica, the church of Galatia, all of them had issues. One of the things that Paul says to the church of Galatia was, “What happened? You were doing so well, and then you got off track. What happened?” So, he’s getting them back on track. Almost all of these epistles are doing that. In some ways, we’re thankful that the church went astray because God is directing us through these letters and showing us how easy it would be for us to go astray.

One of the reasons why you don’t want to just be a part of a church because “Wow, they’ve been around a long time.” Well, they’ve had a long time to sway. So, you don’t want to look at that; you want to look at “Do they love the Lord? Are they following the truths of Scripture?” If not, get out. You don’t want to be involved in that. If in fact it is a solid and true church, but they’re having problems, then God has maybe placed you in there to help build up that church.

If you look with me in 3 John, he starts off by writing, “I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first...”

That’s an interesting way of putting it. He loves the place of prominence. It’s so bizarre to me that you have a church, and people come into the church, and they’re looking for a powerplay? I can’t comprehend that. Go into politics or do something else; buy a company. Why are you coming into a church trying to be in the place of first or of prominence? It doesn’t make any sense to me. Yet, you would be surprised at how many people are really concerned about how they look and saving face. It’s all about persona, rather than it is about loving God. It’s so horrible to me that you would mess up a church that just wants to come together to love God.

When I was growing up, my dad was in ministry for about 60 years. So, I’ve certainly been a part of it for many years. You see a lot of things. Of course, I was going to school in California. When you go to California, that’s a different trip all on its own. As you go into these different churches, you begin to see all these different problems. I can understand why a lot of people

that go to church, and they go, "I don't want anything to do with church." I understand that because it seems like so many of them have people fighting with each other or vying for a position, and I'm going, "What are we doing?" You can hear Paul writing to the church at Corinth, and he goes, "'I'm of Apollos,' 'I'm of Paul,' 'I'm of Cephas.'" Why are you guys fighting over a position?" We like to call ourselves by names, "I know this preacher, I know that preacher." I feel like asking, "Do you know Jesus?"; because He's like at the top of the list and everybody likes to drop names and stuff.

As you look at 3 John, he's very concerned because here you have an individual that is literally thwarting the word of God. I think it's important when we look at this that we understand that John is writing this letter to clearly correct and direct. There's no doubt about that within the text.

One of the statements that he makes here is, "For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does."

His point is "I'm going to address this head on." Your thought is, "John, this is all about us getting along." He goes, "No, no, no. This is about this guy being divisive and hurtful, and we are not going to let it happen." So, he's going to come. Now, it's very important to realize that this is not a letter of personal vendetta by John. In other words, this is not John upset because this guy offended him in any way. You would say, "Why does that make a difference?" Well, Scripture is very clear. 1 Corinthians 13:5 says that you and I shouldn't take into account a wrong suffered. Mud is going to be slung at you. People are not going to like you, but you and I don't have the option to hold a personal vendetta against them. I've had a lot of hurtful things said to me, but it's just to me; it's not to the word of God and it's not against God. So, I can let it go and I'm supposed to let it go according to Matthew 6:12-15. It says that when you're praying, if you want your sins forgiven then you have to forgive those that have trespassed against you; if you want to be heard and have the blessings of God. It then goes on in the passage and says that if you won't do this, then your sins won't be forgiven. So, it's clear that John is not coming from the perspective of "This was really offensive to me." Now, what is interesting is the way that he puts it in verse 10, "For this reason, if I come, I will call attention..."

Meaning to bring up what he has done or call to remembrance; which seems to convey that some people may have tried to cover it up, "Let's just cover it up and pretend like it didn't exist."

"For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us..."

Now, the word that he uses, "*phlyareō*", makes reference to somebody berating. You wouldn't think that somebody would berate an apostle. I can understand a pastor, but to berate an apostle, that's pretty bold when you consider that. He's talking about falsely accusing him as well "with wicked words..."

The word “wicked” is “*ponēros*” within the text; which is making reference to something that is vicious and malicious; destructive in its nature. This word is interesting because it refers more to the influence and the effect of the work, rather than to the act itself; in other words, what it produces. He’s conveying that it produces a hurt. It brings sorrow and pain. People know what they’re saying, and they know how cutting it is. But John is bringing attention to “this really hurt me.” I know that sometimes we do things to God, and we go, “Ok, He’s God; He can take it.” We know that’s true, but Ephesians 4:30 says, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit.” Now, the fact that I can actually grieve God is an amazing thought to me. He must really care for me that I would have any effect on Him; but that I could grieve Him, I just feel so horrible that I could do that to God.

In this passage, he’s letting us know that John wasn’t just somebody that was an iron guy that didn’t feel anything. He’s basically saying, “The things that he was saying against me hurt.” However, he is not coming from a vendetta perspective. You can be hurt by the things that people say. Obviously, if you weren’t hurt, you would be somebody that didn’t care about anything. So, you would be very apathetic, cold and indifferent, but God hasn’t called us to that. I would say to anybody that goes into ministry and wants to serve in any way, fasten your seatbelt, you’re going to be hurt. You’re not going to be appreciated. People are oftentimes going to ridicule you when you do the right thing. Like that cartoon, “You knew the job was dangerous when you took it Fred.” (You would have to go way back to know that one.) The point is that we know. Jesus clearly warned His disciples. When you read in John 15 and you go into John 16, He goes, “Ok, they’re going to kill Me. Now, if they’re going to kill Me, what do you think they’re going to do to you?” So, He’s just getting them to think along those lines, and He says, “Let Me tell you, they’re going to deliver you up in the synagogues.” You say, “Synagogues? That’s religious places!” He goes, “Oh yeah, that’s the place they’re going to hurt you the most.” When you look at Matthew 23, it’s Jesus bringing an indictment against the Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees; those religious leaders. You wouldn’t think that you would get hurt in a religious place. No, no. Those are the worst. So, a church with people that aren’t walking with the Lord is the cruelest. They really are, but it’s not about you and it’s not about me, is it? It’s about the word of God, and we’re going to defend the word of God. We’re not going to get our feelings hurt. Love doesn’t take into account a wrong suffered. It will hurt us, but nonetheless, we will continue to minister in the word of God. Now, we will get highly defensive when it comes to the word of God being defamed and the name of Christ. We’ll get highly defensive here. When we begin to see that something is hurtful towards the body of Christ and would cause a soul to stumble, then clearly there’s going to be an uprising, so to speak, of the leadership.

So, as we come to the passage, he says, “I’m going to say something,” but you have to understand that it’s not because he is personally hurt; though he is and he’s clearly making reference to that. He says, “You would think that somebody when they hurt someone would be satisfied with that, “Well, at least I made them feel terrible.” I think that’s one of the reasons why people don’t forgive people; because they want to make people feel miserable. “Do you

forgive me?" "No." Then the person is sitting there going, "Please?" "No." They just want to see you in pain. That's why it's important for all of us to understand that you and I don't have the power to forgive their sins anyway. We do have the power according to what the word means in the Greek, to let it go. Look, they don't need to hear "ok" from me or anything because I just need to get right with God. If I'm right with God and I don't have a bad attitude towards them, I've let it go. I don't have to try to figure out if they understand how I feel. I don't have to do that. I do have to do my best to do the right thing, but I can't change their heart. Only God can change their heart. If you do the right thing, that's freeing. "Lord, you know my heart. I don't hold any animosity towards this person." God will free you. There's no doubt about it.

So, as we come into this passage, he goes, "He wasn't satisfied with just hurting us, but he won't receive anybody that will do the right thing and that is bringing the word of God." Actually, if you back up into verses 7 and 8, it says those that "went out for the sake of the name", that "we ought to support such men". The word "support" is the same word for "receive" in the letter. So, when he says in verse 10, "he himself does not receive the brethren", it's actually the same word as "support" in verse 8. He's saying that Diotrephes hasn't been receiving those that have been going out for the name of God; those that have been proclaiming the name of God, and he forbids those that desire to do so. In other words, those who were trying to help. Now, it's interesting that he writes this letter to Gaius, and he goes, "You've been supporting people like this, and thank you for doing that." However, the church being under the leadership of Diotrephes, strangely enough it seems to be, is not receiving because he's only concerned about exalting himself. This tells us a number of things.

One, it tells us that there is such a thing as a bad church in the sense of leadership. I've oftentimes said that we should let anybody come through the door, "whosoever will may come," but you don't want to put them in leadership. Once they're in leadership, it's hard to move these people away. They begin to make all the calls and they begin to do what they do to protect themselves, rather than bringing glory to God. You'll always want leadership that desires to point to Christ. If the leadership isn't there to point to Christ, then it's probably not a church. That's the goal.

In this passage, here you have somebody in charge of a church, and he's forbidding these things to come in. This is a sore transgression against God. Just to give you a picture of this; sometimes we read a section, and we think, "Ok, he's going to bring him before the congregation, and it will be a nice thing." No, there's probably going to be some pretty intense moments, but once again, he's defending the Word and the body of Christ. He's not defending himself. I oftentimes think of the passage in Samuel where David was having such a horrible time because his own son Absalom was trying to kill him. So much so that his son had taken over the kingdom, and it was like David was having to go outside with his tail tucked between his legs, ashamed. The people that were with him were in shame, and they didn't know what to do. As he's going out, the guy by the name of Shimei starts throwing rocks at him and cursing him. So, it's like, "Could things get worse?" and they do. His General says, "I can cut this dead dog's head off." David

responds, “No, leave him alone. God has placed him there for me.” He knew that because of some things that he had done that God was using this to humble him. The same thing should be true with all of us. You’re going to have criticism. You’re going to have people that just plain don’t like you for whatever reason, I don’t know. They’re going to say some hurtful things to you and it’s going to hurt, but God is going to use that in your life. There may be some truth to it. I’ve found in some of the criticism that’s pointed to me that although they do it in a hurtful or destructive way, and clearly out of hate and animosity, I still know that God is using that in my life to make me better. You can thank God for that. However, when it comes to the word of God and the body of Christ, you can’t be quiet. That was one of the things that we were talking about this morning.

There’s a passage in Matthew 10 that I want to touch upon. Isn’t it bizarre that we’re in the book of Joshua and then we’re in 3 John, and they just seem to coincide almost every Sunday. Now, I don’t know if that’s just me. In Matthew 10, Jesus is sending His disciples out. They’re sent out under His authority. The declaration is in verse 7 as He sends the twelve out; which is stated in verse 5.

(Matthew 10:7) “And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”

Then it goes on to say in verse 11, “And whatever city or village you enter, inquire who is worthy in it, and stay at his house until you leave that city.”

(Matthew 10:12) “As you enter the house, give it your greeting.”

(Matthew 10:13) “If the house is worthy, give it your blessing of peace. But if it is not worthy, take back your blessing of peace.”

Which means that things are not going well in that house. Now, what are they accepting? Well, they’re accepting both the message and the messenger. In other words, if in fact it’s the message that is out front, then now the two become one. If in fact they reject the message and the messenger, then there’s going to be consequences.

If you look with me, it reads this way, “Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words...”
(Matthew 10:14)

Now, “receive” is the same word we saw in 3 John, right? He didn’t receive them or the words that they were saying. He puts them out and he doesn’t like anyone else receiving them.

So, it says, “Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet.”

Now, we oftentimes end right there; keep reading.

(Matthew 10:15) “Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.”

Ok, so that's an interesting parallel. What is that telling us? There's going to be massive destruction. Why? Because they did not receive the word of the messengers. Scripture is telling us that with Scripture, far more is at stake than just somebody being offended. Look, if somebody offends you personally, forget about it. It's no big deal. Who am I anyway? I'm not that important. You'll figure this out if you live that long, but 50 years after I'm dead you'll go, "Who?" Nobody will remember me. The wonderful thing is that we're not forgotten by God, and we can leave a message of eternal life. We can have an impact on eternal life and this message cannot be messed up because the souls of men are attached to this; eternity is attached. So, this is a point at where we do get really riled up so to speak.

There's a passage in Matthew 23. It's one that we touched upon earlier. In Matthew 23:29 He ends with "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!"

Of course, He's been saying that all along in verse 13, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites..." Then He says it again in verse 14. People will say, "I don't know if I really like religion." I say, "Well, good because Jesus didn't either."

"Woe to you scribes, Pharisees, and hypocrites..." and it goes on.

If you look with me in verse 30, "and say, 'If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.'"

(Matthew 23:31) "So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets."

(Matthew 23:32) "Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers."

(Matthew 23:33) "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?"

(Matthew 23:34) "Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city,"

(Matthew 23:35) so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel..."

It goes all the way back to Abel. What is he saying? Well, I believe he's saying that when you reject the word of God, a fierce judgment comes upon you; that you will literally be judged according to all the rejections. In other words, it exponentially grows. You didn't just reject this word; you rejected all those that rejected the word of God. That's fundamentally the point of Hebrews 2:3, "how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" The more gracious and glorious the message, the more catastrophic and intense the judgment. This is why we can't let the Gospel get messed up; because how will they escape if they reject so great a salvation? We're not talking about them just going against the law; we're talking about them spitting on the cross of grace. As Jesus puts in that interesting parallel, He says, "So, what do you think they

should do?" and they go, "Well, they ought to kill those murderers." Then Jesus says, "What do you think God is going to do?" The point is that we have such a great and wonderful Gospel.

If you look with me in Romans 2; I just want to close with this particular passage. All the way through there is this warning of the church needs to defend the truth. The reason why I'm emphasizing this is I think people get confused. As a pastor, I'll be very hard and harsh on people that are defaming the Name and destroying the Scripture because they're leading people astray; they're hurting people's eternal soul. You can attack me; I'm not going to mess with you. I'm not inviting it, but I'm not going to fight back because I'm not important. However, the message is. Some of you have been with me long enough to know this to be true. You're my witness. When you see me getting upset about something, it's about the word of God and somebody has hurt the church. It's those two things.

So, as we come to Romans 2, there's a concern within this chapter that there are people who seem to know the truth but are doing the opposite. The thought is that "I can do whatever I want to do; I can defame the church, hurt the people, and be a bad testimony" but Romans 2 says, "No, you can't." the statement that's made within the passage is,

(Romans 2:3) "But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?"

(Romans 2:4) Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?"

(Romans 2:5) But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself..."

Do you understand what that means? "Storing up wrath", exponentially beginning to pile it on. This is why you and I can't go against Scripture. It says in verse 23 that you boast in the law and say you know all these things, but because you don't do what it says, "The name of God is blasphemed among the gentiles because of you." In other words, when a church rejects the truth; we're talking about those that know the truth and then they push it aside. It's a great crime because we've told the world that we are believers in faith. Now, it literally is leading them astray by the things that we do. So, you can't let that happen in a church. Matthew says that the church is like a light set up on a hill. So, you can't let the light be tainted any more than a ship going into the harbor and doesn't have the right light to go into the harbor. It would just cause shipwrecks, right? As Jude tells us.

God has called us, and I go through the different passages like 1 Timothy 1:6-7. He talks about those that are involved in fruitless discussion. The way he puts it is "wanting to be teachers of the law, making confident assertions about things that they don't understand." You have people that come into the church, and they go, "I think..." See, it's really dangerous when people start off with that phrase "I think". Then, they sometimes go into these homilies where they're telling stories. You're thinking, "That's a nice story." Is it Biblical? You begin to see that

people begin to control. Oftentimes, I've pointed out things to people and I say, "What does Scripture say?" They respond, "Well, I know what it says, but..." What's that about? What do you mean you "know what it says, but..."? What do you mean by that? Because that's what we follow. That's you being a Diotrephes, "I don't want to hear that." You never want to be selective about Scripture. I've had people tell me, "I don't like the book of Revelation," "I don't like the book of Ecclesiastes," and I can go down the list of the books that people don't like. It doesn't matter. You're not going to thwart the truth. By you doing that, you become a Diotrephes. If in fact you're teaching anything contrary to Scripture, you become a Diotrephes in that respect. God is warning us in these small, sometimes seemingly innocuous books which are not, just what is entailed in this and why we can't let this happen. If you see the pastor or the pastors taking a stand on a particular thing, we have a real good reason to do that. We don't have personal vendettas. You may, but we cannot afford to carry those. We represent Scripture. We represent the truth, and we're here to protect the body of Christ and the word of God. We are guardians of the truth as Paul will often say to Timothy. May we continue along this. Let me just say this, if in fact I'm not, you have every right to come and talk to me about it. If I don't repent, you need to get me out.

Closing Prayer:

Father, we give You thanks for Your word. We give You thanks for the truth of Your word. We're so thankful for those that receive not only the word but the messengers of the truth. We thank You for how wonderful it is that it changes lives. Souls are saved and preserved forever. Lives are changed in their families and at their place of work, and they become a light; where at one time they were just darkness. This is the word of God, and how valuable it is to us.

Your heads bowed and your eyes closed, I'm inviting you to love the word of God as much as I do; maybe you love it more. Continue in these things. Embrace everybody that loves it as well; for that's what unites us together.