

3 JOHN + + +

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Good morning, everybody. All right, so I'm gonna start with a question and that is: have you ever been on the phone with like a customer service representative and you know that they know that their job is to help you, but you know that they know that they stink at their job? And it's super frustrating, and the only thing that's keeping you from throwing your phone like across the room is that you have to call another customer service representative from Apple to try to fix your phone as well.

Take that feeling of frustration, bottle it up inside, push it down deep for just a second because we're gonna bring it back up again in this story now. The story that I want to draw you to is way back in the Paleolithic times when I was in seminary. There were like dinosaurs there and cavemen. It was crazy. But while I was there, there was this place where I would go to pray, and it was a wonderful place called the Chapel of the Holy Apostles. You can still go to it now at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, where generations of people being formed for the ministry would go into this very small chapel to just spend time in prayer with Jesus.

You would like push through these giant wood doors and on the wood doors was inlaid this wonderful verse about what waited for you on the other side. And they even wrote it in the King James. So you take it even more seriously. It's from John chapter 10. It says, "I am the..." can you read it? What does it say? "I am the door. By me if any man shall enter in he shall be saved." What a wonderful sentiment to put onto a door because if the doors would open up wide—or actually, they pushed in—they would push in and you could walk in. You would actually like have this wonderful experience of close intimacy and prayer with God.

That's what students sought and professors sought if the doors were open. Because I would tell you 90% of the time a student would walk over to those doors seeking Jesus and an experience and intimacy with him, wanting to hear what he has to say, and they would walk up to the doors. They'd push them and guess what? Locked. What does that say about theology if you say on the other side of these doors this close intimacy and prayer and experience with God, but these doors are locked?

Take out that frustration that you had from the beginning question. That's the frustration that everybody had and you want to know why I knew that? Because I was the full-time groundskeeper and who do you think they called to get the keys to open up the door? Because those doors were locked and people wanted to experience Jesus. This guy.

But here's what I want you to take away from both of those ideas specifically this door: as we're studying third John, we are going to learn something very important and critical about the church and our testimony and that is our hook for the day, and that is: Your door is your theology. So you're gonna say it all together. We're gonna say it several times. I want you to learn what these stories, what these true stories are about.

So that's why there's a hook each week so you can go back and say, "Okay, I think I understand what this one's about." This is about your door is your theology. So say it on one, two, three. One, two, three.

And I want you to think, it's not your door talking to me, it's your door is your theology. What you believe about Jesus is going to be directly shown from what your life looks like and what your testimony and words look like to other people. And in that way, your door is your theology. And that's what we learned through third John.

Now, as in every sermon in this series, you get a Bible snapshot. So if you don't have your Bible open already, please open up your Bibles to third John. Guess what? It's right after Second John. Yes. I'm gonna give you a couple of pieces of context before you find third John.

The first is this: written around 85 to 95. That's probably a little bit late, on the 95 side. It's probably 85 to 90 because Revelation generally is written after that, and Revelation is generally written between 90 and 100. Third John is usually right before that; written by John the Elder. We covered this last week.

John the Elder is the Apostle John, same author as the Gospel of John, first, second, and third John and Revelation. And this is one of the only letters in the New Testament that's spoken specifically to an individual.

Now, if you read the Gospel of Luke, you'll say, "Hey, pastor, that's written to Theophilus," which could be a very specific person or because it means lover of God (theos phileo). Many authors or many scholars believe that it's actually written to all of those people in the Christian Church at the time. But regardless, this is actually written to a specific person named Gaius.

Now, what makes this very interesting is that this is a very character-driven letter because not only is it to Gaius but it also calls out to other individuals in the church at that same time to either give us a good example or a counter-example of what church should look like with open doors.

Gaius is a good example, Demetrius is a good example. We're gonna find out in the middle that Diotrephes is the counter-example, the bad example, what churches should not look like. And it's all in the circumstances of the writing.

Because as we talked about last week, there were teachers that would hear the gospel, their lives were changed. Somebody opened the door of the gospel for them. They walked right through it and they wanted to make sure that the rest of the world had a bunch of open doors to hear the gospel.

Some of those were bad teachers. We talked about them last week. Do not honor them. Don't let them into your household. But some of them really loved Jesus and they were getting support from no other source, and they were looking for provision from the Lord through fellow believers. And that's where we have the problem.

Even though Gaius and Demetrius were excellent examples of opening their door, having hospitality, sharing the gospel, the guy in the middle, Diotrephes, just wanted to lead a church for the sake of himself, not for the sake of Jesus. He took himself first, and he would not give any provision or any help not only to just random teachers but also to John.

So the arguments of the letter that is given to Gaius is: what you do with the people or what you do with the people of God reveals what you believe about God.

Now as we walk through this letter, it's just a few verses long. I think we're at like 15 verses or something like that. But there's a structure to the way that the Spirit has inspired John in this letter that I want you to follow because once you get into a house and you expect hospitality, you expect a good host, right? And we're hoping that that's what you would experience—a wonderful host.

That host should allow you into the home to hear the gospel, but also to be cared for. But this structure in this letter, it can also go along with the acronym HOST.

Because the first eight verses talk about a hospitality that honors God. That's going to focus on the character of Gaius. But then we're going to shift to a counterexample, something the church should never be, something the church should never show and that's a closed door.

And that's an opposition that reveals pride with the character of Diotrephes. The next verse, verse 12, takes a gear shift back to another positive example of someone who's standing on the testimony of open doors with Jesus, and the character of Demetrius.

And then the whole rest of the letter teaches us that the door that you open tells who you serve.

So let's start with H: Hospitality that honors God. I want to read this to you. You're going to have one word to say because it's probably the most important word that goes along with opening your doors to others who need help.

3rd John 1 through 8 says this: “The elder to my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth. Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health, that all may go well with you, even as your soul is going well.” Put a pin in that. Think about that for just a second.

It gave me great joy when some believers came and testified about your faithfulness to the truth, telling how you continue to walk in it. Notice some of the themes that we learned about last week as well. Dear friend, you're faithful in what you're doing to the brothers and sisters, even though they are strangers to you. They have told the church about your love. Please send them on their way in a manner that honors God.

It was for the sake of the name that they went out. Receiving no help from the pagans we ought therefore to show, to show, to show hospitality to such people so that we may work together for the truth.

Notice what the most important part of that section is: as others come to you, should you meet them with a closed door? No, hospitality says that you should live a life that's different, live a life that opens the door. What opens that door? Hospitality.

But what is it that people are going to find on the other side of that hospitality? What is it going to be that, like a guy like Gaius that's inside of the home, that's like opening it up and like, “Come on in. I'm going to take care of you. Come on in. I've got something important to share with you.” And it's a little

bit more than bread. "Come on in and hear about the name of the one who loves you and cares about you. Come on into God's house."

Notice what John says about Gaius that I wish he would say about each and every one of us. He says, "It is a joy to hear that your soul is well."

So what is it that's going to fuel an actual biblical hospitality that's going to keep the doors open? That your soul is going well.

True hospitality, like actual thoughtful care, it doesn't come from white-knuckling, just being nice. It comes from being close to Jesus, in his home. That's where we have this overflow of gratitude that he has cared so much for us; he's provided so much for us that we can't help but then extend that hospitality to somebody else.

And notice what it did when Gaius was in home and the door was open so others could be in there. John said that it turned even strangers into brothers and sisters. And it was for the sake of the name that they traveled to meet him, and it was for the sake of the name that he received them with an overflowing of the soul.

Why? It's the hook, and we're going to say it together: Your door is your theology.

So if your door is your theology and hospitality comes from an overflowing of the soul, how's your soul?

If you're not doing well with treating people kindly and with compassion, most of the time it's not because you don't have the resources. Most of the time it's because of the state of what's going on in here. How is your soul?

Would other people look at the state of your soul and say, "It is a joy that I can see that your soul is going well," or would other people look at you and say, "Wow, she's busy," "Wow, he's important," "Wow, look at all the things on their Microsoft Outlook calendar. They must be amazing," or would they say, "Wow, I wish my soul looked like that so that my door looked like that, so that my house looked like that?"

And I would say more often than not, our soul isn't doing great. So more often than not, our doors are closed and our homes don't have the same hospitality to brothers and sisters that were once strangers.

And I do wonder what that would say if we bring back our hook again: that your door is your theology.

And what does that say? Is your theology... and what does that say about the state of your soul?

Well, it might show us what's going to happen in these next verses as we go through the HOST acronym and we progress through the letter.

We've got O: an opposition that reveals pride in verses 9 through 11.

And so here is John continuing to speak to Gaius to let his church know too about what it actually looks like to be a church. He says, "I wrote to the church but Diotrephes," remember the bad guy who loves to be first.

Who's supposed to be first? Jesus should be first in every church. Jesus should be first in every home, but Diotrephes loves to be first. He will not welcome us. It's like he's rejecting John and those who are traveling with him.

So when I come, I'm going to call attention to what he's doing. He's spreading malicious nonsense about us, which by the way I know all of you are going to look to start a rock band pretty soon. I'm going to give you some free advice if you're going to start a rock band: here's your name right here, "Malicious Nonsense." I think it would be great. I would sign you if I had a record label.

But he says, "Not satisfied with that, he even refuses to welcome other believers. Not only that, he also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church."

Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. Anyone who does good is from God. Anyone who does evil has not seen God.

And this is the contrast that John has been building toward.

So there was a door with Gaius that was opened, but now Diotrephes seeks to close it. And you heard why. It had to do everything with this soul.

This word said that Diotrephes loves to be—he loves to be first, he's number one. And he is so wrapped up in his home and what he has and the authority that he's been given that he doesn't care much about the name of Jesus other than what the name of Jesus will give to him.

And so not only will he stop people from going into the house of the Lord, will he stop people from going into the house of the Lord, into the church, but he's posted guards so that people can't get in there.

The problem wasn't necessarily the position that he held—the problem was in his soul. And so you saw the problem then was in his church.

Jesus warned against this in Matthew chapter 20. He said that's the way that the Gentiles lead. They like to lord it over them. But then he says, "Look, if you want to be in my house, if you want to serve in my church, it's not about you being first. No, he says, whoever wants to be first or greatest among you must be your servant."

That's the position that our soul needs to be in: not in a number one loving position or authority or a schedule, not in rejecting the people that the Lord has put over us and going like this in our small groups, our friend groups. It's actually about having a soul so overflowed that we can't stand a closed door in our church or to Jesus.

And this is where something's going to hurt, something's going to hurt. Because Diotrephes doesn't have to be a character that lived by himself. We can't turn him into just some soul monster.

I believe that in our church, like I'm talking big C Church, but also maybe here in this church, maybe the people that are sitting in these black chairs and the guy standing up on this stage, maybe we got some Diotrefes in our heart. And all that Diotrefes has caused a lot of atrophy in our soul.

And maybe that's why the Christian church in North America is shrinking faster and faster and faster. Our souls are so parched by trying to just stay in that number one position for ourselves that we're more comfortable with a closed door. We're more comfortable with keeping ourselves busy with a whole bunch of self-justified excuses about why we cannot share the gospel. "Oh, I'm too afraid," "Oh, it's not comfortable."

What if Jesus would have said that to you and me when we were at the door, "I'm sorry, but you on the other side of this door, you can have salvation by me. You can go through the door," but the door was locked? What would that feel like?

But that's not Jesus.

So my prayer is that in this word, this letter comes to this church, in this heart too, to be able to say, "How's your soul?" And to actually diagnose that there's some stuff wrong in here.

That the overflow of hospitality we should be seeing, an overflow of attendance in churches worshipping Jesus, and an overflow of prayer moments and prayer services—that's not happening because we're putting ourselves first.

Maybe this though is going to show us there's some opposition in our hearts and it's revealed a lot of pride.

It did that for Diotrefes because you'll see, and you saw, his door was his theology. But I just want to let you know that's not the last word.

John's got this amazing complimentary sandwich.

He starts with a good example with Gaius.

He gives us a counter example that we need to be convicted by and grow from for the sake of our souls.

But now he gets to another positive example, and that's the S as we continue through third John.

The S in the HOST acronym is Jesus's church should be standing on testimony.

Jesus's church should be standing on testimony. It should illustrate the position of our soul.

Third John 12 says this: "Demetrius is well spoken of by everybody and even by the truth itself. We speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true."

Isn't that cool? Like Demetrius gets a shout out in one verse, but it lets us know what his theology was like—it was all about having an open door testified by the truth. He wasn't about closed doors. No. He was all about having a door that would be completely open so that everybody that needed to hear Jesus could go right in.

His heart, his soul was in such a good place because of the truth of Jesus and the name of Jesus that he could let anybody in.

And the wonderful thing about this section of the scripture is the testimony and where it comes from. It comes from three places.

So John says that the truth of this man's soul, Demetrius, is testified by his peer group, it's testified by John, but it's testified by the truth itself.

And so again, if you want your soul to be in a healthy position to be able to have an open door and have wonderful hospitality to share the gospel, we have to allow the word to do its work in our heart and do conviction for the truth to say, "Where am I in my soul with Jesus? Do I seek the first position in my home with my comfort and appeasing my fears, or am I more worried about having an open door so that other people can already experience what I've already experienced in my heart?"

And if that's the case, what will the truth speak for you?

Because along with our hook, your door is your theology, and Demetrius's door told the truth about who we served.

And with that, we can move to the final point in the HOST acronym of what you experience on the other side of a home filled with the gospel, with Jesus first, and your soul overflowing. That's T.

The door you open tells who you serve.

You could tell who Gaius served because his life was all about Jesus.

You could tell who Demetrius served because his life was all about Jesus and the truth.

But you could also tell who Diotrephes served: he served himself.

And you could see it all because of the doors that existed there.

Now, the point of this sermon isn't "be more like Demetrius" or "be more like Gaius."

The point of the sermon isn't "try to avoid more being like Diotrephes."

The goal of this message is that all three of these characters converge on the cross.

They all come to that point of the deepest truth in the letter and that is the truth of the gospel, of the deepest truth in the letter: that none of those people did it right. And that everyone needed to be under the name.

And it was for the sake of the name that they went out and people have come to you.

It's for the sake of the name that you are welcomed into the gospel.

It was for the sake of the name of Jesus that you're not identified just by who you are as like sinner, backslider, addict, liar, adulterer. Those names are gone.

The door was open for you.

Your soul's wellspring is so full you don't have to worry about being parched anymore, and same thing with these other three characters.

But that means that there's a change—that you should have an open door with other people who need help because they need you to speak the name of Jesus where no one else is going to speak it.

It's important. It's critical to the future of the church that you speak the name of Jesus because he spoke your name from the cross.

Think about the way that Jesus talks about hospitality and welcoming people.

Matthew 10:40 says it this way: "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me," Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."

Your door is your theology.

You've got a closed door: who is that saying about who sent you?

You've got a big old open door, you've got a big old open door that is all about the name, and you're caring for people, turning them from strangers to brothers and sisters.

What does that say about the one who's inside the home that you're excited to make excuses to care for them?

Gaius opened a door; Demetrius opened a door.

Don't be the one who closes the door—that happens enough.

And that's why churches close their doors and they don't open them again.

But that's why this letter is so important as we close out this series.

That's why I want to remind you of how this letter is even structured about how we should host people, be hospitable for the sake of the gospel.

When we reflect Jesus and our soul is in a beautiful position of being overfilled with gratitude, we show a hospitality that honors God.

Yes, we're subject to an opposition that's going to reveal pride in our hearts, but we can ask, stand on the testimony that Jesus can root out that pride.

Why? Because the door that you are going to open is going to tell everyone who you serve.

Because your door is your theology.

And the HOST acronym is not just a part of a letter, it's a description of what happens inside of the home of God, inside of the church.

May this church, King of Kings, be filled with people, be filled with souls who are overflowing for the sake of the gospel—not because you got it all figured out but because you've been welcomed by the one who is always here.

Not to close the door like at seminary, but to open this door.

And I'm not even going to close with a prayer because I want you to see that door and stand up and praise Jesus for all of the great grace that he's given to you, that you may with abandon approach him in his house with not me being first or anyone else but with Jesus and his name on our lips.

Amen. Amen.