



Letters of Love

#19 Hospitality

August 12, 2018

Courage Church, Detroit, MI

scriptures: 3 John, Mark 10:37,
Matthew 5:5, Isaiah 32:8, 1
Corinthians 11:1.

I want to share this with you briefly...

next week we will start a new series... we are going to do a series called "Ancient Cliff Notes" - and what it will be is a cliff notes style look at some of the key stories in the Old Testament. We will look at the story of Samuel and of Saul, the story of Ruth and of Esther... we may look at Job, Jonah, and Hosea... a few others...

we are going to incorporate several different teachers in this series, so it will not always be me up here... which is very exciting! We have a lot of great teachers in our church, and we have a lot of people who are being raised up in that gifting as well. I am really looking forward to hearing from some of them.

The current plan for the series is to go basically all the way until the Christmas season... however we are going to take a break in October... and I will talk more about October toward the end of our sermon, but in October we are going to bring out several of the missionaries that we as a church support, and we are going to hear from them. We have three of them booked so far, and we are working on possibly one more... so for October we will break from the "Ancient Cliff Notes" series, and do a series on "mission" - then get back into the ancient cliff notes until Christmas. So that is just a bit of an update on what is coming in as far as teachings.

Today is the end... the final part in our series "Letters of Love" - this is the 19th sermon since Easter Sunday... we started the series the Sunday after Easter and have been on the 3 letters of John ever since. In a few minutes we will read the third letter.

I warned you last week, but just like last week, we are going to handle this passage quite a bit differently than we did the first letter... I really am going

to use today to springboard us into fall and lay a small amount of ground work for some vision stuff... again, we are coming out of just an absolutely INCREDIBLY FRUITFUL SUMMER at Courage Church. We ministered to a lot of people, we accomplished a lot... and as we prepare for fall, in anticipation of God doing some amazing things here in our community and in our midst, I want us to look outwardly today. That was why at the beginning of service we played that video of our friend Jerome. That is why we highlighted what Kenny and Debra are doing in Haiti...

So here is the book of 3 John:

Greeting

The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth. Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul. For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. **I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.**

Support and Opposition

Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.

Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God. Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself. We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.

Final Greetings

I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face (*mouth to mouth*). Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends, each by name.

-

I really want to see our church grow. I do. And something that I really felt in my spirit this week was THIS thought... and I am going to say it now and build from there...

and what I am going to say takes everyone. It won't work if only Dawn and I do it. It won't work if only our worship team does it, at least not the way that it could work if EVERYBODY DOES IT.

But Courage Church needs to be a place that grows by building other peoples lives... We should be building our church BY BUILDING UP OTHERS. I am extremely convicted in this area... because its very very hard, and it takes an unbelievable amount of sacrifice.

But ultimately, that is the heart of this letter, in my own words...

Building our church by building up others.

What we just read could be best described as "a pastoral letter of recommendation."

Now, In 2 John, he gives us a few guidelines and things to look out for that are warning signs showing why we would NOT be hospitable toward someone... if they don't confess Jesus as the Christ... which is very important. If we accept leaders specifically... teachers... people speaking into our lives and over our communities who do NOT confess that Jesus is Lord, that is going to be very destructive for a community.

And we need to make note that he does that in 2 John so that we can make note that what he says to the church in 3 John is is different from what he said in 2 John... because in the church in 2 John people were coming in on their own accord, heavily influenced by Gnosticism, and spreading something dangerous.

But we need to keep that contrast in our minds as we read about how open to strangers John wants THIS community TO BE...

if the threat is SPIRITUAL... or if the threat is PHYSICAL... that is different. but in many cases, the threat of hospitality was more about what was *comfortable*...

and in this letter...John is giving his approval of the traveling ministers that he knew were coming through - asking that Gaius and the others in the community continue to welcome them in the same way that they have been doing, and then John also directly address a man who was NOT being hospitable.

and before we get into Hospitality which is the heart of the message today, I want to talk for a moment about this man Diotrephes.

Diotrephes was demanding to be in charge, and did not acknowledge even the Apostle John's authority. John says that he was talking wicked nonsense and was refusing to welcome fellow workers of the Gospel who were traveling through. And this is a HUGE deal... a really big problem... Hospitality was the blood flow of the Early Church and it was one of the things that clearly caused the church stand out IN A WORLD that guarded itself pretty closely against strangers... we will get to that in a moment...

But John is a genius communicator. He words this whole thing perfectly. He is not just trying to call out Diotrephes, he is trying to set a course by which the church he is writing to can follow which will truly cultivate the healthiest community, and beyond that, work miracles in their own lives...

Lets explore this quick, and then we will get on hospitality.

verse 9:

“Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first” (does not acknowledge our authority...)

One thing we have said in this series about John is that by the time of these last letters, he was VERY OLD. Just like 2nd John, here he introduces himself as “the elder” - someone who, by the life experiences

that he has had, is qualified to write and speak into the lives of the ones he is writing.

and we have talked several times in this series about the way that John's letters reflect the way that age has perfected him. How as he got older, love became the main thing, when he wasn't always so loving but the more and more life he saw and the more he reflected on Jesus, the more he realized that love should be the central theme in all of our lives...

well, even in this line about this man who likes to put himself first, John can relate. In the early days, John and his brother James went to Jesus and they asked Jesus this question: (Mark 10:37)

“Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”

John tells Jesus “I want to be first.” - I want the throne right next to you...

Because the truth is John was just as human as we are, and human nature is to want to be first. It is to want to be the star... to want to get the credit... to want people to think that we are great. Diotrefes attitude was one that John had to work out IN HIMSELF.

I think that we read some of these stories, and think “I would never do that” - or even more simply: “what is that guys problem?” but when John gets there and confronts the issue, he is doing it as someone who has been on the other end of wanting to be first.

But when James and John ask that absurd question of Jesus, basically what Jesus tells them is that they don't know what they are asking... because they think that they are asking for power but really they are asking for death.

Jesus knew where he was going, and that where he would go he would have to go alone. And I can only imagine John, who was there at the cross on the day Jesus was crucified... just looking up at Jesus and seeing one on his left, and one on his right.... and suddenly realizing what he was asking for... and maybe even realizing that Jesus loved him SO MUCH, that he DID NOT GIVE HIM WHAT HE ASKED FOR.

But watch this... back in Mark 10, Jesus goes on to say how most people think that power is the ability to lord over other people... but he tells the disciples that if you want to be great, you must be a servant.

and here in 3 John, one of the most significant lines we get is verse 4:

“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”

and then from verse 5 to 8 John describes the things that Gaius and his congregation have done really really well... which John is writing to affirm...

He says “you are faithful to strangers... you send them on to the next part on the journey BETTER OFF THAN HOW THEY GOT TO YOU.”

Just like what Jesus said in Mark 10 when he says “if you want to be great... then serve...” John says this is what it means to walk in truth, and this is why I am so proud of you... it is not accumulating all you ever wanted... it is not “all of your dreams coming true” - no... it is hospitality...

it is laying aside your own preferences for the sake of including others and blessing others and benefiting others.

The world ultimately will NOT be won by the people who live their lives trying to build themselves something. It will NOT be won by the empires who use violence and force hostile takeovers, though at times they have created an illusion of being in control.

Jesus says it is the meek who will inherit the earth... the ones who learn to control their strength for the sake of the greater good. God is going to hand the world to the people who, rather than using their strength to command control of people, are willing to lay it down for the purpose of WINNING PEOPLE.

and there is a VERY BIG DIFFERENCE.

and John here writes that there is nothing that gives him more joy than seeing his children live this way.

He tells Gaius that his congregation... his church... absolutely got it right when it comes to the way that they showed hospitality.

I gave you this definition last week, but I am going to share it again today. When defining hospitality in the ancient Mediterranean world that John was in, Bruce Malina defines Hospitality this way:

“Hospitality might be defined as the process for changing an outsider’s status from that of stranger to guest.”

(1) But understanding what this actually meant in that culture is crucial to understand what John is asking of his church...

because for most of us, when we think of hospitality... we think of hosting our friends... or own family... someone visiting whom we already have a relationship with. But in ancient culture that is just the way life is lived...

of course you are sharing life with your friends and family... that was just normal... hospitality was something that you showed *a stranger*. Someone who you did NOT know... that was what made it so powerful and RARE ENOUGH that it had to be specifically taught to people. It was the way you welcomed someone NEW into your community, family and life which was something that people often resisted.

In fact, strangers were often treated like they aren’t even human... they had no legal rights in the societies they entered into, and they often entered at a great risk to themselves. As awful as this is, when someone new came into their community, the community often would either kill them, send them away as quickly as possible, or in some instances... “receive them” - but in order to receive someone new in that culture, they had extensive tests to figure out whether or not this person was a threat to the community physically, or a threat to the way of life that they had worked so hard to create...

or if they would be willing to adapt to it.

Because when you accept strangers into your community, or welcome them into your home... there are all sorts of risks of ways that the new addition will disrupt your current existence... from comfort all the way to safety...

So in that world, hospitality was a process...

But John is trying to cut through that and he put his name on the line for these traveling ministers and he says “accept them. love them while they are with you. Learn from them, pour back into them, and when they leave, send them away better than they were when they came to you.”

but again, the question we always need to be asking is what does this mean for us? Because our world is a bit different than that world was.

But this is one area that I can speak to directly using my own life. Because my life was completely changed by the hospitality of others... and in fact watching others be hospitable was one of the greatest teachers I ever had in my life.

I used to play in a band, and we would travel around all the time... really, we did it for years. We played on the weekends usually at small clubs and venues with other bands, but whenever we could book a church, we always did... so we played at a whole bunch of different youth groups across the country and even the occasional Sunday adult service.

And we would play those shows, and the churches would often take offerings or give us an honorarium, and those dates were usually enough to cover our expenses so that we could then on the weekends go and play “secular” venues, and share the love of Jesus that way with people.

Though our objective was NEVER to just entertain Christians, it was those stops at those churches, where we would perform and teach and just interact with students... those nights were what ALLOWED US to minister on the other nights of the week, in venues that were not churches or christian clubs... because it was the churches who believed in what we were doing so much that they supported it and allowed it to continue.

and along that journey, we had many testimonies of kids coming to Jesus... people think they are just going to a show, and leaving with Jesus... people who came to an event angry, lost, alone and feeling like nobody understood them or was there for them or was even willing to connect with them, and they left changed.

But through all of that, there were people who had our backs. We would meet people in one place, and they would open their home to us, and then they would call their friends a few towns away, and see if they would host us, and allow us to minister to them. That was how I met Kenny and Debra, who actually are now missionaries that WE support at Courage... We played a show in Jackson, MI and connected there with a pastor who brought us to Colorado Springs for a show, and connected there with a pastor who brought us to Southern California for a show, and then that pastor connected us to Kenny and Debra who also lived in California.

they met us... and without knowing us at all, they opened their home to us... all six of us that first trip... and they treated us like family.

and if they didn't open their home... we would have had to go home. We would not have been able to do the work that we did, for all of the years that we did it. We would not have been able to reach the people that we reached.

But even today... any time a stranger comes into your life, or into your community, they are instantly a potential threat to your current way of life. I am not saying that as in "we should be threatened by outsiders" - quite the opposite... we need to welcome them. But the reason that we often DON'T welcome people, and the reason that we are so easily able to justify doing that to ourselves, is because the truth is, no matter how you look at it, they are a threat.

and you have to be willing to risk something to help someone else.

Always. Every single time.

For Kenny and Debra to let my friends and I come stay at their house, for what at first they thought would be a week but ended up being a couple of

months one time, and a whole month several other times... even if they had total and complete confidence that we were good people who meant well by their family and would look out for their children... we still were a threat to their comfort. We would double the amount of people living in their house.

We were a threat to their bills... we would double the amount of laundry that needed to be done, food that needed to be bought, electricity that needed to be used.

Every time you do something to give someone else a foot forward in *their* mission, you do it at a cost to yourself... and that is why I believe that we need to be a community of people who are INTENTIONALLY HOSPITABLE... we make a plan for how we can respond to people's needs...

we make a plan for how we can contribute to the community and be open to bringing other people into our community.

Isaiah 32:8, right? - "a generous man devises a generous plan, and on generosity he shall stand."

Because the kind of community that BUILDS ITSELF SIMPLY BY BUILDING OTHERS...

does not happen on accident.

Nobody accidentally does the thing that is not in their own immediate best interest.

our natural bend is always toward *ourselves*.

But when you live your life intentionally about others, not concerned with how it will come back on you... you are doing it right. And you may not even always see what you are building by loving people that way... but you are building something.

-

Dawn and I had the opportunity to spend a couple of days with Kenny and Debra a few months ago down in Nashville where they now live when they aren't in Haiti. We had a blast... made homemade pizza like we used to do, they taught our kids how to do cartwheels and just loved on our kids the same way that they always had loved on us.

And one thing that I realized is that through the simple willingness to be hospitable to people, to treat them not as outsiders but as guests in their home... not as threats, but as friends... their fingerprints are all over the work being done all around the world today. Because we certainly weren't the only people who they were like parents to. There were times when we had 7 or 8 of us with them, and then two others, or a family of 4 would come stay... IN ADDITION TO US... and it wasn't a big house!

and they have now watched all of these people from all of these places go out, all around the world doing ministry, and they get to sit back and watch with the satisfaction of knowing that they had a role in what God did through that person.

last winter they passed through Detroit just for a morning, and we had breakfast at El Rancho and then showed them the church, and you could tell what it meant to them to be here... it was kind of like when pastor Brad and Stella were here last summer, and they met with our leaders and they said "our cup has been so full all week - its like this church is our church." I think that was sort of how Kenny and Debra felt just getting a tour.

And I think that is the way that John felt when he said "there is no greater joy than to see my children walking in the truth."

Then when they see Dawn and I, who learned hospitality by the way it was shown to us... then show that to others... they have no greater joy. When they see Robert, another person who they took in and believed in, become a youth pastor at a church in Tennessee... no greater joy...

when they see others living, out of the influence of the way that they demonstrated... no greater joy.

Their influence... the influence that they have all over the world, I credit more than anything to the hospitality that they have shown each and every person that has come into their lives and they have invited into their home.

Another story: about another person in our lives and I have no idea how I remembered this when studying for this sermon... but I do, so clearly.

I remember one Sunday night I was at Mount Hope in Lansing, our home church... and for whatever reason I wasn't in the main service, I was with the youth or working on a video OR SOMETHING... I don't remember what I was doing but we slipped into the sanctuary kind of mid-message, I know lots of you can relate to that one...

but we slipped in, and Mary Jo Williams was speaking, who was the pastors wife... and we hadn't been in there for five minutes when Mary Jo started talking about Dawn and I, And about our band, and the work we were doing around the country. I had no idea she was going to do that, and I was glad that I had made it into the service for that... but what she did was she talked a little about what we do, the ministry we had... she made us sound better and more spiritual then we ever felt, that is for sure... but then she said these words to a room full of a couple thousand people:

“we should be supporting them”

I will NEVER forget those words, spoken from the pulpit, from someone who very rarely was up there... in fact, I think that it was the only time that I had ever heard her speak... and she used that platform that she was rarely given, to encourage the church to support *us*.

And it wasn't like a “pity” support... like “oh those kids are trying, we should do something to make them feel good...” this really spoke to me that she believed that the work that we were doing mattered.

And to this day, that family, Dave Williams and their ministry is one of the biggest supporters of Courage Church and the work being done here in Detroit. Because someone believed in us when nobody else would.

and before long, someone else believed. and someone else believed. And Dawn and I have lived a life that has been so dependent upon God bringing people into our lives who will play a role moving us closer and closer to our destiny...

And I tell you both of those stories to tell you this:

I can stand before you today and say without hesitation that I am who I am today because good people believed in me. Dawn and I are here today because good people believed in us... even when we were at our worst they believed in us. Even when we were a nuisance to them they believed in us.

And that is why we are so convicted that at Courage Church, even though our mission right here at home, on the ground in Detroit is CLEAR AS DAY... even though we know that the work will NEVER, EVER BE DONE HERE... and we could put all of our attention and efforts and money into this place exclusively and would be completely justified in doing that because we know there are already more needs here in our city than we could ever possibly meet...

we still believe in the way that God is moving all over the place... and we want to support people who are doing that work.

I saw a Facebook video yesterday from our friend Jerome who planted a great church in Lansing. He spoke here right before they planted...

And they want to buy what they call a "love the city" truck where they go around the city and throw block parties and basically have a traveling church/outreach truck... they are trying to raise 55,000 dollars and let me tell you... though that truck likely will not in any way EVER effect Courage Church in Detroit...

I think we should support them in it. And I am just throwing this out there, but for this week, any money that comes in on our "missions" section of the app and website through push pay, we are going to send to help them buy that truck. We know in our church, there will likely, very soon come a time when we need to do something similar... raise a lot of money in short

amount of time for something impactful in our community... I don't know when for sure, but I know its coming... and so right now we need to be a church that is ALL ABOUT SEEDS. So plant one this week.

and then this is other big thing related to us supporting others...

This October, as a church, we are going to be hosting 3, POSSIBLY 4 missionaries here in Detroit... they will teach us, tell us their stories, show us what we are investing in when we send them checks every month, which we do... and honestly, I want you to be praying about how we can make that month great... I want you to be praying about what you can give, specifically to missions, between now and October so that we can give each of our guests an offering that actually helps them move forward with their mission. Whatever comes in AFTER this week and after we send out the seed money into the "love the city truck" will be split between them, and I would love to see us pull together \$3,000 dollars for that month, to be able to bless these missionaries.

And you may say to me, "Jacob... we are already tithing... we are already giving to the mission here in the city... how is our church supposed to keep doing that... keep moving forward on the projects, keep the church running through tithes and offerings... and yet at the same time raise \$3,000 extra for missionaries?"

I don't know how it is going to happen. But I believe that it will happen. And hopefully not only does it happen, but it becomes the new normal for us.

Look church, we have a big big vision... and we have so many potential things on the way... things in the works... people who want to invest in the work being done here... every summer more teams come here to serve... its great...

But we want MORE for our church here... and I just believe so clearly that if we want more, we need to plant more... we need to invest more into what others are doing. There is no loss when you invest in people... ITS IMPOSSIBLE TO LOSE...

you never end up feeling like you lost when you gave to a missionary. and I don't know how we will do it, but I know that we need to.

Think about what verse 6 of 3 John says:

“You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God.”

What John is saying is this: you guys have been SO hospitable... you've been good too these missionaries who have come in your midst... But listen...

YOU WILL DO WELL... YOUR CHURCH... YOU WILL DO WELL... if you send them off with enough support that they actually are taken care of... they are actually able to go on with the mission without going into debt... they are able to move forward with what God put in their hearts without stalling, because you were the miracle in their lives... and John says that WHEN WE DO THAT FOR THEM...

we will do well.

The people who are coming are, on Sunday October 7, Mark Anthony and Erica Licea, who were our missionaries to Cuba and just got home from that mission are going to come and tell us all about their time there... we highlighted them a couple months ago... and some of you may remember that they were with us a couple of years ago on that Sunday that the power went out at church and so we had house church that morning at our house.

We are still working on who is going to speak Sunday October 14th, I am waiting to hear back for sure, so that date is still up in the air... but then, we are doing a VERY SPECIAL TUESDAY NIGHT EVENT on Tuesday October 16... and I really want you all to be there, I will tell you more about it as we get closer, but we are hosting a speaker named Shane Willard. Shane is probably the person that I quote MOST from the pulpit, with the exception of Pastor Brad... Shane is one of Pastor Brad's friends and mentors, and he speaks all around the world literally all year long. He won't even be in America again until October, and so its very hard to book him but we were able to get him on a Tuesday night... he is one of the best teachers I have heard in my entire life, and his ministry has orphanages all

around the world, they rescue girls from human trafficking, they are just doing so so much to impact the lives of broken people and we want to really support him and his ministry when he is here.

And finally, Sunday October 21 we have Scott Thompson speaking. Pastor Scott was the missions director at Mount Hope Church for many years, and he has literally been Courage Churches number one advocate... he was hugely instrumental in us getting the first Courage House, and now we have an opportunity to support HIM, as he begins a new journey and he and his wife are going to be a serving in Asia Pacific. So please, be thinking and praying about that... how can we be a HUGE blessing to all of them next month... while still continuing the work being done here at Courage? During that series I will also try and do one sermon where Dawn or I or us together give you a really clear update on everything happening here on the MISSION SIDE... the traction on some of the city mission stuff, the side lot project, and some other things that are in the works that are exciting.

I know that today was a bit different... I warned you that it would be. I just wanted to encourage you guys today that our church is a conduit of the grace of God to people all around the world. And I am convicted that the more intentionally we love and serve the world... the more God will align for us the resources to do what we need to do here.

Finally, we will close with 3 John verse 11

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

we all imitate something, as much as we want to be original with it all... so be intentional with who you imitate. Paul says “imitate me as I imitate Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1) -

not copy... not steal... but imitate... be like... learn from... model ourselves based off the way Christ is... if we can set our eyes on what it is that we want to be, and we imitate that... eventually we will become like that.

And John says look... its very easy to imitate evil... its easy to be selfish. its easy to not care about others, to live for yourselves, to never let anyone

in... to keep what you worked for, to not support people who you barely see anyway... but that is not the way of Jesus.

The way of Jesus is the way that says “I love you so much, that I will lay down my life for your sins... because the wages of sin is death... and all of us have sinned.”

What can you lay down in your life for someone else today?

Imitate good.

Whoever does good is from God.