



Letters of Love
#18 “Mouth to Mouth”
Courage Church
Detroit, MI

scriptures: 2 John, 3 John 13-14,
Proverbs 18:1, Ecclesiastes 4:10b

Most of what John is describing in the passage that we are going to

read in a moment are things that we covered previously in our series, because as you will see when we read it in a minute, he is addressing a lot of the same issues that he covers in 1 John. I am not going to repeat those today, but what I am going to do is, on our website... later this week when this sermon gets published, I will post the entire text from this passage onto the page and I will add links for you to each sermon that we did in this series that addresses that particular scripture.

Hopefully that helps us stay focused today on what we haven't covered, but gives you a chance to go back if there are things in this passage that we don't cover today.

Here is the entire book of 2 John:

Greeting

The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all who know the truth, because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever:

Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love.

Walking in Truth and Love

I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father. And now I ask you, dear lady—not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning—that we love one another. **And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it.**

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. **Watch yourselves**, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.

Final Greetings

Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete.

The children of your elect sister greet you.

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As you will see even more clearly when we read 3 John next week... 2 and 3 John are very very similar letters addressing almost identical issues... I will briefly share with you a tiny bit about what that issue was, but I am going to do something totally different with these last two Epistles than I did with 1 John.

There are a couple of things that are unique to 2 John, things we did not cover already in the series and I will address those briefly today, and then I am going to actually spend the rest of the sermon on John's closing statements. We will re-read his closing statement here in 2 John, and I also want to read you the closing statement of 3 John.

I have told you several times in this series... it is very important to me that WE GET RIGHT what John was communicating to HIS CHURCH and to the people HE WAS WRITING TO... but I find it EVEN MORE important, AND MORE VALUABLE... that we figure out what it is that God is doing THROUGH THESE WORDS, in our community. And as I read and re-read this passage, the last couple of sentences are the ones that I believe WE NEED THE MOST right now. So we will get to that in a few minutes, and park there.

But first, lets explore the introduction:

John begins this letter by saying “the elder, to the elect lady and her children”

He begins by introducing himself... “the elder” - this is likely NOT him referring to himself as an elder in the church he is writing, the way that we would think of an elder... most likely he is referring to the way that he was much older in age... someone who had seen a lot and who, by way of experience, was qualified to speak into their lives.

John was most likely writing this letter from Ephesus, and we know that in that church particularly, when they used the word “elder” what they were referring to is “someone who had been directly disciplined by one of the Apostles” - and it is very possible that he was pulling from that definition as He was one who actually literally walked and talked and did life with Jesus himself.

and John addresses this letter: “to the elect lady and her children”

Who is the lady? who are her children?

There are all sorts of theories out there... and nobody can say for sure who “she” is - but the general consensus is that when John says “to the lady and her children” - what he is doing is writing to a specific church and those who are a part of it. The lady is a church, and the her children are its members... In the book of Ephesians, which again, John is writing this from Ephesus - Paul says that the church is the BRIDE of Christ. It was very common language when referring to the church.

I will show you the Greek just for a couple minutes and then we will get into really practical stuff... but I think it is crucial that we understand he is writing to a church...

The Greek words John uses that we translate as “elect lady” is “*eklektos kyria*” (ek - let - toss... Ku-ree-a)

eklektos is not the same word, but it is a very similar word to the word *ekklesia*, which is the Greek word for church... *ekklesia* literally means "called out of your home and into an assembly" - *eklektos*, (ek - let - toss) our word in 2 John, means something similar... it means "picked out, chosen"

and then *kyria* (Ku-ree-a) is a word only used in this one place, which makes it a bit difficult to translate but the word "lady" seems to be the best translation.

but in many languages the word *curia* has been associated with and has come to mean church. In the Catholic Church there is the "Roman Curia" which is the name for the government in the Catholic Church (Curia is a latin word meaning: "a gathering of men" or "court")... even in Martin Luther's writings when he is listing the words that are used for "church" *kyria* is on that list.

then you also get the word "Children" which is the word: "*teknon*" and in the New Testament, this word is used to describe someone who is being taught something. It is used to describe people who's character is being shaped by the leadership that they are under.

and the last hint, is John ENDS 2 John by saying something similar:

"The children of your elect sister greet you."

Now, unless there are just two specific women with children John is referring too here, it can most sensibly be concluded that John ends by sending a greeting to the church he is writing to, from the church he is writing from... possibly being the church in Ephesus.

okay... all of that to say:

we will proceed on the assumption that John is writing to a church.

And the issue that he is addressing, and he also addresses this issue in 3 John, is the issue of traveling ministers and people who are coming into their church. In 3 John he specifically says that SOME of these ministers

should be accepted and even beyond that, need to be supported... but he warns here in 2 John that we be careful who we let into our church to speak into our lives.

What he tells us is, that if someone is coming with a message contrary to the gospel:

to not show them any hospitality... don't let them in...

that is the easiest way to protect the flock from falling prey to a false teacher... is to keep the false teacher away from the flock entirely.

We will focus a lot more on hospitality next week, I don't want to spend a lot of time on it today but I want to say a couple of things briefly about it...

I love the way that Bruce Malina defines Biblical Hospitality... He says we could define hospitality as "the process by means of which an outsider's status is changed from stranger to guest"

and when I read the Bible, I believe that there is a strong case to be made in which our initial response to people should always default to hospitality. Anyone who knows me knows, I believe we have an obligation to the stranger. I believe that we all were strangers once. I believe that the Gospel is for everyone and that we were put here on this earth to bring Heaven to earth for people...

But when someone new comes into your life... when they come into the church, into the assembly... when they come bringing something new to the community, it has to be tested. We can not just assume that because someone has come in, that they have our best interests at heart, or more importantly, that they have the Gospel at heart.

one thing that John uniquely and specifically says in this letter to THIS CHURCH about what was going on FOR THEM is this dyer warning:

"Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for"

and then it goes on to SPECIFICALLY SAY how you could lose it... it says

“If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.”

There is a difference between accepting people for who they are and living life with them and showing them a better way, the way of Jesus...

that is a whole lot different than when someone comes into your life and you welcome them, and slowly but surely their influence begins to erode the values that you have worked hard to create... slowly but surely THE person that THEY are begins to shape the person that you are...

you have heard it a thousand times... but “show my your friends, and I will show you your future...” - you have got to be intentional with the people who you surround yourself with in life.

Remember... John says “to the elect lady and her children” - “*teknon*” people who’s character is being shaped by the leadership that they are under... AND SOMETHING WILL SHAPE YOU... if you are not intentional to place yourself in a place to be shaped into who God wants you to be... you will UNINTENTIONALLY BE SHAPED INTO SOMETHING DIFFERENT.

now... here is where I want to park.

John ends this letter by saying this:

I don’t want to write any more using paper and ink.

Now, we do not know for sure what John wrote his letter on because we don’t have the original letter, but the standard for writing material was a sheet of papyrus... which is where we get the word paper from. They would make sheets out of papyrus plants that were about 8x10 in size and its understandable assumed that this was what John used to write on.

Now, if you look in your Bibles at 2 John and 3 John, you will notice that they are almost identical in length. In my Bible, they take up about a half of

a page. Those who have studied ancient writings will tell you that both the 2nd and 3rd letters of John are the standard length of what would fit on ONE sheet of paper. So unless he wrote using HUGE letters, each of these letters fit on just one piece of paper, unlike most of the other letters that we get throughout the New Testament.

And this is the significance that I see in that.

John gave them the most content that he could in the smallest form that he could... then ends by saying "I have much more to write you..." - and he very easily could have just gotten another piece of papyrus... it would not be strange to do that... almost every other letter would have been written on more than one piece... but when he got to the bottom of the page he said "I just have so much to tell you... BUT I NEED TO TELL IT TO YOU IN PERSON."

This "communication from a distance"

This "watching from a distance"

This "gap" between us

its not enough. There is too much to be done for me to just send a letter and then expect it to get done... no... John tells them "I need to get to you... we need to be in community together... and when THAT HAPPENS... when we are "face to face" as the English Bible translates it... then, and only then, will my joy be complete.

WHEN WE ARE TOGETHER... DOING MINISTRY TOGETHER... my joy will be complete.

In fact, he uses a very particular phrase there that is translated as "face to face" - improperly... its the Greek words "*stoma pros stoma*" - it does NOT mean face to face, it literally means MOUTH TO MOUTH. John says "I hope to come to you in person, to talk mouth to mouth, so that our joy may be complete."

He says the EXACT same thing at the end of 3 John... "I hope to see you soon, and we will talk MOUTH TO MOUTH"

Which sounds a little strange to us but it is actually something you get in the Old Testament.

In Numbers 12, it talks about how when God speaks to the prophets, He speaks to them in visions and in dreams. It almost has this illusionary aspect to it... like, God wants to say something to them, but He is only willing to do it in a bit of an abstract way that always leaves a certain level of wondering... was that really God? or was that just a strange dream.

But then God says this... He says this about Moses... He says MOSES IS FAITHFUL IN ALL MY HOUSE. He is faithful... and because he is faithful,

God says that when He speaks to Moses, to doesn't speak to him in riddles like He sometimes has to do with other people, in visions like He has to do with the prophets... He comes right down with Moses, and He speaks to him "mouth to mouth." It even says that "Moses BEHOLDS THE FORM OF THE LORD."

its the words: *dabar pey pey* (da-vare, pay pay)

with him I speak: mouth to mouth.

With him I am close... with Him it is a first hand experience... with Him he actually goes up on the mountain... its not just something he reads about, or watches a video on Facebook about.

Moses is the guy who actually went up to the mountain to talk to God... to hear from God... everyone else said "you go Moses... you go, and come back down here and tell us what God says... we don't want to go ourselves" - but Moses goes up... and has a personal encounter with the living God.

And John pulls from that language when he tells the church that he is writing to... that he simply is not content writing them a letter...

He needs to be right up in their face... he needs to be right in front of them so that he can transfer something into them that a letter just can't do... a podcast just can't do... a live stream just can't do.

so he is limiting his words to one page and is determining in his heart that he will come in person... and when and only when he does that, will his joy be complete.

Church... its great to send a letter. Its great to connect on facebook. Its great to like each others instagram photos...

But there comes a point when sending a letter, or receiving a letter, or staying home and not being in the mix of what God is doing, its just not enough.

We have got to show up in each others lives.

We have got to be working together for the Kingdom, not sitting on the sidelines watching a few of people do the work that we were all meant to carry a part of...

This thing called "Church" - it only works when you and I all contribute... when we all work together and when we all move forward in the same direction of loving our community and showing them Jesus, together.

But the way that the world has been shifting... it is easier than ever to disconnect and yet still convince yourself that you are connected to people... you can hide behind a screen but not be in any real community with people... you can attach yourself to a cause but not actually contribute to that cause. Think about what Proverbs 18:1 says... it says that whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment.

If you isolate yourself, you can spare your conscious of having to be weighed down by the problems that come with being in a community with other broken people. If you don't SEE THE NEEDS of others... you will spare yourself of the guilt of NOT DOING WHAT YOU CAN TO MEET THE NEEDS OF OTHERS...

but you are robbing yourself of an experience that God intended to use you for... God works through broken people to HEAL BROKEN PEOPLE... and

when you are a part of that type of work, God does a real number on your heart and your life too.

Now, I am not a doctor, I am not a physiologist, and so I need to be careful in what I say about stuff like this because THESE ARE JUST OBSERVATIONS...

But it doesn't take a doctor to know that it is so much easier to hide behind the screens... to watch from a distance... to not engage...

The advancements that technology has made over the last several years have been absolutely incredible leaps, and yet it has made it easier than ever for us to be selfish. It has made it easier than ever for us to avoid anything that even remotely resembles a healthy relationship with other people.

and at least for me, its done as much harm as it has done good in the way that it has let me get sucked into mindless activities and consumed a lot of my time on things that just, quite frankly, don't matter... and every ounce of it is at the expense of doing things that DO matter.

and low key, and unbeknownst to us... its really just a wall we are putting up... its a barrier... a safety net to guard us and distract us...

The problem is, what happens when your world falls apart? and there is nobody there... and maybe you post about it on Facebook and you get 100 likes, 25 sad faces and a handful of comments of telling people that you that they are praying for you, or that they are so sorry for what happened to you... and those things are thoughtful and somewhat helpful... but honestly, man cannot survive by Facebook likes alone. And the things that may fuel you in your boredom... they will always fall short in times of tragedy... because we were built for community... IT IS NOT GOOD THAT MAN SHOULD BE ALONE.

We just simply have got to use our time intentionally and be in community with each other. Because the bottom WILL fall out at some point, and we WILL need someone to catch us.

Please hear me... People tell me sometimes, "I don't go to church... I don't need to go to church, I am the church!" - listen... no you are not. You are not the church. Because the church is NOT about what God is doing in the life of one person. Salvation does not make you the church. Salvation makes you a Christian.

The Church is about what God is doing through a body... a collection of diverse people who He brought together and WHO NEED EACH OTHER.

The church is a group of people who, as Paul says in Galatians... Bears one another's burdens... the church is a collection of people who when they bring together all of the things that make each individual unique, it forms a reflection of the diversity of God and is a demonstration of the HOW MUCH JESUS CHRIST LOVES THE WORLD... showing different people THAT UNENDING LOVE in different ways... because we are all different... reflecting IN DIFFERENT WAYS THE SAME MESSAGE.

and if you try and do it by yourself, that message will be distorted.

Ecclesiastes 4:10b - someone who falls when they are ALL ALONE is in real trouble.

I know this is something churches don't talk about very often anymore... but what happens if you are disconnected from community... disconnected from the body of Christ, and then someone comes INTO YOUR LIFE like the people that John warns about in this short letter? And you don't really have any other influences... there is wisdom in the multitude of counselors but you haven't really surrounded yourself by any...

and when you let a voice in, and you don't have any other voices from any other positive channels... no matter what that one voice is saying you justify it with: well, at least someone is talking to me. And so you let them in...

and suddenly the only voice speaking into your life at all is one that is unraveling the Gospel in you.

and you fall...

and there is nobody around to even know that you fell. And it can be very easy to blame the people who didn't hear you fall, but the warning is issued to the one who isolates... the one who chooses to stay distant. The one who thinks that it is easier to not let your heart connect... to just read about it... to just get a letter and try to apply it but with no community around you to work out what it means for your life.

I can just imagine John writing all this, and then realizing at the bottom of the page "man, they aren't going to understand all of this... I need to go! I need to explain it to them. We need to work this out together!"

The church, which ultimately is here for the mission of Jesus Christ, also serves as a protection from the things that try to creep into our lives, and if we isolate ourselves and we hide our reality behind a filtered Facebook post then ultimately we are going to lose what we worked for because we did NOTHING TO PROTECT IT.

John says "mouth to mouth" - but we will say "face to face" because its a lot less creepy... - that is where community is cultivated... over a shared meal together... that is where community is cultivated. Over a cup of coffee, and showing up when a baby is born, and crying on someone's shoulder when you OR THEY have lost something or someone... that is where community is cultivated. By helping someone with a project... or helping them work on their house, or their problem... or over an outreach where we help give the entire community backpacks for their kids or haircuts or an eye exam...

These are the things that feed peoples destiny, because your life is not meant to be about you alone. It is about the Gospel of Jesus Christ making all things new in our world.

I told you this last week... but at the backpack giveaway, this was what I kept hearing, over and over from people... they were just so in awe of what was going on... of the unity in our church and the unity between us and other churches, and the incredibly high impact day we were able to present to our community... and they all just kept saying:

"I have never seen anything like this before."

Do you think I could have done that alone?

Do you think Dawn could have? Or Austin and Sarah? Do you think James could have done that alone? Do you think Emily did that alone?

IT TAKES EVERYONE... it takes all of us going up the mountain... and seeing for ourselves just what God is capable of when His Church comes together.

and when everyone is involved, not only are we protecting ourselves by keeping ourselves around other people who love Jesus and are looking out for us... but only together does the mission of the church move forward.

I don't want to hear any more stories of defeat... I want to hear them so I can empathize... but I want to start seeing more people win in life... I am sick of my own stories of defeat... I know God has more for us than that. I am sick of anxiety... and worry... and stress...

I am sick of loneliness being such a common denominator in our city. It needs to end. And the church absolutely can play a role in that.

The Gospel message is that Jesus Christ died so that you can live... He gave up his life so that you can have yours... and Jesus wants us to live lives full of mercy and grace toward others... lives full with other people... lives full of joy. Look to the cross this morning if something has stolen your joy... and know that it can be found again in Jesus...

The reason that I believe so much in the Church is because it is the bride of Christ. It is Jesus' one and only... its the only plan...

and I know that the church has let a lot of people down over the years... because it hasn't lived up to their expectations... I get it... But I still believe that it is the only hope for the world.

And it becomes more powerful when you become a part of it.

Let me say that again: THE CHURCH IS MORE POWERFUL WHEN YOU ARE A PART OF IT!

So this week, lets spend time with people... face to face.