

THE BIG READ (22)

Jesus in 1, 2, 3 John

A. Introduction

1. Every book of the Bible has one dominating theme – Jesus is the Christ.

“Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’”
(Luke 24:45-47)

Jesus is the Christ who will suffer and die.

Jesus is the Christ who will rise from the dead on the third day.

Jesus is the Christ who will forgive the sins of all who repent.

Jesus is the Christ who will be preached to the nations.

2. The New Testament contains a number of epistles or letters sent to individual Christians or churches.

These letters address specific situations in the lives of believers and through them we are taught how to live as God’s people today.

Thirteen of these letters were written by the apostle Paul. The remaining nine letters were written by other church leaders, including these three letters of 1, 2 and 3 John.

3. The apostle John wrote these three letters near the end of his life.

Prior to his arrest and exile to the Island of Patmos (the setting for his letter of Revelation), John was ministering in Ephesus, and it was from there, John most likely wrote these letters.

Ephesus was a great trading centre and a great marketplace for new ideas including those that mixed Christianity with other belief systems.

And these new versions of Christianity are there in the background of each of these three letters John wrote.

B. Why did John write these letters?

1. The first letter John wrote (1 John) was to an unnamed local church.

A number of its members, it appears had recently left to start up their own group.

“Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.” (1 John 2:18-19)

This new group had its own new ideas about who Jesus is and what He’s done.

“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognise the Spirit of God. Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.” (1 John 4:1-3)

This new group was encouraging the remaining members of this local church to come and join them.

“I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray.” (1 John 2:26)

2. In response to this, John writes to encourage those who had remained in the church to stay where they are.

He wants to reassure them that because they have put their trust in Jesus, they really do know God and are one of His forgiven people.

"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." (1 John 5:13)

3. John's second letter (2 John), again to an unnamed church, deals with a slightly different issue, which is how the local church should respond to false teachers.

John has many things he wanted to say to this local church, which he hopes to do when he visits them.

"I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete." (2 John 12)

But there is something that can't wait, because there is a real danger threatening to harm this local church – false teaching.

4. John writes to help this local church protect itself from false teaching.

He tells them how to spot false teachers and how they should treat false teachers.

"Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son." (2 John 7-9)

"If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching; do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work." (2 John 10-11)

5. John's third letter (3 John) is different to the previous two letters – it is written not to a local church, but to an individual.

John had received a report about Gaius from some missionaries who were with Gaius recently.

"It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth." (3 John 3)

Gaius encouraged John, because Gaius had offered hospitality to these missionaries, and this was evidence of his faith in Jesus.

"Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth." (3 John 5-8)

6. John, however, was concerned that Gaius would stop offering this hospitality to these missionaries who were preaching and teaching the truth about Jesus.

"I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church." (3 John 9-10)

Diotrephes wanted nothing to do with John or the other apostles, and he didn't want them to have any influence over the church, he likely was pastor of, and Gaius was a member of.

Diotrephes refused to welcome these travelling missionaries and removed from the church those members that did. No doubt this removal would soon come Gaius' way.

So John writes this letter to Gaius to encourage him to keep serving Jesus, by offering hospitality to these missionaries, and to encourage him to spend time with other Christians like Demetrius, who will spur him on, in this way.

"Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God. Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone – and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true." (3 John 11-12)

C. The Story of John's Letters (or rather The Story of Jesus in John's Letters)

1. 1 John as a letter naturally divides into three sections, with each section designed to reassure the Christian that they do know God.

Chapters 1:1-2:2: Those who know God know that God is light

Chapters 2:3-5:5: Those who know God walk in the light

Chapter 5:6-21: Those who know God stay in the light

2. In the first section of 1 John, John makes it clear that those who know God know that God is light.

John begins by reminding the church that they know the truth about God, because the truth about God is found in Jesus, and the truth about Jesus is found in the apostle's teaching, that have heard and believed.

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ." (1 John 1:1-3)

This truth about God, which was proclaimed to them, is that God is light.

"This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:5)

Because God is light, those who know God will admit their sin and accept the forgiveness that Christ came to bring.

"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:8-9)

"My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world." (1 John 2:1-2)

3. In the second section of this letter, John says that those who know God will walk in the light and explains what it means to walk in light three times (2:3-27; 2:28-4:6; 4:7-55).

Walking in the light means believing that Jesus is the Christ.

"Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist – he denies the Father and the Son. No-one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also." (1 John 2:22-23)

"This is how you can recognise the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God." (1 John 4:2-3)

"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well." (1 John 5:1)

Walking in the light means loving one another.

"Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard." (1 John 2:7)

"This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another." (1 John 3:11)

"Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." (1 John 4:11)

Walking in the light means obeying God's commands.

"We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands." (1 John 2:3)

"No-one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God." (1 John 3:9-10)

"This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome." (1 John 5:3)

4. In the final section of 1 John, John makes the point that those who know God will stay in the light.

"We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true – even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life." (1 John 5:20)

He reminds us that we know the truth about Jesus and says "Stay where you are!"

"Dear children, keep yourselves from idols." (1 John 5:21)

5. 2 John as a letter divides into two sections, with each section focusing in on how a local church can protect itself from false teachers.

Verses 1-9: Focus on the truth so you can spot false teachers

Verses 10-13: Protect the church by keeping away from false teachers

6. In 2 John 1-9, John's big concern is to help the local church spot false teachers, and the way he helps them, is by telling them to focus on the truth about Jesus.

As this local church focuses on the truth that is embodied in the Lord Jesus, preached by the apostles, and which overflows in love for one another, they will be able to spot false teaching.

"And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love." (2 John 5-6)

Two aspects of the false teaching they will be able to spot, are that there will be false teachers that do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, and there will be false teachers that do not continue in the teachings of Jesus.

"For many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully." (2 John 7-8)

"Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son." (2 John 9)

7. In the remaining verses of 2 John, John tells us to keep away from false teachers.

Do not associate with them or give approval to the false teaching they are giving.

"If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching; do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work." (2 John 10-11)

8. Like 2 John, 3 John can be divided into two parts, with each part designed to encourage us to keep serving Jesus by welcoming those who teach and preach the truth about Jesus.

Verses 1-10: Keep serving Jesus

Verses 11-14: Keep spending time with Jesus

9. In verses 1-10, John encourages Gaius to keep serving Jesus by offering hospitality to these travelling missionaries who teach the truth about Jesus.

"It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth." (3 John 7-8)

10. In verses 11-14, John says to Gaius that spending time with other people who are like Jesus, such as Demetrius, and copying their example, will help him to do this kind of serving.

"Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God. Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone – and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true." (3 John 11-12)

D. Jesus in John's Letters

1. The One who came to purify us from all sin.

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin." (1 John 1:7)

"But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world." (1 John 2:1-2)

"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." (1 John 4:10)

2. The One who came to destroy the devil's work.

"The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work." (1 John 3:8)

3. The One who came to give us life.

"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him." (1 John 4:9)

4. The One who came to give us understanding.

