

When Nothing Seems to Last

Postcards from John, Part 2

2 John 2-3

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

Believers in the body of Christ are bound together by love for the truth. This truth dwells within believers, transforming their lives, as it also brings along the benefits of grace, mercy, and peace from God and Jesus Christ. This divinely-given truth still exists today and will continue on throughout eternity. Even when things around us don't seem to last, these gifts from God will last forever.

Discussion Points:

In simplest terms, truth conforms to reality. God is the creator and has given us His absolute truth. And as Christians, we believe Jesus' claims to be the way, the truth, and the life (John 24:6). However, we find that we live in a time that seems to have abandoned truth in favor of emotional, moral, and ethical relativism, becoming what is now called a post-truth culture.

- Why or why not does truth matter in day-to-day decisions?
- How can living by emotions or relativism rather than truth become detrimental to your relationship with others? To your walk with Christ?
- What are some characteristics that should be evident of one who lives in the truth of Christ and the Word of God?
- Why would someone deny truth exists? Does the rejection of truth change the existence truth? Can one truly be post-truth?

Grace is the unmerited favor of God toward man.

- Why do you think the Apostle Paul continually refers to God's grace throughout his letters in the New Testament?
- What are some ways that God has blessed you with His grace in your life thus far?
- How does knowing and living in God's grace influence choices and perspectives in your daily life?

Discussion Guide Cont.

Mercy is one of the intrinsic qualities to the nature of God. He magnifies His gift of mercy toward us through Christ, the supreme expression of mercy and love.

- How could and should this knowledge impact your relationships around you?
- Can you recall any instances in your life where you were shown biblical mercy or where you, as Christ's ambassador, showed His mercy on others?
- How does the characteristic of God's peace fit within or alongside the concepts of grace and mercy?

Gospel Connection:

Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is the ultimate window into the truth of God's plan. Jesus' sacrifice has a profound effect on any person who puts their faith in Him as Lord and Savior. God the Father has given us the opportunity to experience His truth, along with His grace, mercy, and peace, through His Son. This message has been true since before the creation of the world and is still true today. It will be true forever.

Practical implications:

Think: How does knowing truth, through our Savior, encourage you?

Pray: Praise Him for blessing us with truth, as well as for the gifts of His grace, mercy, and peace. Ask God to help you serve and obey Him in truth.

Do: Live daily in God's truth and share His truth with others.

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The Roman god by the name of Vulcan, was one of the oldest of the Roman gods and was worshipped as the god of fire. People really didn't pay that much attention to him until late August, when temperatures soared and the granaries were full and fire would be devastating.

The Roman world celebrated Vulcan with a festival on August 23rd. During the festival, large bonfires were created in honor of him, hoping to satisfy him so that he would not want to reign down fire and consume them.

But in the year 79 AD, on August 24th – the day after this empire wide festival held in honor of the god of fire – ironically, Mount Vesuvius erupted. The firestorms from this eruption would envelope cities and villages more than 100 miles away as fire, smoke and ash poured into the sky.

Up until this time in history, the word volcano didn't even exist. But following this fiery explosion – which people assumed was related to the fact that Vulcan evidently hadn't been happy with the festival the day before - they created the word, Volcano, after him.

Lava flowing at 100 miles an hour buried one nearby city filled with people who didn't even have time to run for their lives. The name of that city was Pompeii.

Pompeii would be buried for centuries under pumice rock and volcanic ash. When it was finally excavated, the eruption had virtually frozen in time this nearby Roman city. In fact, Pompeii gave us one of the most detailed descriptions of life in first century Rome.

And it wasn't a pretty sight.

In fact, when a 17th century explorer first uncovered some of the city ruins, he found paintings and statues and monuments so immoral and descriptive and deviant, he kept it

a secret and covered it back up where it remained hidden for another 100 years.

In the 18th century, excavations began . . . and this city, frozen in time, provided enough information and artifacts and remnants of life in first century Rome to fill warehouses and museums.

Written on a wall in the market place of Pompeii are these lamenting words, evidently from someone who lived there and had grown weary of chasing after pleasure and wealth:

“The sun after the splendor of the day sinks into the ocean; the moon after showing us her full light wanes. In the same way the anguish of love ends in but a breath of wind. All things pass away.” (Inscription near a street named *Abundance*)ⁱ

This was written on a wall, ironically next to street named Abundance. As if to say, I have it all . . . but everything I have seems to slip through my fingers.

Two thoughts dominated this Roman world and it dominates our world to this day:

Number 1: the fear of the future – you never know what might happen.

Number 2: nothing seems to last – so you'd better live for yourself and grab whatever you can while you're alive!

Vesuvius was, to the Roman world, what 9/11 was to Americans. After this fiery surprise, nothing was certain anymore . . . nothing was safe . . . nothing was guaranteed to last . . . and if there was a God, He was evidently impossible to please.

We have begun exploring another remnant from this same period of time in the Roman Empire. Not long after the Roman world was changed by Vesuvius, a private letter was composed by the Apostle John and sent to an unnamed lady whom he wanted to

encourage. That letter has been preserved over time for us today.

This brief, inspired, first century note arrived at her residence around five years after Pompeii had disappeared under 20 feet of lava. And the Apostle John is about to tell her – and us – when nothing seems to last . . . when nothing seems to be safe . . . when the future seems bleak or uncertain . . . here are some unshakable, permanent, unchanging truths.

Let me invite you back to *Second John* where we pick up our exploration at *verse 2*. Let's back up to John's opening words and get a running start:

The elder to the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in truth; and not only I, but also all who know the truth, for the sake of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever. (2 John 1-2)

Let me break this down into two principles which John wanted this woman to hold onto – and for you and me to hold onto as well . . . especially when nothing seems to last.

First - The body of Christ is permanently bound together by love for the truth.

John begins this letter by telling her and her children that he loves them in truth – and for the sake of the truth – that is, because of the truth, John can be understood to write, our love is rooted in the truth which resides in us all.

In other words, we love one another for the truth's sake.ⁱⁱ

The common bond that binds us together is the truth we share together in Christ.

A local church is made up of people from all walks of life. We haven't been told to love each other because we have the same bank balances or the same personalities or the same skills and the same backgrounds.

I'm always amazed and encouraged with each new member's class here at Colonial. Some have come from small churches in North Carolina, and some have come from large churches in California. We have southerners sitting next to people who moved here from the north. For those northerners, this winter has

been their first winter without snow shovels and snow boots . . . they're loving it, and at the same time, they're deeply confused.

Some of them have known the Lord for years – they've served as deacons and elders in their former churches – and they're sitting around new believers in Christ who are just learning how a New Testament church operates.

Some of them know the Bible well and others are beginning to understand the differences between the Old Testament and the New Testament – between the Books of Moses at the front and the Book of Maps at the back.

This class includes people representing several different countries of origin including 4 different languages. The variety of backgrounds and histories and ethnicities and cultures and traditions are amazing.

Some of them would like more music on Sunday morning, and others want longer sermons – okay, I made that one up.

Look - how do we ever make it together? We're all so different! We wouldn't be able to agree on where to go to lunch after church today.

How do we make it together?

Listen, one of the greatest evidences of the life changing truth of the gospel is the fact that we do!

The redeeming power and truth of Jesus Christ binds together different people in genuine and profound unity.ⁱⁱⁱ

John is essentially encouraging this woman that she's not alone – she is a member of the body of Christ – this is equivalent to saying, “We are in this together!” For the sake of the truth, we are bound together by truth in love.

Secondly, in a first century – and 21st century – world of insecurity and uncertainty, John wants to reinforce something else:

Second - The truth is alive and well and will last forever.

Even though cultures lose sight of truth .

..

Even though cultures suppress the truth .

..

Even though cultures redefine the truth .

John personifies it by saying that it lives within us and it is going to last forever.

It doesn't change from culture to culture; it doesn't morph from generation to generation . . . the truth of the gospel and of Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Notice again at *verse 2*:

For the sake of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever. (2 John 2)

This isn't just intellectual truth – this is living, transformational truth.

And John pulls out one of his favorite expressions here – the truth which abides in us.

He'll use that verb – meno (μὲνω) more than 40 times in his writing. The same verb other Apostles used of God's counsel which remains or abides forever (*Romans 9:11*); of God's word which endures or abides (*1 Peter 1:23*).

Gerhard Kittle writes that this Greek verb primarily means "to stay in a place."^{iv} In other words, it moves in . . . and then it changes everything.

It isn't truth simply apprehended in the intellect, but truth that is welcomed in the heart.^v

In other words, truth pitches a tent there on the campground of your life; the truth moves into the apartment or townhome of your mind.

This Greek verb was often used in the first century of someone living as a guest in the home of another.^{vi} The believer here essentially puts out the welcome mat for the truth and the truth moves in and makes himself at home!

I had our first meeting recently with the seminary leadership – the vice presidents, the dean and provost along with the CFO. And we met, for the first time, in my study at home. And I knew that these five men would be arriving at different times, and so I typed up in big letters and then taped the piece of paper to the door of my study leading out to the driveway, "Come on in." You don't need to hesitate . . . you don't even need to knock . . .

I'm expecting you and you're welcome to just come on in.

This is what you are saying every time you open the word of God – "Come on in . . . you don't need to knock . . . you're welcome to just come on in."

And guess what? Truth always travel in a party. It never travels alone. Truth happens to have some really good friends that trail along wherever he goes.

John introduces us to three of them.

Notice *verse 3*.

Grace, mercy and peace will be with us . . . (2 John 3a)

To change the analogy of this living dynamic, because you've accepted the truth of Christ, about Christ, and about the gospel of Christ, the truth delivers to you three gifts.

And I want you to notice that John isn't delivering to this woman some hypothetical wish . . . he isn't saying, "You know, I sure I hope you get some grace and mercy and peace."

Not hardly.

This isn't written as a wish; this is a statement of fact!^{vii}

I don't want to bore you with grammar, but John uses the future indicative tense which can be understood to mean, "You *shall have* grace, mercy and peace, and you shall *continue* to experience these gifts."^{viii}

In other words, you've got all three of them now – they came into your life when you invited truth to come in – and they are not leaving you for the rest of your life.

John, why are you so confident? How can you be so sure? Nothing lasts forever. Everything is transient. Didn't Pompeii teach you that? Everything slips through your fingers!

John is certain of their permanency because their source happens to be Deity!

Notice:

Grace, mercy and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love. (2 John 3)

Both Father and Son are involved in bestowing on the redeemed the gifts of grace mercy and peace.^{ix}

John also repeats this little preposition “from” – *from* God the Father and *from* Jesus Christ – which stresses the fact that they are separate personalities and at the same time that they are co-equal and co-eternal.^x

And look at the gifts they are committed to giving the believer – and imagine how this would have impacted a woman living in the first century, just a few years past the horrific 9/11 of Mount Vesuvius . . . living as a widow with the uncertainties of the future, in a culture going from bad to worse, a world that had lost its grip on right and wrong.

Yes, even in a world like hers . . . and like ours.

That leads me to our third principle from these opening verses:

Third, lasting gifts from the God of truth are grace, mercy and peace.

Let’s unwrap these three gifts and enjoy them for a few moments together.

The first gift is grace.

The word is *charis*, and it refers to unearned favor. In the days of this widow, *charis* was something good that someone did without any expectation of return. But in her world, *charis* was always performed for a friend – never for an enemy.^{xi}

But in the New Testament, this word is given new meaning; it becomes undeserved favor granted to an enemy who can, in no way, pay God back.

Sinners, with nothing to offer Christ, come by faith to Him and are saved by grace through faith, and not of ourselves, it is the gift of God (*Ephesians 2:8-9*).

I come as a sinner to God . . . undeserving, unattractive, unrighteous . . . and He takes my sins and casts them into the depths of the sea (*Micah 7:19*).

Corrie ten Boom used to say, “And when they are cast into the sea they are forgiven and forgotten – and God posts a sign that says, “No fishing allowed.”^{xii}

The second gift is the gift of mercy.

Mercy (*eleos*) for the believer carries the nuance of compassion and help.

Grace is for the guilty . . . mercy is for the needy and the afflicted.

The Apostle Paul informs us in *Ephesians 2:4* that God is rich in mercy. He’s rich in mercy. What’s God rich in? He’s rich in mercy . . . and even though God deposits mercy into your bank account of life, and He does it new for you every morning (*Lamentations 3:22 & 23*), He is at no time any less rich . . . in mercy.

Finally, John informs this woman – and us – that a companion of truth is peace.

If this widow knew anything, she knew that peace was not a part of her Roman world.

This is the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I – and the establishment of the League of Nations, dedicated to keep the world at peace.

The League of Nations became ineffective within less than 10 years – and it became a monument to the inability of mankind to manufacture peace.

People today want peace with the Prince of Peace.

In the last 400 years alone, there have been an estimated 8,000 peace treaties between countries and nations, and the average life expectancy of those treaties is two years.

Peace is when everybody stops to reload.

Peace isn’t something mankind can make – peace is something only God can give.

In fact, the word here means literally, “to bind together.” What John is writing about is the fact that the Lord Jesus made a peace treaty with God the Father possible by virtue of His death and sacrifice on our behalf.^{xiii}

And by faith, He binds us together with God in a living, inseparable bond.

So we face life, John writes, not asking God to bring us external peace, but internal peace as we focus our hearts and minds and lives on His truth and His love.

Max Lucado writes about this kind of peace in his new book entitled *Unshakable Hope*, which I enjoyed reading over Christmas break. He writes:

On several occasions I have known the name of the victor before the end of the contest. Being a pastor, I'm often unable to watch the Sunday football game. Often, while I'm at church, the teams are playing. (I know what you mean Max – while I'm teaching GreenHouse class tonight - the Kansas City Chiefs will be beating the Patriots...please, Lord, let it happen!) On many Sundays a well-wishing parishioner will receive a text or e-mail and learn the outcome of the game and feel the burden to share it with me. I've often thought of wearing a sign around my neck that reads: "I'm recording the game; don't tell me anything."

I remember one game in particular. My beloved Dallas Cowboys (I thought Max had discernment); they were playing a must-win game. I'd been careful to set the recorder and was looking forward to watching the game. I avoided any mention of the game. I avoided eye contact with anyone I thought might spill the beans. I made it out as far as my car in the parking lot

when someone yelled out, "Max, did you hear the news? The Cowboys won!"

Gone was the suspense. Gone was the edge of the seat anxiety. Gone was the nail biting. But even though I knew the outcome, I still wanted to watch the game. As I did, I made a delightful surprise. I watched the game stress-free. The Cowboys fell behind in the second quarter, but I didn't worry. I knew the outcome. We fumbled the ball with six minutes to play. I didn't panic. I knew the winner. We needed touchdown in the final minute of the game. No problem. The victory was certain.

So is yours. Between now and the final whistle, you will have no reason to be anxious. Yes, you are going to fumble the ball. The devil will seem to gain the upper hand. Someone will intercept one of your dreams. All that is good will appear to lose. Don't panic . . . you know the final score.^{xiv}

Even when things don't seem to last . . . in the end, the things that matter will be proven to last forever.

Like love, truth, grace, mercy and peace.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 01/20/2019 by Stephen Davey.

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ii Joel Beeke, *The Epistles of John* (Evangelical Press, 2006), p. 219

iii

John MacArthur, Romans: Volume 2 (Moody Press, 1994), p. 273

iv Gerhard Kittle & Gerhard Friedrich, editors, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume (Eerdmans, 1985), p. 581

v Kenneth Wuest, In These Last Days: Studies in the Greek Text of I, II, III John (Eerdmans, 1954), p. 200

vi Ibid, p. 201

vii William Barclay, The Letters of John and Jude (Westminster Press, 1976), p. 140

viii D. Edmond Hiebert, The Epistles of John (BJU Press, 1991), p. 294

ix Robert Lightner, The Epistles of First, Second, Third John & Jude (AMG, 2003), p. 97

x Adapted from Hiebert, p. 295 & Lehman Strauss, The Epistles of John (Loizeaux Brothers, 1962), p. 149

xi Wuest, p. 201

xii Robert J. Morgan, p. 363

xiii Wuest, p. 202

xiv Adapted from Max Lucado, Unshakable Hope (Thomas Nelson, 2018)