

“NO GREATER JOY.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

September 8, 2019, 6:00 PM

Scripture Texts: III John 1:1-8

Introduction.

III John is more like a postcard than a letter. A postcard epistle. It is the shortest book in the Bible with 219 words. The Spirit is not always long winded.

Like I and II Timothy, Titus and Philemon, it is written to an individual, a man named Gaius.

John. The elder. The elderly. Vs. 1.

It begins, “The elder.” John is an elder in two ways, in age and in office. He was old and he had spiritual authority.

In his old age what is he doing? He is writing, he is speaking, he is defending, he is promoting the truth, he is speaking into the life of a younger believer, he is challenging and influencing, he is building up and encouraging the saints.

When is retirement age? 65, 66, 70?

When is retirement age for Christians? Death.

Don't equate retiring from your earthly career with retiring from the Lord's work. As long as we have breath our work is not ended. Don't ever cease from the Lord's work, from doing good.

Pastor Barry set a great example among us, he never stopped. Even toward the end, he hoped he could get better so he could continue serving.

John was in his 80's, still doing good work, still doing the Lord's work, kingdom work, Gospel work. He could write and give godly counsel.

Do you know why pagans look forward to retirement so much and invest so much to be able to be retired for as long as possible? Do you know why they look forward to resting, relaxing, playing, traveling, being care free? Because they don't believe in heaven.

Retirement is their substitute for heaven. They have nothing beyond the grave to look forward to. They have to reward themselves here and now for their long life of labor.

Christians should not seek the same kind of retirement pagans seek, to do nothing, to be selfish, to surrender all usefulness. For Christians it should be a different kind of season for a different kind of usefulness and work.

If eternal rest and glory awaits us, how should we spend and invest our last days on earth? How should we live for Him who secured so much for us and will reward us? Selfish leisure, luxury, license?

Don't waste your last days, your last strength. What has Christ done for you? What can you do for Him? Ask Him that. Ask Him what purpose He has for you in your last days. Look for opportunities to use what He has given you for His glory.

So, your back is weak, so your hands and feet are not as strong. There are other ways to serve.

First and foremost is the worship and praise of God. That is our greatest service. Second, we can use our tongues or our pens to give wisdom, speak encouragement, bless others. God means for the older to help the younger. Titus 2

“Older men, be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness” (Titus 2:2).

“Older women, be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. Teach what is good, and train the young women” (Titus 2:3–4).

Don't spend your last years in unprofitable talk, gossip, small talk, employ your tongues for good.

I frequently hear some of our senior saints wonder why God keeps them around so long when younger, stronger ones die. We underestimate what God plans for us in old age. We serve God just as effectively with our hearts as with our hands.

Moses in his old age (81) couldn't fight the battle but he could lift his hands in prayer. But notice, of the fighting and the praying, praying was more important and won the day.

Remember Simeon and Anna in the temple. Were Anna and Simeon unprofitable though they were devoted to fasting and prayer? A heart devoted to the Lord, that obeys, that

loves, that has simple joy in the truth, that blesses others, that expresses gratitude and thankfulness to the Lord, these are sacrifices of service pleasing to God.

Don't complain about what you can't do, ask God to show you what He now wants you to do.

Christ did His greatest work out of weakness. He did more by His death than by His living.

Don't despise your weaknesses.

We can still worship and that is the best work.

We can still pray and that is the greatest work.

We can still speak wisdom and a testimony concerning Jesus and that is holy work.

Could it be that God is lengthening some of our days so we can see some answer to some prayer? What prayer would you pray that you desire to see answered more than anything else?

Rather than feeling useless and unworthy and tossed off and passed by, turn to God in faith and with patience seek what He now has in store.

Hebrews 13:16 Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Praying for yourself and others, vs. 2.

This is a wonderful verse that encourages us to pray for body and soul, physical and spiritual. John commends his beloved friend's soul as healthy and wishes the same for his body.

In America what gets more attention, our bodies or our souls? Dumb question, right. We are fixated on our bodies. There is a new diet fad about every year if not more.

We obsess with our appearance, our weight, our clothes and fashions. Diet and exercise have become idols, not just among Americans but among Christians.

And of course, I have to make the caveat that of course we should care about what we eat and how much, and we should take care of our bodies and getting proper exercise. But things are out of balance, obsession is idolatry.

This verse has been abused in another way.

We lived just 90 miles from Tulsa, OK, home of Oral Roberts and Oral Roberts University. In his biography he credits III John 1:2 as the inspiration for his whole life and ministry of preaching a health and wealth Gospel.

He took this to mean that God desires both spiritual and physical and material health and prosperity. The morning he read this verse totally changed him and propelled him on a whole new healing ministry and prosperity Gospel.

Roberts and many others completely take this verse out of context and miss the context. What is the greatest joy, prosperity or walking in the truth? Spiritual prosperity, not material prosperity.

If you could have one kind of great prosperity, which would you chose, spiritual prosperity or material prosperity?

Remember Solomon when God asked him what he wanted, asked for wisdom and that please God very much, God commended him, and gave him far beyond what he could ask or imagine.

What are we pursuing, investing in, cultivating, seeking? What do we long for and pray most for? We can pray the two graces may be constant companions, but of the two lean toward soul prosperity. Pray for what is eternal, what is unseen.

My children. The children who walk in the truth. Truth.

What gives you joy? Where is your happy place? Nature, hiking, camping, music, art, video games, books/reading, yard, sports, good health, vacations, traveling, good friendships.

What gives you no greater joy? The greatest joy? Deep seated lasting joy?

Joy is rooted in truth and truth is rooted in the knowledge of God. God is the supreme joy.

Heaven is God and the serious business of heaven is joy.

In Nehemiah when Ezra read the law to the people they responded with rejoicing. The joy of the Lord was their strength and salvation and hope.

John says his joy is in the truth and when that truth is embraced and abided in by those he loves.

Is your best joy when you hear those you know and love walking in the way of the Lord, abiding in Christ? I suspect as we get older and closer to heaven, our source of joy shifts to knowing those we love will be in heaven with us.

The best joy is not joy that is kept inside, the best joy is joy that is shared, spread, passed on.

Truth is not just something you know, it is not just something you believe, not just something you can repeat. Truth is something you live, you show, you put into practice. It isn't just for the mind, it is for the feet and hands.

Proverbs 23:15-16 My son, if your heart is wise, my heart too will be glad.
16 My inmost being will exult when your lips speak what is right.

Proverbs 23:24 The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice; he who fathers a wise son will be glad in him.

Are we raising up spiritual seed, are we sowing spiritual truth?

What gives you the greatest joy in your children? Their success in school or sports, their success in business, in their careers, in their accomplishments and recognitions? Or in their spiritual growth, in their love for Jesus and worship and the Word?

Are you content or satisfied with a weak or nominal profession of faith, that they claim to be Christian even though they don't show any interest in Jesus or His church?

Are you anxious for your children's or grandchildren's souls? Do you pray for their souls more than any other prayer? Do you pray they will be saved from the wrath to come? That they will be reconciled to the Father? That they will be filled with the Holy Spirit? That they will walk in the truth and abide in Christ?

With your adult children what do you talk about most? Their jobs, how they are advancing in their careers, are they investing for the future, what are their vacation or retirement plans? Or do you talk about spiritual realities, their spiritual growth, spiritual future?

Plant seeds. Fan the flames. Ask good thought-provoking questions.

Mark spiritual moments.

Love them much, especially in their sin.

Set an example. Show as much of the fruit of the Spirit as grace enables.

Confess and repent of your sins publicly.

There is no greater joy for a parent than to witness their children coming to know the truth and embrace it and love it and walk in it. Pray for this greater joy.

When our own children do this, they become doubly our children, children after the flesh and children after the faith, too.

This joy is not just for parents, but for spiritual parents, for pastors, for elders, for Christian teachers, for those who are disciplining and mentoring others.

We know John from reading his letters. We know his love for the truth. John knows and loves the truth because of the joy it has produced in his own life. What we love and treasure, gives us more joy when others embrace the same.

Love the truth this week, live the truth this week, preach the truth to yourself this week, speak the truth to those around you with week, especially those caught up in lies. This is something you can do until your last breath to the glory of God. Pray for greater joy for you, your family, your church, our nation and world.