

## Tuesday, December 22, 2020—1 John 1-2

John was the beloved disciple. He was closer to Jesus than any of the other disciples, and he lived long after the other disciples. He saw the power of and need for the good news of Jesus in a variety of situations.

The Gnostics were a group who claimed to know Jesus but said people had to have special knowledge in order to be saved. Also, their teaching separated the physical from the spiritual. This special knowledge was only for spiritual salvation, so what one did with his or her body did not matter. In fact, many of them reveled in sinful pleasures while claiming also to follow the Christ who never experienced any of them.

John wrote to combat this prevalent false teaching. John knew the physical and spiritual realities of Jesus. He had heard, seen, and touched Jesus. John knew God was completely pure. “. . . in him there is no darkness at all” (1:5b). Anyone who claimed to know Jesus yet walked in the darkness of sin was a liar (1:8). Some said what they were doing was not sinful or inconsequential, and John said they made Jesus a liar (1:10).

Everyone has a sin condition only Jesus can heal. Jesus speaks to God on our behalf and is the atoning sacrifice for our sin (2:1-2). To know Him as Savior compels us to walk in obedience with Him as Lord (2:3-4). “Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did” (2:6). To walk as Jesus did meant living in righteousness and loving others.

Resolve to love God, love people, and walk in purity.

## Monday, December 21, 2020—2 Timothy 1-4

Paul was in prison, but that didn't stop him from sharing the gospel and shaping disciples. One of his first disciples was Timothy, and the two of them remained close for years—whether ministering together or only maintaining communication. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul again shared advice and admonition for Timothy's leading his people.

Paul urged Timothy to embrace hardship and serve with boldness. Timothy could trust God would be faithful, so Timothy should put to use all God had

deposited in Him (1:8-14). As a disciple-maker, Timothy was to be strong in the grace of God and to take the things Paul had taught him and use them to disciple reliable men who would, in turn, disciple others (2:1-2). The Kingdom of God advances only when disciples of Christ make disciples who will make disciples.

Though Paul was chained, God's word was not (2:9b). Timothy was to present himself to God as one who handled this word correctly. He was to train others to do the same. Proper instruction in the truth leads to repentance and knowledge (2:25). Otherwise, false teachers creep in (2:16), and the culture within the church becomes toxic (3:1-9).

Paul said all those who want to live godly lives will be persecuted (3:12), but the Word of God was sufficient to teach, rebuke, correct, and train in righteousness (3:16-17), no matter how difficult the situation. Timothy's duties were simple: Preach the Word. Endure hardship (4:1-5).

Pray for a love for the Word and conviction to teach its truth. Endure hardship, and make disciples.

#### Sunday, December 20, 2020—Titus 1-3

Paul's call from God led him to travel widely over more than a decade. In that time, he met many people and invested himself in their lives, helping them know Jesus and walk faithfully with Him. Some of those people developed in faith and demonstrated gifts vital for Kingdom growth.

One of those was Titus. Paul took Titus to Crete and left him there in charge of the churches God was birthing among the people in the towns on the island. As in his letter to Timothy, Paul highlighted the role and character of church leaders (1:4-9). There was much in the culture of Crete that could hinder the gospel, and Titus had to prepare the leaders for that.

The church had the opportunity to unite the generations in the call of Christ. Older could teach younger. Younger could inspire older. Weak could encourage strong through service. Titus would set the example for them all in the way he lived and spoke, living with integrity that even skeptics and opponents could not deny (2:1-10).

Jesus had redeemed them to make them people eager to do good works (2:1-15), not because they earned it, but through His mercy (3:5). He gave them assurance of eternity so they could live daily doing what was good. Their personal and corporate lives were to reflect the call and character of Jesus. A focus on the main thing would help them avoid foolish controversies and troublemakers (3:9-11).

Pray to be a church focused on glorifying Jesus and doing good.

#### Saturday, December 19, 2020—1 Timothy 4-6

Pastors are the shepherds of the local flock. Like the shepherd of Psalm 23, they are to lead the people, nurture the people, and protect them from outside threats. Paul was affirming Timothy in his role as pastor and reminding him there was always the threat of false teachers lurking around the people of God. Timothy was to expose these untruths (4:6).

Timothy was young and possibly hesitant to teach with boldness those who were older than he was. Paul told him not to let anyone look down on him but to set the example and to remind people that training and growing in godliness would pay dividends in this life and the next (4:7-16). The church was a family, so, to be healthy, they would have some uncomfortable yet important discussions about truth, desires, and growth.

The elders of the church were the leaders. Timothy, as pastor, was one of those elders. The church was to provide for them as they led, but the church was also to hold them to high standards for teaching and character. Likewise, the members of the church were to conduct themselves in the church and in the community with honor and integrity. Paul warned them strongly against the love of money. He urged them to find contentment in godliness. There was far more return on that investment (6:6).

Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness (6:11). Pray for growth in your generosity. Pray for your pastors and church members to bring honor to Christ.

#### Friday, December 18, 2020—1 Timothy 1-3

Paul spent two years with the Ephesians during one of his missionary journeys. He wrote to the Ephesians while imprisoned in Rome, and he eventually sent Timothy to pastor the people. Paul had significant investment in these people, but he had the same goal for them that he had for any and every church—loving God and loving people (1:5).

Timothy needed to address and combat the false teaching that was poisoning the minds and fellowship of the Ephesians, so he needed to embrace the gifting God had given him to pastor. With the letter, Paul was encouraging Timothy as an individual and the Ephesian church as a whole to fulfill the design God had for them. For the church, this design included passionate, purposeful prayer, orderly worship, and holy lifestyles (2:1-15).

The church needed solid leadership to become the body God intended, so Paul gave Timothy a list of standards for the elders who would oversee the function of the church and the deacons who would serve the needs of its people (3:1-16). These men had important and distinct roles to play, but they had very similar characteristics.

These leaders needed solid home lives. How could they care for God's family if they were not first investing in their own? These leaders needed a good reputation in the community. How would Jesus be honored if the community saw His servants as questionable or worthless people?

The healthy church magnifies Jesus, ministers to its people, and makes Him known to the community. Pray for your church's health.

Thursday, December 17, 2020—2 Peter 1-3

Peter was not satisfied with a faith in Christ that prayed a prayer of salvation and did not grow. He and his audience faced too much difficulty to only have a faith that forgave sins and waited for heaven. They needed an authentic relationship with Jesus that carried them through hardship and empowered them in weakness. His letter described this vibrant faith.

This kind of faith had qualities that developed over time—making the believer more like Jesus and deepening her love for others (1:3-8). If a Christ-

follower was not continually growing, he would be confused and distracted by life and forget Jesus had cleansed him in the first place. Peter urged them to be diligent (1:10) and pay careful attention (1:19) because the gospel was not some religious myth but absolute reality.

Peter's audience could not afford to be lazy. False teachers always plagued the people of God, and the Christians of Peter's day were no different. They needed to grow in the truth to combat falsehood and avoid condemnation (2:1-10). The culture always drifts from Jesus and revels in its sinfulness. Peter warned his readers not to fall in that trap.

Peter called them to wholesome thinking (3:1). God had spoken and worked in the past. He would continue to do so. The world scoffs and doubts, but God works in His timing to fulfill His promises. "You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming" (3:11b-12). Pray to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus.

#### Wednesday, December 16, 2020—1 Peter 3-5

In mixed-martial arts, opponents fight one another with a variety of blows from hands, feet, and body. If they cannot achieve a knockout, they work to make their opponents submit. Once in a position they know they cannot change, they "tap out," submitting to superiority.

Peter called his readers to submission, and he used Jesus as the example. Jesus experienced the wrestling match between flesh and spirit, but He willingly submitted for the glory of God and the good of mankind. This submission led to suffering, but it eventually led to healing. Husbands and wives have the opportunity to submit mutually to God and one another (3:1-7). This is not to be a "tapping out" because the wrestler has grown weak or compromised but a voluntary choice to serve the other from a position of faith in God and strength from the Spirit.

Church members submit to one another, living in harmony and maturing the body (3:8-12). They encourage one another to be ready to tell of the hope they have in Christ and to suffer for doing good (3:13-18). Their submission and suffering symbolize their repentance from sin, gladly embracing the call and will of

God (4:1-2). The world finds this strange, yet the Christian rejoices that he participates in the suffering of Christ (4:13).

The call of Christ, for young and old, is humility because God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (5:5). Cast all your cares on Him because He cares for you. Submit to His will for His glory.