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A Pastor's Heart

The Olivet Discourse is one of the most studied passages in the Gospels (it would be a toss-up between the Sermon the Mount and this discourse). It was Sunday, the final week of Christ's life. He and the disciples were walking from the Temple to the Matthew of Olives where Christ eventually would be captured by the Jews. While walking the disciples commented on how awesome was the temple building...

Mark 13:1, "And as He was going out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, 'Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!'"

Even by today's standards, the Herodian Temple would have been impressive. Some of the stones used to build the edifice measured 40 feet by 12 by 12 and weighed up to a hundred tons! So the disciples were in awe! Yet they shouldn't have been. Something far greater than Herod's temple walked beside the Apostles and they didn't realize it. Accordingly, Christ responded with a shocking statement...

Matthew 24:2b, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here shall be left upon another, which will not be torn down."

By this time Christ and the Disciples had reached the Matthew of Olives. Here His disciples approached

Him in private and said:

Matthew 24:3b, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?”

What proceeded from this question is a sermon known as the Olivet Discourse in which Christ detailed the events surrounding both the destruction of the temple AND His Second Coming. As it related to His Second Coming, we read of the Last Judgment when God will gather everyone before Him; all who have lived on the earth. At this time He will separate them into two groups as a shepherd divides the flock into sheep and goats: Those who are His — the sheep — will be placed on His right hand. Those who are rebellious and wicked — the goats — will be placed on His left hand. And then comes the judgment by which the sheep will be brought into glory and the goats will be cast into the lake of fire.

Now as sobering as is this passage, there is a peculiarity; specifically the basis upon which they will be judged.

Matthew 25:34-40, “Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’ Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite you in, or naked, and clothe You? And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, *even the least of them*, you did it to Me.’”

On what basis will the righteous be judged?

The righteous will be judged on the pastoral care they offered to the body of Christ! Do you see it?

- Feeding.
- Inviting the brethren into one’s house.
- Visiting- that is, pastoral care.
- Comforting and encouraging.

These are all pastoral activities rendered by the body to the body.

Matthew 25:40, “Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, *even the least of them*, you did it to Me.”

Once again we are confronted with the very important matter of pastoral care; a stewardship and obligation that rests upon each and every member of the body of Christ. On the Day of Judgment we will not be able to say, “I wasn’t called as an elder; it wasn’t my job to care for the body!” As we have seen again and again, each and every one of us has the responsibility to care for the body of Christ; it is the heartbeat of a child of God! And that is why passages like the one before us this morning is so important.

Again, John is writing as a Pastor's pastor- THE elder! As such, not only what he says here, but what he does is of didactic importance as it teaches us how to fulfill our calling to shepherd the flock of God.

- What constitutes a shepherd's heart?
- What desires and inclinations ought we to foster as we grow in grace?

The Pastor's Heart's Concern

This morning we answer these questions as we consider the Heart of this Pastor named John. We begin first with the pastor's heart's concern.

3 John 2, "beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers."

At first glance what John says here might be a little surprising when it comes to our discussion of a pastor's heart. Yet for a shepherd, this passage makes perfect sense. See, there is a clear distinction being made in this verse between how Gaius was doing *spiritually* AND the *rest of his life*; his physical, emotional, and social well-being. "Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health //// just as your soul prospers"

By placing Gaius' "prospering soul" and the rest of his life in apposition, John is making a distinction and so expressing his wish that Gaius prosper in ALL realms of life; not just the spiritual. Now you must see that this sentiment would have been as surprising in John's day as it most likely is in our own. According to the Greco-Roman worldview, life could be broken down into the non-material and the material. That which was in the category of the non-material (like love, feelings, ones spiritual life, etc.) was understood to be virtuous, commendable, and worthy of one's pursuit. The material world, on the other hand, consisted of the physical shell in which life was encased. Accordingly the tendency either was to

- Neglect completely the physical or corporal. ****or****
- Attack it, abuse it, and so destroy any and all of its proclivities.

This can be seen in Paul's dealings with the churches to which he wrote. The Church in Colossae struggled with false teachers who believed that because the body/corporal/physical was evil, it was the Christian's duty to oppose it and so deny it. Thus Paul exhorted them...

Colossians 2:20-23, "If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 'Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!' (Which all *refer to* things destined to perish with the using?)- In accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, *but are* of no value against fleshly indulgence."

Now the Church in Corinth struggled with the same false teaching; however in this church the teaching took a completely different course. Instead of opposing the physical/corporal, the teachers in Corinth preached license. Since the non-physical was all that matter, what difference did it make what you did

with your body? Thus Paul exhorted them...

1 Corinthians 6:12-15, 19-20, "All things are lawful for me [a quotation of what the false teachers were saying], but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything. Food is for the stomach, and the stomach is for food; but God will do away with both of them. Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord; and the Lord is for the body. Now God has not only raised the Lord [this is radical- God cares so much about the physical, that He restored Christ to that state by raising Him from the dead!!], but will also raise us up through His power [IOW, it is not just Christ, but living in a physical/fleshly realm is the future of us all]. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? May it never be! [Now if that wasn't radical enough, notice how Paul closes his argument here, v. 19...] Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body."

And this brings to the front a very important truth found throughout Scripture: at creation, God not only made us both physical and spiritual- corporal and non-corporal- BUT He charged us with the calling to subdue it all unto the glory of God.

Genesis 1:27-28, "And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'"

In other words, we are not to avoid any part of God's creation, but rather subdue it to the glory of God! And so, far from ignoring the body, the Christian is charged to take dominion even here; neither abusing it nor embellishing it.

1 Thessalonians 4:3a, 4, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification; *that is*, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor."

This means that not only are we to care about what is on the inside, BUT we must also prove to be wise stewards of what is on the outside. Now throughout church history this is a principle that has from time to time been well neglected. There are the ascetic movements that are around even today. Neo-Platonism which believes that evil is resident within things. Accordingly;

- Certain musical beats and so music
- Alcohol
- Activities

Have been deemed to be evil in and of themselves. Fundamentalism (not true Biblical-fundamentalism as espoused by J. G. Machen) no doubt contains Neo-Platonic thought, but on the whole says that because of *the potential* that the physical has in leading the Christian astray, it ought to be opposed. Christian "Pietism" found in many churches and parachurch organizations which understands that the spiritual is that which sanctifies the physical. And so one cannot enjoy a sunset unless it makes you think of God directly, or to derive pleasure from pushing the body to the limit (say as in athletics) is deemed

carnal.

At the opposite end, you've got churches, movement, and whole denominations which because the soul is eternal place very little weight or import into the concerns of this physical world. There's the dispensationalist (and this is a caricature I know) who are accused of burying their head in the sand as they await the destruction of this current world. As such, because society is "going to hell in a handbasket" you need only care for you and your own; don't take dominion! Don't rule over the earth as the future Kingdom of God. There are the separatists who have fled from the world as best as possible and so hide behind walls of their making. Look around and you will discover

- Educational movements based on this premise.
- Christian soap operas.
- Christian music.
- Christian T.V.
- Christian games- our kids don't play monopoly, they play Bibliopoly!
- Christian foods.

In missions this teaching has had devastating effects as Christians have gone out to minister only to the spiritual; either neglecting the physical altogether or using it as an avenue to share Christ. Church history is dotted with these efforts. They come to a village and address physical needs that they might get a hearing. Once the gospel has been preached and accepted, the missionaries take their supplies, technologies, and the like to the next village. See, it doesn't matter that many in the previous village will starve to death on account of their ignorance. They're saved and so will go to heaven. It's the next tribe we must worry about.

In this context how important it is to see that which ought to concern us as shepherds! Listen to John's statement: "Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health //// just as your soul prospers."

This word, *prosper*, literally means, "to be led along a good road" or "to have a good journey." Metaphorically it is translated as "succeed" or "prosper" in Romans 1:10 and 1 Corinthians 16:2. The focus of this word lays emphasis on the circumstances in which Gaius found himself; his business, employment, plans, and purposes. Here John longed for Gaius to prosper!

The phrase, *be in good health*, was used by Luke the physician to describe those who are "fit and well" or "safe and sound."¹ This had reference primarily to Gaius' physical health.

Together we behold the passion of a pastor- it is for the entire person. Not just the spiritual, but the physical, social, educational elements as well. As servants of one another, we long for and work toward the best in each of these realms!² And so that which ought to concern us as pastors is the longing for

¹ Compare Luke 5:31; 7:10; 15:27

² Thus Paul as the consummate shepherd wrote his concern for Timothy, "No longer drink water *exclusively*, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments" (1 Timothy 5:23). As a shepherd, Paul expressed a care for Timothy that went beyond his walk with Christ. The Apostle cared about Timothy's physical health. And yet, it just wasn't the physical that concerned Paul.

In 1 Timothy 6:17, Paul charged Timothy, "Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy." Part of a Pastor's Concern is for

and so the helping of one another to mature fully... in all realms of life!

- Does this mean that of the physical and spiritual, there is no distinction?
- Both are equally important?

The Pastor's Priority

3 John 2-3, "beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers. For I was very glad when brethren came [the brethren here most likely refers to those whom Gaius himself housed]." ³

The implication is that missionary after missionary came and gave the same status report to John concerning Gaius. ⁴ These missionaries bore witness to Gaius' loyalty to Christ (your truth). ⁵

As we'll see in a moment, Gaius' walk with Christ obviously was flourishing. Yet notice that by John's wording, there is a clear distinction being made here and so a discrimination which made John "rejoice exceedingly" on account of the state of Gaius' soul. And that is what we'd expect, if we had to choose between a person winning a Mr. or Mrs. Universe competition, being a professional athlete, becoming a brain surgeon, or knowing Christ, we'd all chose the latter. Christ said this:

Matthew 16:26, "For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Paul put it this way:

1 Timothy 4:7b-8, "On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and *also* for the *life* to come." ⁶

Clearly in Scripture there is a distinction to be made when it comes to the importance of our spiritual development over the other areas of life. And so it was with John when it came to Gaius. John longed for Gaius to excel as a soldier of Christ in all things. However what thrilled the Apostle most was hearing that Gaius indeed was a man of God.

the proper use of the things of this life. All things have been created for our enjoyment unto the glory of God. Accordingly, we must not worship creation, but use it as God intended and be masters here! And so of all peoples on the earth Christians ought to be ones who fully enjoy the things of this life: learning, talking, eating, drinking, the Arts, sports... LIVING! In the words of 1 Timothy 4:4, "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude."

³ Compare also 3 John 5-8

⁴ The genitive absolute construction with the present participle indicates repeated occurrence.

⁵ In Scripture, "truth" covers every sphere of life- moral, intellectual, spiritual.

⁶ And so as parents, for example, we ought to make a distinction when it comes to the development of our children- first their walk with Christ is where our concern must be, then their physical, emotional, and social education. Yet when it comes to this we haven't done so well as Christian families. We invest an inordinate amount of time in our children's physical, social, and intellectual development. But when it comes to their spiritual development, we relegate that to a youth pastor not much older than our children. So long as our children are having fun with Christ, we're satisfied.

3 John 3, “For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth.”

The latter statement, “how you are walking in truth” constitutes what John meant in 3 John 2 when he referenced Gaius’ “prospering soul.” What is a prospering soul?

Notice first, that a prospering soul is NOT —

- Gaius’ mastery of a course on theology.
- His grasp of the language of God-speak.
- That he hadn’t missed a quiet time in four years.
- The Spiritual disciplines enjoyed by the disciple.

That wasn’t what John had in mind when he rejoiced over the prosperous state of Gaius’ soul. Rather it was that this disciple was, “walking in the truth.” While this necessarily meant that Gaius was indeed...

- In the word of God.
- Learning its teaching.
- Growing in his ability to defend it and so argue for it.

Yet the implication was that by these things God’s word had penetrated his heart such that it was transforming Gaius from the inside out. That truly is what we are after as shepherds when it comes to fellowshipping with and serving one another. Notice the emphasis in the life of Ezra.

Ezra 7:10, “For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to practice *it*, and to teach *His* statutes and ordinances in Israel.”

This must be the priority both of our lives and one another. We see it in John’s commendation of the young men to whom he wrote in 1 John.

1 John 2:14b, “...I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.”

What constitutes maturation in Christ? When the disciple not only gets into the word, but the word gets into him! This is what Paul had in mind when he exhorted the Ephesian church.

Ephesians 5:18, “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.”

Recall that the word for “filled” was a maritime word used when the wind “filled” the sails of a vessel and so drove the ship. So ought the word of the Spirit fill and so drive us in our life. Accordingly Paul exhorted the brethren in Colossae:

Colossians 3:16, “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you...”

As ministers of Christ, we long for our disciples, first to be healthy in all respects; physically, socially, educationally, and spiritually. However that which is our primary focus when it comes to our pastoral care is the spiritual development and maturation of our people.

- We long for each other not only to be able to grasp the grace of Christ...
- But that the grace of Christ might impel us, move us, shape us such that we might become better mothers, fathers, trash collectors, farmers, doctors, teachers, etc...
-

John's Basis

Finally, this leads us to the basis for why John wrote what he did here. If John's words in this epistle don't characterize our passion for one another, there is a reason. That which served as the basis for John's pastoral ministry has yet to color our thinking.

3 John 4, "I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth."

John brought out the "big guns" when it came to Gaius. Here the apostle tips his hand that this disciple might understand why John

- Wrote what he wrote in this epistle.
- Did what he did as an apostle.
- Ministered the way he did as a pastor.

What was the Basis?

I remind you that we here are examining the words of a shepherd; not simply the words of a child of God whose hope, joy, and crown Christ and His Second Coming.⁷ No! As a SHEPHERD whose life therefore was consumed with the question of people, John's greatest joy was NOT...

- Their respect and admiration.
- Adoring words.
- Proving to be more grounded than another's disciple.
- Conversion.

BUT hearing of his children walking in the truth.

Now we've talked about this passage before simply because it is so amazing. This shepherd, this pastor, this disciple of the Lord who...

- Walked with Christ for three years.
- Beheld His Transfiguration⁸
- Sat at His feet.

⁷ Compare 1 Timothy 1:1; 1 John 3:3

⁸ Compare Matthew 17:1-2

- Laid his head upon Christ's breast⁹
- Who received far more teaching than could be written down at the time¹⁰

...considered his "most extreme joy" to be hearing of his disciples walking in the truth. It is this valuation that makes a good shepherd... an effective father... a faithful caretaker of another's soul! And it is this that must impel us when it comes to the body life of this church. Dr. John MacArthur put it this way:

[This] expresses the ultimate goal of every true minister. That goal is not just to teach the truth, or even to know that his people understand it, but to know that his people believe, love, and obey the truth.¹¹

Such is the clay from which a shepherd is formed! And such is the outlook we must foster if we are to prove faithful to the calling which God has placed on each and every one of us here this day. Accordingly, I can't caution you enough to "guard your heart" from a mentality that is rife in American Christianity... the mentality of the consumer.

- How many Christians have left a church because they haven't felt cared for?
- How many have left because they didn't get what they wanted?
- How many Christians sitting in churches across the land are contemplating a move this very moment because they feel neglected or lonely?

In a survey conducted in March of 2008 of people who recently left their church family, Bill Reichart discovered that

- 48% didn't feel that the church helped them grow or engage them in meaningful activities.
- 60% of the respondents said that they felt that either the preacher or the church as a whole seemed judgmental or hypocritical.
- 16% felt that there were too many changes occurring.
- 14% felt that the church was run by a clique that discouraged involvement.

Family of God let me clue you in on something that most have missed today, God did not gather His people into a body that you might feel welcome or cared for or that you could have a place to send your kids on Wednesday night or that there might be a social network for you like one of these:

- Married without kids.
- Married with kids.
- Empty nesters.
- Single.
- Divorced.
- In recovery.

Christ did not gather His people into a body so that you could engage in meaningful activities. Listen!

⁹ Compare John 13:23

¹⁰ Compare John 21:25

¹¹ 1-3 John, MNTC, p. 247.

The church is not here for you. You are here for the church and the church is here for God!

As such we must STOP viewing this body as a product and START viewing it for what it is: your family in Christ entrusted to your care that you might encourage it, strengthen it, rebuke it, uphold it, and weep over it... unto the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. On this issue, we will be held accountable on the Last Day! Though Paul wrote this passage in reference to the care of widows, nevertheless his exhortation is apropos when it comes to our forever family of God; the church:

1 Timothy 5:8, "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever."

How will it fare for the unbeliever on the Last Day; the one who neglects their family? They will be cast into the lake of fire!

You say, "But I don't have this love for the body. Am I one of the 'goats' mentioned in the Olivet Discourse?" That's possible and so it behooves us all to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith!¹²

However as Christians we must see that "loving the brethren" is not natural! I've yet to meet a pastor who *began* pursuing the calling out of a love for people. Talk with most fulltime ministers and you will discover that most if not all feel a lack of passion, love, and care for the body. Truly taking our eyes off of ourselves and placing them on the welfare of others is quite alien to us. In fact, Scripture teaches this:

1 John 4:19, "We love, because He first loved us."

Truly, the pastoral heartbeat as reflected in 3 John comes only as we grow in our love and devotion to Christ (don't ever forget that John is writing this text as "the elder"- the pastor, indeed, but also the aged!). And we take a huge step in the right direction if we recognize that God saved us that we might build up and so care for the body unto the praise of His glory. And we understand therefore that God has placed us in a church body NOT to get, BUT to give. Behold our paltry love for the body, are convicted, and so brought to our knees in confession and supplication that God might mature us and so use us to bless the body. Continue to...

- Seek Christ.
- Grow in our love for the Lord.
- Daily preach the gospel to our souls that we might never forget our "purification from our former sins!"¹³

In other words, don't seek to be a great shepherd of other people's soul. Rather, seek to be a great servant of Christ!

¹² Compare 2 Corinthians 13:5

¹³ Compare 2 Peter 1:9

About Bethel Presbyterian Church

The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word is published regularly.

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

All our sermons can be accessed via the World Wide Web. The recording for this sermon (the last few minutes were not recorded because of a power outage during the sermon) and these notes can be found at [Introduction to 3 John](#). The web address for all sermons at Bethel Presbyterian Church can be found out as follows: <http://bethelpresbyterian.sermonaudio.com>

About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on May 24, 2009. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.