

INSPIRED TEXT MESSAGES – Part 2

TEXT MESSAGE FROM JOHN

Dr. Derek Morris

- Preaching passage: 2 John
- Subject: What the text message was that the presbyter sent to the chosen lady and her children
- Complement: love each other in the truth
- Exegetical idea: The presbyter encouraged the chosen lady and her children to walk in the truth in love.
- Preaching idea: Walk in love, and walk in the truth, like Jesus.
- Purpose: To remind my hearers that God wants us to walk in love and walk in the truth like Jesus and to encourage them to do so.

I got a text message during last week’s sermon from someone sitting in the congregation. Just one word: “Hi!” He wanted me to know that text messaging really works, even in church! In part 1 of our series on Inspired Text Messages, we considered the text message that Paul, prisoner of Christ Jesus, sent to Philemon. You can hear that message by going to www.forestlakechurch.org and click on Visit the Sermon Archives. By the way, I had a chance to practice what I preached before the sun went down. Do you remember the key thought from part 1 of our Inspired Text Messages series? Since God has shown grace to you, show grace to each other!

Today we’re going to examine the another inspired text message, which also happens to be the shortest book in the Bible—that is if you count the Psalms as one book rather than a collection of 150 text messages. Otherwise Psalm 117 with just two sentences is the shortest inspired text message of all!

The inspired text message that we are going to study today is found just

before the book of Revelation: it's called 2 John. We're going to ask the same 3 questions that we asked in part 1 of our series on Inspired Text Messages: Who? What? and So What? You should have received a copy of this inspired text message with your bulletin. It looks like this. (hold up handout).

Let's begin with our first question—Who? Who is the sender of this inspired text message and who is the recipient? We start our search for the answer to that question by reading verse 1. “The elder, to the chosen lady and her children...”

Who is “the elder” referenced at the beginning of this inspired text message? You say, “That’s easy! At the top of the page in my Bible it says 2nd John—so the author is John.” You may be right about that! But remember that the header is not part of the original text. The earliest manuscripts of this inspired text message do have the following header: Johannes β, or 2nd John. While this header was supplied by a scribe at a later date, it indicates that the early Christian community recognized John the apostle as the author of this inspired text message—but he never specifically identifies himself.

This we do know—the author of 2nd John is the same person who wrote 3rd John. Both inspired text messages begin with the words “the elder.” They also have very similar language, especially in the closing comment: 2 John v.12 reads “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.” 3 John v.13 is almost identical. So these two inspired text messages are almost certainly written by the same author, who identifies himself as “the elder.”

What caused the early Christian community to link “the elder,” the author of

the inspired text messages known as 2nd and 3rd John, with the apostle John? Nowhere in the gospel of John or in 1st John does the John refer to himself as “the elder.” Rather, John cryptically refers to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” However, the themes of love and truth found in 2nd and 3rd John are very prominent in all of the writings of the apostle John. The Gospel of John and 2 John also speak of a commandment to love. It is likely that the aged apostle John writes as one who is so well known in the Christian community that he does not even need to mention his name. He is simply “the elder”—a term not primarily referring to age but to standing in the Christian community. Even those who question John’s authorship of the inspired text message of 2 John recognize that this correspondence is strongly linked to John and suggest that 2nd and 3rd John, if not written by John, may have been written by one of John’s disciples.

What about “the chosen lady” to whom the inspired text message is sent? Who is she? Several suggestions have been made. Someone has suggested that Eklekta, the Greek word translated “chosen” is actually her name! In other words, “The Elder, to a lady named Eklekta!”—but this is highly unlikely because at the end of inspired text message “the children of her chosen (eklekta) sister send their greetings. They can’t all be named Eklekta! Others have suggested that this inspired text message was written to a woman named Kyria, the Greek word translated “lady.” That’s not impossible. Kyria was a woman’s name. Perhaps “the elder” wrote this inspired text message to an elect, or chosen, lady named Kyria.

A third suggestion, and in my opinion the one which makes the most sense is that this is an inspired text message sent not to an individual but rather to a local

Christian community, a local Christian church, a woman being the symbol of the church. We have many other examples of inspired text messages being sent to an entire Christian church, like Paul's inspired text messages to Theassalonians, or Philippians, or Colossians. The elder John's place of residence is not mentioned, but according to the testimony of early Church Fathers, the apostle John spent the closing years of his life with the Christian community in Ephesus. The "children of your chosen sister" who send their greetings at the conclusion of this inspired text message would be the members of the Christian community in Ephesus.

So we have tried to answer the Who? Question: the aged apostle John, or perhaps one of his disciples, to an unnamed Christian community.

What is the content of this inspired text message? Read the first three verses of this inspired text message with me, and listen for some key words: "The elder, to the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in the truth—and not I only, but also all who know the truth—because of the truth which lives in us and will be with us forever: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father, and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love."

Did you hear some key words repeated over and over again? You're right! Truth and love. Whatever "the elder" is talking about, it has something to do with truth and love. Let's keep reading. Let's all read together, beginning with verse 4: "It has given me great joy to find some of your children in the truth, just as the Father commanded us. 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.”

There again we see truth and love linked together. Walk in the truth; walk in love. These words remind us of the teaching of the apostle John in another inspired text message—1 John. Listen to his testimony in 1 John 1:6: “If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.” And again in 1 John 2:4-6: “The man who says, ‘I know him,’ but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.”

Doesn’t that remind you of the words of “the elder” in 2nd John? Walk in the truth and walk in love—truth and love inextricably linked together. Why is the aged apostle making such a strong point about love and truth being inextricably linked together? The answer is found in verses 7-11. “Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is a 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. 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.”

Apparently, false teachers were coming to this Christian community promoting the idea that the Son of God never really became flesh. He just appeared to us. That heresy was called Docetism and it was prevalent at the end of the first

century AD when the aged apostle was writing this inspired text message. I'm sure that those false teachers weren't saying, "We need to hate God and hate each other!" No! They sounded good: "Let's just love God and love each other. We don't need to believe what the Scriptures teach. We don't need to take it literally that 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.' Let's just love God and love each other!"

But "the elder" says, No! Those are deceivers, opposed to Christ. Don't even welcome such people into your house. Walking in love and walking in the truth go together. Don't ever separate the two. Those who love Jesus will walk in His truth. Those who walk in the truth will love each other.

John the elder concludes with these words: "I have much to write to you, but I'm running out of papyrus!" Well, not exactly, though some suggest that the brief text messages of 2nd John and 3rd John were about the length to fit on a standard sheet of papyrus. "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."

That reminds me of Paul's words in his inspired text message to Philemon: "Prepare a guest room for me." John the elder is intending to visit and see that his children are indeed walking in the truth and walking in love—truth and love, hand in hand.

What relevance does this inspired text message have for our lives today? Or to ask our 3rd question—So What? Well, let me ask you a question: Has anyone ever told you that we don't have to live in harmony with all of the teachings of God's Word anymore—we just have to love God and love each other? Has anyone ever

told you that we don't need to keep the commandments of God anymore—we just need to love?

Many years ago, when I was growing up as a young lad in the south of England, there were some slightly older young lads in Liverpool who became quite popular. Perhaps you've heard of them. They were called the Beatles. One of their early songs went like this: "All you need is love, all you need is love, all you need is love, love, love is all you need! Love, love, love, love is all you need." In one way, they were absolutely right, and in another way they were dead wrong. Love is all you need, as long as that love is guided by the truth. And the truth that "the elder John" is talking about is not an abstract concept. That truth is a Person! Jesus boldly declared in John 14:6, "I am the Way, I am the Truth, and I am the Life." And the apostle John declared in John 1:14, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

Love is all we need, as long as that love is guided by the truth as it is revealed in Jesus. Do you want a simple rule by which to live? Walk in love, guided by Jesus. Walk in love, guided by the truth of His Word. Walk in love, believing that Jesus is all He claimed to be. Walk in love like Jesus.

I'd like you to think for a moment about a story in the life of Jesus that illustrates walking in love and walking in the truth. If one comes to mind, you can either send me a text message or an e-mail: 407-488-4018 or dmorris@forestlakechurch.org, or you can use the old fashioned method and raise your hand!

Jesus with the children – Mark 10:13-16

Jesus with the woman caught in adultery – John 8:1-11

Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus – John 11

I heard a wonderful illustration a few months ago out here in the parking lot of walking in love like Jesus. I'm still trying to recall who told me the story, so if you're listening and it's you, call me or send me a text message! These are the details as I remember them. The setting was a women's prayer group. A young lady expressed her need for some reliable transportation and asked for prayer. The group prayed, asking for God's leading and blessing. While driving home, one of the older ladies in the group was struck by this brief thought. "It's your turn!" What did that mean? "It's your turn!" She was almost home when she remembered that as a young woman someone had shown love and care for her by providing a car for her for \$1. "OK, Lord, I get it! It's my turn!" The older lady made a u-turn and drove to the home of this young woman who had made the prayer request at the women's group just a few minutes earlier. She knocked on her door, smiled, and said, "I have a car that I want to sell you." "Oh, that's a beautiful car. I couldn't afford that car!" "Sure you could," the older lady replied. It's only \$1!"

That, my friends, is walking in love! That is walking in love like Jesus. You see, Jesus didn't just give us some reliable transportation for \$1. He gave us redemption, forgiveness of sins, cleansing, eternal life, as a free gift. I want to reflect that amazing love in the way that I live, don't you? The text message from "the elder" to the chosen lady and her children has one short powerful idea: walk in love and walk in the truth, like Jesus. Let's go and live like that!