



Reaching the lost amid a troubled
denominational context ...
with the help of the Apostle John

Reaching the lost ...



- It is not good to have zeal without knowledge!
 - “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?” (Luke 9.54)
- He who wins souls is wise:
 - “When they had testified and proclaimed the word of the Lord, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.” (Acts 8.25)
 - Eventually, John wrote his gospel, so that ...
 - “... you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20.31)

... in a troubled denominational context



- John didn't *only* write his gospel ...
 - He also wrote three letters, and received a revelation.
 - All four documents reveal Christian congregations significantly troubled by false teaching, of which a substantial element was the promotion of sexual immorality.
- *If* the churches in Revelation 2-3 reflect those over which John exercised some sort of particular oversight (maybe a bit like a modern bishop should) then John was also engaged in “reaching the lost amid a troubled denominational context”.

Consider the Seven Churches



- A bleak picture:
 - Five of the seven are significantly rebuked: only two are commended.
 - Significant struggles with false teaching and ungodliness are the norm, not the exception.
 - Jesus never suggests that the faithful should leave, even the worst congregations.
 - *All* of the false teachers promote sexual immorality:
 - Balaam, Jezebel and (probably) the Nicolaitans.
 - *Living in Love and Faith* (or, more accurately, *Dying in Discord and Unbelief*) is nothing new!
 - Several churches are a “curate’s egg” – partly commended, and partly rebuked: but *all* are commanded to repent.

Consider the Seven Churches



- A faithful Lord:
 - All are addressed by Jesus, and all exhorted: “He who has an ear ...”.
 - We must not lose confidence in the power of God’s word, or the patience of the Lord.
 - Even the one receiving the harshest rebuke (Laodicea) is assured of the Lord’s love.
 - But it may not have *felt* loving ...
 - All are promised that “he who overcomes” will be saved.
 - There is no promise to he who doesn’t: judgement day will divide the visible church.
- So continue to listen, repent and “hold on to what you have” (2.25, 3.11)

Church	Jesus' diagnosis	Contemporary?
Ephesus	"You cannot tolerate wicked men ... yet ... you have forsaken your first love."	Doctrinally scrupulous but spiritually cold
Smyrna	"Be faithful, even to the point of death."	Facing Martyrdom: not here
Pergamum	"you remain true to my name ... nevertheless ... you have people there who hold ..."	Their PCC would be divided over LLF!
Thyatira	"I know your deeds, your love and faith ... Nevertheless, You tolerate that woman Jezebel ..."	Orthodox but won't correct, rebuke or refute.
Sardis	"You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead."	Ouch. Just ouch.
Philadelphia	"I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name."	Hopefully many of us?
Laodicea	"because you are lukewarm ... I am about to spit you out of my mouth."	The Church of England?

3 John and 2 John



- 3 John: toxic leadership destroys gospel *ministry*
 - Diotrephes “loves to be first” (v9) and “refuses to welcome the brothers” (v10)
 - Gaius loves the missionaries (v6)
 - John loves his friend “in the truth” (v1) and commends the godly Demetrius (v12)
- 2 John: undiscerning fellowship destroys gospel *integrity*
 - “Grace, mercy and peace ... *in truth and love*” (v3)
 - “love one another” (v5) *and* “do not take him into your house” (v10, ie the church)
 - False teaching always pretends to be “progress” (v9)
 - “chosen ladies” and their children are key to faithfulness (v1 and 13)

1 John



- 1 John: false teaching destroys gospel *confidence*
 - John writes to those who *believe* that they may *know* (5.13)
 - Yet 1 John is not so much a letter of assurance, but re-assurance.
- Why do they lack confidence?
 - Because of false teachers ...
 - “I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray.” (2.26)
 - ... who have divided the church
 - “They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us ...” (2.19)

1 John



- So what should we do in our churches to keep on reaching the lost in our troubled denominational context?
 - Preach the apostolic gospel to all (1.1-4):
 - “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard” (v3)
 - Specifically, Jesus’ incarnation (eg 4.1-6) and propitiatory death (eg 2.2, 4.10)
 - Encourage the Lord’s people to “continue” in Christ (eg 2.24), by
 - *trusting* the authentic Lord Jesus (eg 2.27-28, 3.23, 5.1)
 - *loving* the brothers (eg 3.16-18)
 - *obeying* God’s word (eg 2.3-4)
 - The false teachers love to unwind the cord, but these three are inseparable (5.1-5)