

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

IN HIS PRESENCE | RYAN BRAMLETT

RYAN BRAMLETT | JUNE 11, 2023

Traders Point how are we doing? Yeah. Hey, it's so good to be with you today as we continue in our series *Love and War*. And what we have been doing in this series is walking through this short letter in the back of our Bibles titled 1 John. And it is a short but powerful book.

John really writes in these extremes, if you will. He'll say, "Hey, you either walk in light or you walk in darkness." And we'll see today that he will say, "Hey, you are either a son or a daughter of the devil or you are a son or a daughter of God." And then he'll come out and just say, "Hey, you are either living to love others or you are living with hatred in your heart."

It's very stark. It's very black and white. But at the same time through this he does two things really well. He provides assurance and conviction. No matter what we're going through, he assures us that we are with God and He is going to be with us through it all—who we are, our identity.

But then he also gives us this conviction side. God loves you but He has more for you than you could ever dream, ask, or imagine. That's what we've been looking through in this letter.

Today we're going to be in chapter 3, starting in verse 19. If you have a Bible you can go ahead and flip there. If not, everything will be on the screen behind me. I also want to encourage you. We're not going to be able to cover all of chapter 3 today, so subscribe, if you haven't already, to DBR—Daily Bible Reading—this will give you a chance to study what we don't cover today. I also want to encourage you to take notes. Every time we open God's Word we can trust that He is going to say something. Alright? So, hopefully you've had enough time to get there, chapter 3, verse 19. Look at what John says. He says:

"Our actions will show that we belong to the truth, so we will be confident when we stand before God. Even if we feel guilty, God is greater than our feelings, and he knows everything. Dear friends, if we don't feel guilty, we can come to God with bold confidence. And we will receive from him whatever we ask because we obey him and do the things that please him."



We're going to stop right there. So, I love the way that John writes here. And maybe at first glance it's hard to tell, but what he's talking about in these few verses here is he is talking about prayer. He's talking about prayer. Did you notice that even the language that he uses there of, "Hey, when we come before God."? When we come before God. And I love that. I think John does a great job, not just talking about what prayer is, but where prayer happens. You see:

Prayer is when I come into the presence of God.

Prayer is when I come into the presence of God. Think about that. This is moments in our lives where we can break away and step into the presence of God. Prayer is this sacred place where heaven and earth touch. Where God and humanity come together. And John says that we can step into this place, into the presence of God. What I want us to look at today is:

What's keeping you from being in His presence?

What is it that is keeping us from the presence of God? Do you know what I mean? If God is offering this, if God is saying that this is possible, why are we spending more time over there? If there is this world where me and you, anytime we want, can step in and go into the presence of God, why aren't we?

What we're going to look at today is this idea that when we come before God, it almost feels like—maybe you can relate to this, "There is this barrier that comes between me and the presence of God." There are these things that stop us from ever getting a chance to be in His presence.

And John talks about a few of them. In our time together what I want us to do is just walk through one by one and say, "Hey, what is it in my life that is keeping me from the presence of God?"

I think the first one that we see as we come over here, it's the:

Unknown

Right? Here's what I mean. When we talk about prayer there is almost this mystery to it. Right? What is going to happen? If I go into this space, what's it going to be like on the other side? How is God going to meet me? Is there a set of things that I have to do to get into that space, to say the right words or... What is going to happen when I go on the other side of this?

And I think even the way that we talk about prayer makes it look like we don't think about prayer the same way John is talking about prayer. Alright? Here's just an example. We're going to do this *Family Feud* style. So we asked 100 participants, If I'm going to send some prayers, where am I going to send them?



I'm going to send some prayers... up.

Right? I'm going to send my prayers up. What does that communicate? That God is not in this space with me. That I'm going to pull up and I'm going to share and then I'm going to send these prayers to God and maybe He'll get to them, maybe He won't. But I'm going on with my day and maybe I'll hear from God,.

But what the Bible talks about is a very different interaction of what prayer is. During prayer we actually get to come before Him. But is that really the relationship that we want?

Maybe, if you can relate, that's not what your relationship with God looks like. Maybe it looks more like a text message relationship between you and God. And I know at times I want my relationship with God to be more of like a text message relationship because, if I'm being honest, I would much rather have a text message relationship with most people.

I was there when the great shift happened, when we went from having to call people and talk to them and not even on personal cell phones but on home phones and places of business. You had to call the person.

Text messaging was the first time when you didn't have to be present with the person to have a conversation. But in these olden times... I still have the numbers locked into my head because you had to call everyone: 271-4841. This was the number to my house. Because when I would get kicked out in the morning, go out, I could go but I had to call and check in every few hours to let them know that I was still alive. I had to have that number. I could have been calling from a pay phone in Mississippi. Right? And I'm not even going to go into what a pay phone is. It is not important.

Then 632-7415, extension 118. This was my mother's work number. Every day when I got off of the bus I had to call her. And I was so thankful that they finally got rid of the receptionist (sorry if you were that person) because you would have to make small talk with this person. You're calling and you're just trying to tell your mom that you are alive and you are like, "I don't want to do this. I don't know what to say."

But the worst was when you had to call a friend's house. Your friend didn't have a phone. They didn't have their own line. That only happened on TV shows. You had to call the house. And the kid never answered the phone. Usually it was the dad. And he wanted to talk because no one wanted to talk to him, I don't know. But he'd answer the phone and you'd be like, "Hey, is John there?"

"Yeah, may I ask who's calling?"

"Ryan."



"Ryan, buddy, how have you been?"

"Good."

"What are your plans for the summer?"

"I don't know, man. I'm trying to make some plans right now if you'd give the phone to John we could get to this conversation."

But this is that idea that as that has gone away we've really kind of stepped into this—we love the text message relationship. Like I said, it's the first time that we don't have to be fully present with the person to have a conversation. I can just send you my thoughts, my ideas, my questions, my problems and now it's on you and I move on with my day. That's not the relationship that God wants to have with me and you. You see, we get this idea that when it comes to the Christian view of prayer:

During prayer, I'm fully present with God, and He is fully present with me.

I want you to think about that. God has said, because of the work of Jesus, that we have direct access to Him. Anytime of day we can step into that place and He is fully present with us.

Here's the thing. We believe God to be fully present. He's omnipresent. He's in all places at all times. But it's on me and you to be able to want to be in that place, to want to be fully present with Him. Because even though He's accessible, it doesn't mean that we are taking advantage of it. And even though He's omnipresent with us, it can feel like we are not with Him.

Have you ever been in a room with a bunch of people but still felt alone? It's more than proximity. Or, have you ever been—I don't know—in a little tiff with a spouse and even though you're in the same place, you guys are not really talking. A little bit of silent treatment is going on. And even though you're sharing the same space, there is a barrier that is keeping you two from being fully present with one another.

What I want to ask you today is:

What does your prayer life look like?

When it comes to you and God, how would you describe it? Is it more of that text message relationship? I mean, think about a lot of our prayers. We pray as we get ready for the day. We pray before a meal. We pray at the end of our day. Does it really just feel like we're throwing things up there to God and trusting that He's getting them, maybe. Or, when we think of prayer is it that time when we are blocking out everything else and we are coming into His space and we're saying, "God, I want to be fully present with You."

How can I know? Well, a few things. One, I'm not just talking, I'm listening. And then two, it's not just circumstantial. I don't just go to God when times are hard. Or, I don't just go



to God when I've lost everything and then I step in and have that conversation. Do I desire this space where I am constantly in His presence? Because we want it. We desire it.

Even for those of us that it is unknown to. Even for those of us who don't believe in God or don't pray regularly, think about this. Don't you find yourself crying out to God, even a God you don't believe in, even a God you don't talk to most of the time? What is that? Well, it's when our humanity gets exposed and we come to the end of ourselves that the deepest parts of us reach out to a God beyond what we can see, feel, or know here on earth.

Our humanity—I just want you to wrestle with that. What is that? Because we would say it's because you were made in the image of God. And even though we try to cover it up with money, success, or we can cover it up even when our health is doing really well, there is going to come a time where you are going to cry out to God. I just want to encourage you with this. Don't wait.

And for all of us, I just want to spend the rest of the time looking at the things that are keeping us from the presence of God? And John mentions two more in this Scripture. He talks about them specifically. Let's just unpack each one. So the first one being:

Unknown

The second one that we see that John mentions here in these verses are our:

Actions

Our actions. So when it comes to coming into the presence of God there is this mystery about it. Maybe we're not going into it because there is this connection between our actions, how we live, and how willing we are to go into the presence of God. Take a look at what he says here in chapter 3. He says:

"Our actions will show that we belong to the truth, so we will be confident when we stand before God." 1 John 3:19 (NLT)

Alright? So here's the idea. It's not that our salvation is dependent upon our actions. This is more the confidence of why and how we are going to come to God. And how confident we are to come into His presence is how we're living. Because if we aren't living rightly, if we aren't following Jesus, if we're not mirroring His life, we're not going to want to go into that presence. Because all God's is going to talk about is that. All God wants to do are the things that God wants to do and if I don't want that then I'm not going to go in there.

For example, if I don't want to work out I don't want to hang out with Pastor Aaron. Right? It's going to come up. Even if he tries to slide it in a different way, it's going to



happen. It's never, "Hey, bro. You want to go sit down somewhere?" It's like, "Hey, you want to go strap a bunch of weight on us and go for a really long walk?" "No. I don't."

And they tricked me the last time, Pastor Aaron and Pastor Kyle, at the end of the year. They did this Christmas workout (it was a horrible gift) where they made up this workout. One, I don't think they are qualified to be making up workouts. You know what I mean? So I was a little skeptical. But we go through this and they are walking me through, "We're going to do this, and this, and this, and this." I was like, "Okay, I'm not doing that."

And then I was standing next to this guy, and one of the things was: climb this rope from the floor to, I don't know, 100 feet in the air. And he said, "Do you think you can do that?" I say, "I don't know but we won't find out today. Today won't be the day." Here's the idea. Our actions—it's not only that our actions keep us from loving other people really well, our actions actually keep us from experiencing more and more of God's love when we're not living rightly. We don't want to be around a God who is completely right and holy and other.

And the way that he talks about it here is that as we begin to follow Jesus our actions should actually change. It's not overnight. And maybe you thought that and you're a little bummed out that it wasn't an overnight type of a thing. But look at the way that John talks about it in verse 9. He says:

"No one born of God makes a practice of sinning," he's not saying that anyone who follows Jesus doesn't sin, he doesn't make a practice out of it, he doesn't justify it, doesn't explain it away, *"for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God."* 1 John 3:9 (ESV)

So, I love the picture that he uses here of a seed. And if you were here a few weeks ago we kind of used this illustration. But here's what happens. What John is talking about here is this idea of justification and sanctification.

So justification is that moment you place in Jesus, you repent from all things, and you begin to follow Him. And it's at that moment God plants His seed in you. The old you is dead. The new you begins to come alive. And His Spirit comes in a seed. You're justified.

But then the rest of your life from now, keep going, is called sanctification. And this is the process of that seed growing. And what he is saying is that as that seed grows, it bears more fruit. And as that seed grows, it takes up more and more space in our lives where it makes it harder to sin. We don't desire to sin as much as we once did because

we are enjoying the life that God has for us and our actions are mimicking Him. And we're following Him.

And as time goes we grow, not overnight but as a seed grows and begins to blossom and takes up more, and more, and more, and more space to bear more of His fruit from His seed. And when does that seed stop growing? Not on this side of eternity.

And John says, "Hey, be mindful of your actions because they could be the things that are keeping you from going into the presence of God." And then, in true John fashion, he's going to create two extremes. He's going to look at two different people and look at their lives and their actions. He's going to present a guy named Cain and he's going to present Jesus. So take a look at what he says. He says:

"This is the message you have heard from the beginning: We should love one another. We must not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and killed his brother. And why did he kill him? Because Cain had been doing what was evil, and his brother had been doing what was righteous." 1 John 3:11-12 (NLT)

So the first example that John gives to us is that he says, "Don't be like Cain. And Cain, who was the son of Adam and Eve, had a brother named Abel. And Cain and Abel grow up and they are going before God to present Him with a sacrifice. Abel, his sacrifice was accepted and Cain's was rejected.

And Cain gets so angry, so frustrated, that in a fit of anger he actually kills his brother. He just kills his brother. And did you notice why he killed his brother? What is says? He said he killed him because he was doing what was right.

I think somebody here needs to hear this. If you are living a godly life, you are trying your best to follow Jesus, and it feels like you're creating tension in your relationships, it feels like you're losing a little bit, it seems like you're not as accepted as you once were—I just want you to know why that is.

It's because it is really happening. There are some people that the closer you get to Jesus the more uncomfortable they will be with you. And that is not a sign for you to stop in a sense. That is why Jesus gave us this. The world hated Me. The world that hated Me is going to hate you too. So I just want to give you the courage from this day to say keep going. Keep trusting in Him.

So God comes to him after Cain has killed his brother and look at Cain's reaction when he's confronted:

"Then the Lord said to Cain, 'Where is your brother Abel?' 'I don't know,' he replied. 'Am I my brother's keeper?'" Genesis 4:9 (NIV)

Do you hear what he is saying? My brother is not my responsibility. Why would I have anything to do with him? How would I know?

And you see at the root of this is this selfishness. When our actions are bound up in what we want all of the time, they are going to keep us away from doing what God has called us to do.

And now he's going to flip it. He's like, "Don't be like Cain. Instead be like Jesus. Look at what he says about Jesus, what he decides to say:

"We know what real love is because Jesus gave up..." this is the action, *"Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion — how can God's love be in that person?"* 1 John 3:16-17 (NLT)

Did you see the difference? He says that Cain actually took the life of his brother. Whereas Jesus laid down His life for His brothers and sisters. Where Cain is the son of the devil, Jesus is the Son of God. And he says, "These are the options. These are the choices. This is the fork in the road."

And if you notice, there is a big... What separated them? It was a concern for others. He pointed out that there was compassion, someone who would give up their life for others.

Then he makes this real practical example. If you have enough and you see your brother or sister who doesn't and you don't do anything about it, how is the love of God in you? It's a mark. Our actions are really centered around the life that God has for us. It's that we will be some of the most unselfish people in the world.

I love the way Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said it once when he was giving a speech. He said:

"Be concerned about your brother. You may not be on strike. But either we go up together, or we go down together. Let us develop a kind of dangerous unselfishness."

"Let us develop a dangerous unselfishness." And I just want you to know, how do you get that? It's in the presence of God because you know who is dangerously unselfish? God. And when you go into that space and you sit with Him and you see how dangerously unselfish He has been and continues to be with you and wants to be with you, and when you feel and experience the compassion God has for you, you are overwhelmed to go out and to love your brothers and sisters.

So often I feel like we get tied up in this idea of what it means to live for others, this heroic one act that someone, somewhere, is going to call you in to take a bullet for your best friend. Chances are it's not coming. How we lay down our lives is much smaller, but in a lot of ways much harder. It's little by little. It's when I step out and I live out this love for others. When I see my brother or sister in a need and I look to meet that need.

Prayer helps that. Prayer is like a greenhouse where those things can begin to come together. Prayer might be the most unselfish thing that we do when we do it correctly. Because what we're doing is coming into the presence of God and for sure we make our petitions, we make our requests known. We ask things, we plead for things. But at the end of it it is always, "But not my will but Yours be done. God, I'm giving you my desires, my wishes, but at the end of the day, what You want, I want that. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." And that makes it so much easier to live it out.

So those are two big ones. It's the unknown, the mystery, the actions—my life's not lining up with the life God has called me to, and the guilt that can come from that. And that leads us to the last one. If one of these two don't get you, chances are this one is coming for you.

Feelings

Feelings, oh feelings are a big one. Feelings are a big one. But look at the way that John addresses our feelings. He says:

"Even if we feel guilty, God is greater than our feelings, and He knows everything."

And the feeling that he is talking about here is guilt. He says, "If we feel guilt, we're not going to want to go into the presence of God. But he says, "If we can come to this place where we distinguish between even though I'm feeling something, it doesn't mean that that is true or it doesn't mean that there isn't a greater truth out there. Even though I feel it, it doesn't mean that it has to be true.

And here's the line that I want everyone to be able to go away with today and to remember:

God is greater than my feelings.

I want you to say that with me. God is greater than my feelings. At every campus, because I know how you are. You won't do it the first time. With us again: God is greater than my feelings.

Do you see how counter that is to the culture that we live in? "God is greater than my feelings." The culture we live in right now, at least what I hear, is this: feelings are ultimate. That if I feel like it is good, then it is good. If I feel like it is true, then it's true. And the further we dive into that ideology, the farther we push ourselves away from God and being in His presence. When we are exchanging fleeting feelings for the faithfulness of God we lose over and over and over again.

I just want to ask you this. Because I know feelings are real and I know that they are strong:

Has a feeling ever failed you?

All of the time! You've had a feeling financially, you've had a feeling in a relationship, you've had a feeling to do something sexual, you've had feelings that felt really real and good and true in the moment and then as time passed you said, "What have I done?" At the same time:

Have you ever done something that didn't feel good but ended up being good for you?
I just want to put a pebble in your shoe.

My feelings can tell me something, but only God knows everything.

Feelings can tell us something. Feelings can tell me something, but only God knows everything. The answer is not to pretend like my feelings don't exist, it's not to pretend like my feelings aren't real, because I can't give something to God that I don't acknowledge. I can't surrender something to God by not saying that it is real. Feelings are real and they tell me something. But I need to go to God to tell me what is the most real. Even in this situation, what's really true.

I just want to give us a prayer. A prayer that we can do every single day this week, a prayer where we go into the presence of God and before we ask for anything it is a prayer for our feelings. This is in Psalm 139. He says:

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life." Psalm 139:23-24 (NLT)

And I just want to pull out three things as you work this into your prayer time this week. The first one is: search me. Here's what you're giving God permission to do. I'm going to be fully present with you and I'm giving you all of myself, not just the parts that I want to give you, not just the parts that I'm willing to let go like I'm still holding on to all of this other stuff over here. To have someone search you, you have to be fully present for that to happen.

I just recently traveled overseas for the first time and I was searched for the first time. And they found things that I didn't even know were there. Okay?
Here's the idea, I'm going to go before a holy God and I am flawed and broken and messed up, but I'm going to go in faith and say, "God, search me. It's all yours. Look. Flip over every rock. And point out anything that offends you."
Here's this idea. I could be doing something that is offending God but it doesn't feel wrong. It doesn't feel like I am. So, I'm still doing it. But in these times of prayer, when I come into His presence, He reveals to me, "I know you think this is okay, but I actually have something better for you and I'm going to ask you to stop doing that and start doing this."

And you're giving Him... "Hey, God. You are greater than my feelings so if it doesn't even show up on this side, God, I trust You to point it out to me and then lead me. Don't just leave me in this moment of conviction, but, God, lead me so that I can cling to You and I will walk with You to the way of everlasting life. I'll walk with You into Your presence." If we don't feel guilty we'll be able to step into all of these places.

But do you feel guilty? Do you feel like there is no way that you could go before God? I just want to encourage you what's on the other side. If we can get past that place, if we can work through the unknown, the actions, and our feelings, look at what John says is on the other side. He says:

"Dear friends, if we don't feel guilty, we can come to God with bold confidence. And we will receive from him whatever we ask because we obey him and do the things that please him." 1 John 3:21-22 (NLT)

On the other side of this, this is what the Bible would call the abundant life. What's on the other side of this is true and real connection. The relationship that Jesus died for me and you to have. But the problem that so many of us struggle with is how do we get to the other side?

So many people have tried so many different things, "I just want to be in the presence of God. I feel it, and I desire it. But I just don't know how to get past these things." So we spend our lives—it's just unknown, "Maybe if I could just know a little bit more then I would want to go back there."

Or, actions, "I'm just not doing enough. If I could do more then I could get back and I could be in the presence of God and that ache would finally be settled."

Or, "If I could just feel good enough. If I could just feel worthy, then I could go back there."

But I am telling you, from this side there is nothing that we can do that is going to get us to the other side of this. It is only when we acknowledge what has already been done for us. The only way to get through this barrier into the presence of God and to have a real relationship with Him is to trust the gospel.

And the gospel is this. God saw us and we were far from Him. But God had compassion on us and He chose to wrap Himself in skin and bones and live the perfect life that we couldn't live. And as He came the unknown became known and we saw who God is, we saw exactly what He is like, and we got to hear His mission and His desire for our lives. And as Jesus lived this perfect life for me and you, He still did not receive a reward from us. What He got was a crucifixion. He went to the cross and He lived and died for us so now it is no longer based on our actions but His perfect action, no longer my actions, but His perfect sacrifice for me.



It is no longer what it's going to get me when my feelings feel and tell me that I can't go be with God. It is moving past feelings to truth. And even when my feelings betray me, and even when my guilt and shame try to overtake me, God's convictions and assurances reign over that. God says, "You are not what you have done but you are who I say you are. And who the Son sets free is free indeed, "You are a son or you are a daughter and you are everything that I came to give."

God wants you. God desires a relationship with you. And you don't have to wait for it. You just have to believe. You have to have faith in all of that was done for you. And now you get to enter into that space and be with God.

I want you to think back to Jesus' last moments on the cross. He was dying for me and you. Look at His words. It says:

"Then Jesus shouted out again, and he released his spirit. At that moment the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom." Matthew 27:50-51a (NLT)

I want you to think about this. The curtain was torn from the top to the bottom. Why is that significant? One, it signifies that God did this, we didn't. And what curtain did He tear? Well, He tore the curtain that was in the Temple. He tore the curtain that was in the Temple that separated us from the most Holy of Holies, the place where God's presence was.

So in that act on the cross, here's what Jesus had made very, very clear. No matter what the barrier was or might be or could be for you, because of the finished work of Jesus on the cross the curtain has been torn straight down the middle. Now everything that was separating us from God is no longer. And we can step into the presence of God and to be fully with Him, not settling for a text message relationship but to be with Him. And what I want to challenge you with this week is to live in this space. Because this could be the most real place that you experience all week. Where God is greater than your feelings, and God is greater than your actions. Can you do that?

FIND TIME THIS WEEK TO BE FULLY PRESENT IN HIS PRESENCE.

That's what I want to do. That's where I want to be. And I know that's where life change is. And I know where that dangerous unselfishness is. I know where that compassion is. I know where that love and strength to move forward is—it's in His presence. It's being with Him. It's believing and trusting that there is a God of the universe and He wants to be in your presence.

So what I want to do right now is just create a time just for that. For you to be in His presence. You don't have to move. You don't have to go anywhere. What I want to ask



you to do is just open your hands, you can kneel. At any campus take whatever position is comfortable for you. We're just going to create two minutes for you to be in His presence. And use what we just learned in that Psalm: God search me. Point out anything that offends you. And lead me.

For those who are hearing this for the first time, I hope you saw in that visual that the barrier has been removed. If you place your faith in Jesus today, that space is for you. That sacred space where humanity and divine come together and heaven and earth touch. That's assessable for you because of the finished work of Jesus on the cross. Spend this time placing your faith in Him.

Let's just take the next few minutes to allow God's Spirit to lead you and to guide you. Be fully present with God.

At all of our campuses, if I can have you stand up in this moment. I hope you enjoyed that time. I pray that God revealed something to you as you offered yourself. What we want to do right now is just go into a time of prayer and a time of worship. And if you would, at all of our campuses, go ahead bow your head, close your eyes as we pray.

Father, we come before You today and, God, I just pray that we could see You for who You are. The veil has been torn. The mystery is gone. You want us, You want us in Your presence. So, God, search us. God, remove any sinfulness, remove any selfishness, remove anything that is keeping us from You: our feelings, our actions. God, give us confidence to stand before You.

And, God, we trust—we trust that where You lead us is what's best. We trust that You are good, even when our feelings disagree because, God, You are greater than our feelings. And, God, as we stand here in Your presence, God, we ask for You to take us deeper. God, we ask You to take us farther. God, we ask for more and more time with You. God, we ask that we could look more and more like You. God, it is by faith that we will follow.

Jesus, we love You. And it's in Your perfect and holy name we pray. Amen.

