



1 John 3:19-24  
 Encouragement: 1 John  
 “Confidence, Pt. 2”

Rev. Brian North  
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This morning we continue in our series going through the NT letter of 1 John. And today we are wrapping up chapter three. This is a little bit of a confusing section, a couple verses in particular, so hopefully today’s message brings some clarity and encourages us to live out the message here. So, with that very non-specific introduction...let’s dive in to today’s passage. We are in **1 John 3:19-24**, and we’ll read the whole thing right up front here this morning. This is God’s Word to you and me today...

So, I’ve titled today’s message “Confidence, Pt. 2” because it builds off of a message titled “Confidence” that Pastor Rob gave a few weeks ago, that looked at the last verses in chapter 2. There are thematic things in those verses that John returns to in the passage we just read. Of course, this also flows out of what just came before it. And you may recall that last week’s passage ended with verse 18, which reads, **“Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth” (1 John 3:18)**. We spent some time last week talking about loving with actions...but not so much on “truth.” In today’s passage, as you heard, John continues this “truth” theme when he talks about how we “know that we belong to the truth.”

Throughout the Bible, “truth” is a big theme - from the Old Testament to the New. Jesus certainly makes a big deal of truth, even saying that he *is* the truth. Later in a conversation with Pilate just before his death, Jesus says, “Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” The other side of the coin is: if you’re not listening to Jesus then you’re living a life that lacks truth. In response to Jesus’ statement Pilate asks the question that’s been haunting the halls of philosophy for centuries, “What is truth?” Some people argue today that there really is no such thing as truth...others argue that all truths are true, including, I suppose, if someone said that nothing is true. Can it be true that all things are true, including the statement that nothing is true? It’s such a conundrum, right? Are you confused? **Jesus cuts through the confusion and says, “I am the truth.” To belong to the truth is to belong to Jesus.**

So, John says that we know we belong to the truth, to Jesus, and set our hearts at rest in his presence: (Verse 20, now) If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. The word he uses here for “condemn” is interesting. It’s made up of two words – “kata” and “gnosis.” Kata is “against” and “gnosis,” is “knowledge,” and here it’s “against self-knowledge.” In other words, we search ourselves and assess our lives and our hearts are grieved by it. That’s the kind of condemnation he writes of.

However, he writes that God is bigger our “knowledge against ourselves.” **God is bigger than any kind of self-condemnation we may have for falling short of loving with action, of loving like Jesus.** It really flows out of last week’s verses that exhort us to love others with action. If we examine our lives after that exhortation, and realize we’re falling short, that we aren’t loving others as Jesus models and commands us to: Don’t condemn yourself about it. God already knows, and he’s bigger than whatever failures we may have, and so our hearts can be at rest that God still accepts us and is working in us.

So, if our hearts do not condemn us then, what follows the rest of these verses is the result of that, and there are several things that kind of link together: **We have confidence in God, we will receive from him what we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. And the command is to believe in Jesus and love one another.**

Let’s work our way backwards through these things, starting at the end. We talked about loving one another quite a bit last week, because that was an important theme to the previous verses. **The other command is to “believe in the name of his son, Jesus Christ.”** The word for “believe” is *pisteuo*, and it means “to be persuaded” or “convinced.” It’s an intellectual persuasion/convincing. So, the mind is completely engaged; this is not blind faith with our brains turned off, which unfortunately is how some Christians act. The apostle Paul communicates the same thing in Romans when he writes about being renewed by the transformation of our *mind*. The Christian faith is an intellectual one, and rigorously so. Of course, if some Christians seem to have the brain disengaged, for others, their faith never leaves the

brain: it's just an intellectual exercise and accumulation of Biblical and related historical/language knowledge. That's no good, either, and it's what John is seeking to counteract when he writes about loving with action (v. 18). Our faith starts in the mind; but then it gets to the heart and the hands and becomes a whole life experience (live, work, play). It impacts all of who we are, wherever we are.

Now, besides John telling us this, Jesus himself says that believing in him matters because he is God come to us in the flesh...that his life and his teaching is a sure and certain foundation – both in this life and the life to come. Jesus is unique in all of history in this regard. No founder of a major religion made the claim to divinity that Jesus did, and throughout history people who *did* make that claim were labeled as lunatics and their movement died out. Jesus is the only one who made the kinds of claims he made and said the kinds of things he said and people actually kept believing him and convincing (“pisteuo-ing”) others to do the same after his death.

So: John reinforces the message that Jesus teaches, that believing in him matters. We might ask, “Well, what difference does believing in him make?” **“Why believe?” John gives us two things right here. First, whatever we ask for from God the Father, he will grant.** Verses 22 and 23 tell us that God grants those things to those who ask, because they keep his commands, the first of which is to believe in Jesus.

We might have several questions about this “grant whatever you ask” bit. First, John already told us that God knows everything – not that we needed John to write it here, because that's clear throughout Scripture – but he wrote it anyway, and so if God knows everything – past, present, and future – why pray? What's the point? We might wonder that. A second question, or more of an observation, is that it seems like there are a lot of unanswered prayers, which contrasts what's said here.

And as many of you know, what John writes here flows right out of Jesus' own teaching. In the Gospel According to John, Jesus says, “Ask for anything in my name and I'll do it” (John 14:14) and in John 16:23 Jesus says that whatever you ask the Father for in Jesus' name, he will grant. So,

what John writes is deeply rooted in Jesus' teaching, and we have to ask: is it true, or is it off the rails on the crazy train? I mean, there are a lot of things I've asked God for, or my loved ones have asked God for, and God did not grant them. Back in the mid-1990's, Gwen was praying for God to bring her someone tall, dark, and handsome. Strike 1, 2, 3...you're out. For myself, I still can't dunk a basketball on a regulation height hoop, don't own a waterski boat, have never snow-skied in Colorado, and my hairline has not reversed course.

More seriously: War still exists between nations, gun violence in America rages on, political rancor here in America is bordering on the absurd, homelessness persists, drug use is nearly an epidemic problem, mental health issues are trending in the wrong direction, and cancer still kills. We could go on and on. For many of these issues, the problem is us. Let's not blame God for the problems we create in our lives.

My favorite band, Theocracy, puts it well in a song they released a dozen years ago (just released their first album in 6 years, so they're on my mind):  
**Why do we only call Your name when there's no one else to call?**  
**And we only really seek You when our mighty towers fall**  
**Why do we say You've failed us and You've turned Your eyes away**  
**When we're only sleeping in the bed we made? (Theocracy, *As the World Bleeds*)** There are real consequences for turning our backs on God and doing things our own way, and we shouldn't be surprised when our prayers for those things aren't answered as we'd like – both collective things as a society, and the messes we've made in our own private lives.

But there are other situations that are “more in God's hands,” we might say. Why are our prayers for them not always answered? Prayer is certainly one of the mysteries of our faith. **Sometimes God answers prayer favorably, but the timing is different than we expected, or the answer isn't what we were expecting but it's still a positive answer. Other times God answers and the answer is “no.”** That's when our prayers are not in his will. We might find that off-putting, but it's no different in the rest of life. For instance, a couple weeks ago, JD, our 5-year old, found an older, currently unused, Android phone sitting on a shelf in our house. He got one of the

other kids to charge it for him, and he asked us if he could have it. I remind you, he's 5. The answer to that request was easy: No. It's not in my will to grant that. A request for a car for a 16<sup>th</sup> birthday? No. A request for a vacation to Hawaii? Absolutely...you wanna pay for it? (Remember, sometimes we *are* God's answer to our prayers!) A request for dinner? Consider it done – when do you want to eat? Some things are in the will of us parents, and some are not.

It's much the same with God: Prayers that line up with his will are the ones he says “yes” to, and even then sometimes the answer isn't what we expected or the timing is different than we'd prefer. **You see, prayer is not about getting God to do what we want, as though *our* will and desire is paramount, but it's much more about getting us in tune with what he's already doing.** It's about bringing our hearts, minds, and wills in line with His will. As Jesus teaches us to pray (and we prayed a few minutes ago) – “Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” That kind of prayer changes us and puts the focus and the glory on God, because it's *his* will being done. So, God grants what we ask for as John writes, but there's a bigger Biblical picture to keep in mind.

**The second thing John says is a benefit to having our trust in Jesus is: confidence before God (verse 21).** Now, he might be intending that to mean confidence before God in our praying – they follow one right after the other here. And that certainly is true. But trusting Jesus also gives us confidence before God when we breathe our last and we find ourselves facing the Creator of everything seen and unseen and who holds creation in the palms of his hands...though certainly God doesn't look like us and probably doesn't actually have hands. Most people today, if they believe God is real or likely is real, but haven't committed to Jesus, they believe that their good works, their good “vibes”, the nice things they've done, will be enough. I wonder, however, what is good enough? Where is that bar set, and how confident are we that we've cleared that bar? How can we know that we're good enough to be in the presence of a holy God? I have zero confidence whatsoever that I am good enough to stand in the presence of God. Jesus gives us that confidence.

And so: **This is the good news of Jesus: He lived the perfect life, died on the cross as the once for all sacrifice for our sins and fulfilling the Old Testament sacrificial system, and by his shed blood we are, in God's eyes, washed white as snow.** When God looks at you he sees Jesus, if you've put your trust in him. And *that's* where our confidence lies. It's not in ourselves, it's in Jesus, who overcame the grave, was raised to new life, validating all his claims. The resurrection is why Jesus' band of followers didn't fade into oblivion like other people who made the kinds of claims that he made. This is why we trust Jesus. So, trusting in Jesus gives us confidence before God our father, and he listens to and answers our prayers when we are in Christ. It all flows out of trusting in Jesus the Messiah.

I want to wrap this up with something that I think ties all of this together for us; it hits on every sub point we've covered this morning under this theme of having confidence because of our trust in Jesus. What I want to share comes from a pastor friend of mine in Pennsylvania. Her name is Linda. She retired from pastoral ministry a little over a year ago. About 6 months after retirement, this past February, she was diagnosed with cancer. Here's what she wrote about it on her Caring Bridge webpage in early March as she shared this news, "I have just been diagnosed with a rare cancer - Primary Peritoneal Cancer - stage 3. This cancer forms in the membrane lining of the abdominal cavity, called the peritoneum. While this comes as a complete shock to Don and me, we know that it doesn't surprise God and we are trusting God with each step and each second. While this cancer has a poor prognosis, we know that God is the Great Healer. We are asking for prayer for miraculous healing here, but we know that sometimes God's sovereign healing takes place for eternity." Right here she articulates nearly everything that's in this passage: God knows everything already, we can turn to him in prayer and he will give what is asked for even if the answer looks different than we might envision, and we can approach him confidently in this prayer, and also in regards to eternity.

Nearly 8 months later after multiple rounds of chemo, multiple surgeries, and so forth, here's the communication the family shared this past Thursday. The title of the post is, "She's Cancer FREE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!" Then they write, "While we are celebrating with the utmost thanksgiving to God for His

wonder working, miraculous healing, we recognize that there are many in our lives who have not had God's healing hand of cancer upon themselves or their loved one. With you, we mourn and grieve as Romans 12:15 calls us to, "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn." We know that our news may feel angering, frustrating, and simply not fair to some, and we do not want to make light of what you may be walking through.

“We grieve with you and long for the day Jesus returns. Isaiah 55:8-9 says, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the Lord. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.’” I will never be able to make sense of God's plans this side of Heaven, but I find peace in knowing that His plans far exceed mine. All the time - in the good and in the bad.” They went on with more, including acknowledging that it is almost a certainty, medically speaking, that the cancer will return at some point. And yet they still praise God for his faithfulness, confident in his goodness, his love, his grace, his sovereignty over all things – all of that, both in this life and in the life to come.

So, whether this idea of following Jesus is new to you or you've been following him for decades, I just want this passage to encourage each of us to trust Jesus...to believe him...to be persuaded by him because he is true, and then to keep trusting him – keep being persuaded and convinced...and to be confident, not in ourselves, but in Jesus. It doesn't mean life will be roses without thorns, but it does mean that you'll have a firm foundation on which to stand and confidently weather the storms as we continue to bend our will to the will of God and give him all the praise and glory. Let's pray...Amen.