

Dr. Robert Yarbrough, Johannine Epistles, Session 2A, Theological Themes in 1, 2, and 3 John Audio Overview Podcast from NotebookLM

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Welcome to the Deep Dive. We're taking your sources and really digging into the most compelling insights to help you get well-informed fast. That's right.

Today we're diving into something pretty fascinating from excerpts of Dr. Robert Yarbrough's lecture series on the Johannine Epistles. Yeah, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John. We're exploring the major theological themes in those letters.

Powerful stuff, even though they're short. And the central question here from the source material is quite pointed. What do John's letters have to say to Christians who are literally dying for their faith? And on the other hand, to Christians maybe living with what the source calls a bloodless religion.

Wow, yeah. That's a stark contrast, isn't it? One facing the ultimate cost, the other maybe, well, maybe facing very little cost at all. Exactly.

So our mission today is really to unpack the key insights from these lectures, try to understand John's message for, you know, these two very different situations you might find yourself in. So why John? I mean, why is he the one perhaps uniquely qualified to speak to this tension between, like, costly faith and maybe a faith that's lacking substance? Well, the source makes a really strong case. I mean, sure, like all Scripture, John's letters are inspired, they're profitable, they're meant to uphold people, especially in really dark times, you know, just like the word upheld Jesus himself through his trials.

But John brings this unique authority that's really born from his own experience. And that experience was, well, pretty intense, traumatic, frankly, right? Absolutely. The source mentions his pastoral concern, you know, for people maybe deceiving themselves, walking in darkness, maybe compromising to avoid persecution.

It points to 1 John 1 and that warning about the spirit of Antichrist in 1 John 4.3. Yeah, that spirit that denies the reality of Christ often, you know, by denying the cost of following him. Okay. And what gives John's warnings real weight is that he wasn't just theorizing.

I mean, he lived through immense pressure, violence, loss. He saw things, things you just don't forget. Like, what specifically? The source goes into some detail, doesn't it? It does.

I mean, just think about the cross. Yeah. John was there.

He saw Jesus die. He mentions the spear in the side in his gospel. No 19.

Right. And the source really emphasizes this wasn't like watching a movie. This was uncontrolled, escalating violence: the scourging, the thorns, the mocking pilot, trying and failing to stop it.

Even, you know, the desecration of Jesus's body after death. It's hard to even imagine seeing that kind of physical violence, death right up close. It changes you.

It grounds everything he writes later in this like visceral reality. And he was there at the arrest to write John 18, the ear being cut off. Yes.

But interestingly, in that same chaos, Jesus actually protected him and the others. He says, if you seek me, let these men go. Fulfilling his prayer from John 17.

Exactly. So John knew firsthand both the real danger and Jesus's power to save his followers, even in those high-pressure moments. Okay.

So he witnessed it, but he also experienced suffering himself. Oh, definitely. The source reminds us, you know, acts five talks about his own arrest, being imprisoned, beaten for preaching the gospel.

He faced the real possibility of death for his faith. Yeah. And experienced what must have felt like a miraculous deliverance.

Then there's the personal loss. Just devastating. His own brother, James, martyred, killed by the sword.

Acts 12 tells us. And the source points out that James was the second martyr after Stephen. Peter gets arrested right after James is killed.

John could easily have thought, am I next? Imagine living with that shadow. And then there was another James. Yes.

His co-pastor, James, the half-brother of Jesus. They worked together for, gosh, maybe 15, 20, even 25 years. Pillars of the church in Jerusalem.

Wow. That's a long partnership. A long time.

And this James was known for his piety; camel knees, they called him from praying so much. His death was also brutal. How so? The accounts say he was pressured to deny Jesus on the temple wall, refused, affirmed his faith, and then was reportedly thrown off and beaten to death with a club.

Oh, that's horrific. Losing a ministry partner of decades like that. I mean, that kind of trauma, it leaves a mark.

It's deep. And the source even mentions John's own potential for violence, the wanting to call down fire. Right.

Luke nine. Yeah. Him and his brother, James, the sons of thunder.

Jesus rebukes them, of course. Yeah. But the source suggests, you know, even for given moments like that, they can stick with you.

They reveal, quote, the raw edges of what we are. It links to that idea. Maybe you've heard of it from Bessel van der Kolk's book.

The body keeps the score. Trauma affects us even just being near it. Exactly.

You can't just unsee these things. And finally, the source mentions the sheer scale of the destruction of Jerusalem. Yeah.

Likely in the late 60s A.D., Romans besieging the city, thousands dead, including many Jewish believers in Jesus. The source says starkly that blood ran in the streets. Now, Christians probably survived because they listened to Jesus's warning and fled beforehand.

But still witnessing or even just living through that kind of devastation, the source contrasts it, you know, like a local tornado killing five people versus a city siege killing tens of thousands. It's a different scale of trauma altogether. OK, so pulling all that together, John isn't writing theology in a vacuum.

Not at all. His letters about life, death, love, hate, truth, lies. They're absolutely rooted in these real, raw, traumatic experiences: death, threats, community under immense pressure, profound loss.

And that gives him this incredible credibility, this authority to speak both to the persecuted, those paying the ultimate price, and to the complacent whose faith might seem to cost them nothing at all. Precisely. It grounds the whole message.

And it connects to us too, doesn't it? The source suggests we all deal with trauma in some form: upbringing, loss, just proximity. And Gospel John Preaches speaks into that. Absolutely, it does.

OK, so if that's the sort of ground John's standing on, how does the source help us unpack what he's actually saying? It suggests looking at word frequency. Yeah, it's an empirical approach, basically. Yeah.

Looking at the Greek text, seeing which words John uses over and over again. The idea is that repetition often reveals a writer's main emphasis, their core message. Makes sense.

So the source picked out 12 keywords and started with the top three. Let's dive into those. What do they tell us about John's message for those two groups, the faithful dying and the potentially bloodless? OK, well, the most frequent word, by far, 62 times just in First John, is God, Theos.

OK, God. So for believers facing death, what's the message about God? The source points to verses like First John 2.14. The core message is that the eternal God defeats the evil one. When you're facing overwhelming evil, persecution, or fear.

The anchor is that God wins. Believers overcome through God and his word, which means both Christ himself, the Word, and Scripture, which reveals him. God's ultimate victory gives strength to endure.

That's powerful. OK, what about those maybe coasting the bloodless religion folks? What's the message about God for them? It's a pretty sharp warning, actually. It's basically: don't fool yourself, and don't think you're foreign to God.

First John 2.4 puts it bluntly. Whoever says I know him but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him. Ouch.

Yeah, but contrast that immediately with verse five. Whoever keeps his word in him, truly the love of God is perfected. So it's easy to say I know God.

Sure. But the source stresses that the Christian understanding of Yahweh, Jesus, the Spirit, is very specific. It's not just any generic idea of divinity.

It's distinct from the concept of Allah in Islam. Both might be seen as ultimate authorities, but their revealed character, their commands, their message through Christ- they're fundamentally different. So it's not just acknowledging a God; it's knowing and obeying this specific God revealed in Jesus.

Exactly. It's about relationship and obedience, not just saying the right words. OK, that's a crucial distinction.

What's the second most frequent word? It's the verb loving. Agapa shows up 28 times in First John. Loving.

How does that speak to those suffering for their faith? Well, the source emphasizes love for fellow believers, the Hoya Delphoi, the brothers, which includes men and women in the faith community. This love is presented as a key sign of genuine love for God. And crucially, it provides assurance of eternal life even when facing death.

Assurance. How? Look at First John 3.12. We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers. In places where being a Christian is dangerous, this love isn't just a feeling; it's practical solidarity.

It means putting your own safety, even your life, on the line for others. The source had that powerful story, didn't it? Yeah. The anecdote about the pastor in Sudan.

Security forces came for the speaker, Dr. Yarbrough in this case, and the local pastor deliberately stalled and let himself get arrested so the speaker could get away. Wow. That is love in action.

That's letting out First John 3.13. That's demonstrating you've shown costly love. An incredible example. So what's the message about loving for the lax, the comfortable? It's the flip side of that same verse, First John 3.14. Whoever does not love abides in death.

If your care for fellow believers is lukewarm or maybe just non-existent, John says you lack assurance. You're still abiding in death, spiritually speaking. So it's a challenge.

It's a real check. The source suggests it challenges those whose religion might just be showing up for an hour on Sunday without any real tangible investment of time, energy, money, or concern in the actual spiritual and physical well-being of others in their church family. So John ties our vertical relationship with God directly to our horizontal practical love for other believers, whether that's costly solidarity or just active care.

Exactly. It's like a litmus test for the genuineness of faith. OK, that's clear.

What's the third word? Knowing. Specifically, the Greek word *ginosko*, which often implies experiential, relational knowing and not just intellectual knowledge. It appears 25 times in First John.

Knowing. How does that apply to the faithful facing death? The source connects it to Christ's sacrifice. Knowing that Christ laid down his life for us empowers believers to trust God, even if they are called to lay down their lives.

Christ's selfless love becomes the pattern for our own. Ah, like First John 3.16. Precisely. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

Now, the source clarifies this isn't just about seeking martyrdom. Right. It also includes that servant-hearted care, like Jesus washing the disciples' feet in John 13.

Knowing Christ's love transforms us to love others selflessly, potentially at great cost. OK. And for those whose faith might be a bit shallow, how does knowing challenge them? The warning here is about who you listen to and what message you're actually absorbing.

John warns that some people don't listen to the full, authentic apostolic message. They follow a spirit of error or untruth, precisely because they don't truly know God or aren't from God. That's the First John 4.6. Yes.

We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us. Whoever is not from God does not listen to us.

By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. The source really stresses the need to make sure you're tuned in to the genuine message passed down from Christ through the apostles, not, you know, creating a customized faith that ignores inconvenient parts. And the source drew a parallel with Jude's letter too.

Yeah, Jude verse 3, that warning about godless people who deny Christ by their actions and beliefs, with implications of immorality and connecting to that spirit of error. The source gave some contemporary examples, instances where churches or individuals might deny core historical Christian beliefs, like the reality of miracles or the substitutionary atonement of Christ or biblical teachings on identity, or even adopt stances contrary to long-held Christian ethics on life. These are presented as, well, tragic examples of not truly knowing God because they're not listening to his revealed truth.

So ensuring that what we claim to know aligns with the authentic apostolic witness is vital. Absolutely vital, according to John. Wow.

Okay. Those first three words, God-loving, knowing they really do cut right to the heart of it, don't they? Highlighting that stark contrast between deep, costly faith and, well, just going through the motions. They really do.

And understanding them against the backdrop of John's own traumatic life makes them even more powerful. And these are just the first three the source looked at. There are more.

Oh, yeah. Nine more frequent words that add further layers to his message. Definitely more ground to cover there.

Well, this has been incredibly insightful, thinking about John's letters through his own experiences, his trauma, and then focusing on these key themes. It really brings out that tension he addresses between costly faithfulness and a faith that maybe risks becoming bloodless. It makes his words feel urgent, I think, relevant whether you're facing hardship or living in relative comfort.

It really does. So maybe here's a thought, a provocative one for you, the listener, to take away from this deep dive. Think about the reality of trauma in your own life, whatever shape that takes.

How does the gospel message about who God truly is, about costly love, about authentic knowing, as John lays it out, speak into your reality? And then, looking at John's challenge, ask yourself: does my faith show that tangible, maybe even costly love he describes? Or is there a risk it's slipping into that kind of bloodless form he warns so strongly against? That's a heavy but necessary question for all of us. It is, and clearly there's still so much more packed into these short letters. We'll definitely be revisiting these themes and exploring more from the source material in future deep dives.