



REDEMPTION

CHURCH AT NEW HOPE

To All Who Did Receive Him

John 1:6–13 - Sunday, October 8, 2023

Why do people reject Jesus? If he is the Son of God, the Word made flesh, the Light of the world, the way, the truth, and the life, then why would anyone reject him? The gospel is good news! Why would anyone turn it down?

As you share the gospel with others, perhaps you've thought of such questions. Why won't my sister believe? Why won't my neighbor talk with me about Jesus? Why can't my children understand the gospel instruction I give them? Why did my coworker reject my offer of the gospel? If you've never wrestled over this question, then you've probably been unfaithful in evangelism. Any sharer of the gospel will, at times, stand bewildered that anyone would reject such glorious news.

It is a question I had to answer early on in my preaching ministry. Discouragement can overwhelm a young minister when you seek to share the gospel boldly, clearly, directly, and passionately. And when we observe that sinners don't respond to our preaching, preachers take one of two dangerous routes. They conclude, "Well, there must be something wrong with me. Let me change my approach. I'll try to connect by being less confrontational more humorous, and preach to a person's felt need. I'll try to attract seekers and ever so subtly mention the gospel so as not to offend others. Then people will come, and I'll no longer be rejected!"

But others take an even more dangerous approach. They conclude, "Well, the problem must be the gospel I'm preaching. The message must be changed to better fit the times. This old gospel I've been preaching must be outdated, talking too much of sin and condemnation."

If we don't have a good answer for why people respond to the gospel as they do, then we will be quick to assume the problem is either in the messenger or the message. And if the problem is with the messenger, then the erroneous solution is to adopt unbiblical methods. And if you think the problem is with the message, you will abandon the gospel for a false gospel. Theology matters, and we must be able to give an answer for the mixed reactions to our evangelism lest

we become discouraged or deceived. Why do some reject Jesus and some receive Jesus? Why do some put their finger in their ears when we talk about Jesus, and why do some lean in with eagerness?

In the prologue to John's gospel, John helps us answer the question on the front end. Throughout the gospel, we will see some believe in Jesus while many others reject him. This Word made flesh will receive mixed reactions. Jesus' coming will be polarizing. Here, John gives us good theology so we can be better prepared and encouraged in our evangelism. As we work through John 1:6-13, we will first observe John the Baptist's witness to Jesus. Second, we will see that the world, including Jesus' own people, rejects him. Thirdly, we will see how it is that sinners like us can come to receive Jesus.

1. The Witness to Jesus (vv. 6–8)

In this majestic prologue to John's gospel, the evangelist captures and describes the person of Christ. Just in the first five verses, we've marveled at the Word who was with God and was God, the Word who created all things, the Word who is the life and light of men! But all of a sudden, the gospel halts such glorious meditations and redirects our focus to John the Baptist. At the mention of John the Baptist, we feel like he's an unwanted interloper in this Christological text. Why does the apostle John interrupt his theological prologue about the person of Christ by bringing up John the Baptist? The mention of John the Baptist feels like a theological buzz kill. And so it feels strange that we are first taken into heaven, pondering the glorious relationship of God and his Word, only to shift to an eccentric homeless man who preached in the wilderness. Verse six interrupts—"There was a man sent from God whose name was John." Wait a minute, tell me more about the Word! But our quick dismissal of John the Baptist indicates that we don't realize the importance of his ministry as a witness to the Word coming into the world. We overlook the importance of the man's testimony.

The John mentioned in verse six is the Baptist. In his gospel, the apostle John only refers to himself as the beloved disciple. While the other gospel writers must distinguish between John the Baptist and John the son of Zebedee, the fact that John's gospel doesn't label John as "the Baptist" is further evidence that the author who wrote John's gospel is the disciple John.

But in introducing John the Baptist, in verse six, we are told that he is a man who was "sent from God." His ministry was one sent from God in fulfillment of prophecy in Malachi 3:1: "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me." John, the gospel writer, will further expand on the message and function of the Baptist later in chapter one, but he introduces the Baptist here to clarify three truths.

First, John was sent from God. As loony and quirky as the disheveled, locust-eating prophet seems to appear, he was a divine messenger. The gospel writer isn't interested in giving John's origins as Luke wrote in his gospel account. So, the gospel of John doesn't need to address

those matters. However, the birth of John to barren Elizabeth, recorded in Luke, demonstrates the divine sending of John as the forerunner to the messiah.

Second, John is a witness. Verse seven tells us he came “to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.” Thus, John’s ministry was not in opposition to Jesus, nor was it an alternative to Jesus. John’s ministry was an arrow pointing to Jesus. John the Baptist was the morning star preparing the way for the dawn of the sun. John’s ministry called for people’s repentance and prepared Israel to receive her Messiah. John labored to greet the light of men with a humble and contrite people. And so John preached in the wilderness and baptized the repentant so that when the light came, they might believe Jesus is the Son of God.

Third, John was not the light. John the Baptist had an influential ministry, and there is some indication that people followed John well after his beheading and well after the resurrection of Jesus. Apollos was a Jewish preacher who eloquently expounded the Scriptures in Ephesus. But Priscilla and Aquila had to pull him aside and correct him because he seems only to have known the baptism of John. Also, in Ephesus, Paul encounters men who were followers of John but hadn’t been baptized in the name of Jesus (Acts 19:1-7). So perhaps there were a few followers of John the Baptist hanging around claiming that John was the light, not Jesus. If so, the apostle John gives his strong rejection of that idea. John was not the light. Jesus is the light. But John the Baptist served a vital role as a man sent from God to bear witness about the light.

When it comes to the ministry of Jesus, every gospel writer begins by stressing the significance of John the Baptist as the one who bore witness to Jesus. And while the mention of John the Baptist may seem like a clumsy addition in the prologue about Jesus, the mention of the Baptist highlights that God has given witness to his Son. Just as John the Baptist bore witness to Jesus, so does every Christian bear witness to the light who has come into the world. The disciple mentions the Baptist because in order for people to believe in Jesus, there must be those who testify about Jesus. All evangelism begins with the announcement of a message about Jesus and a testimony of witness to Jesus. If you’ve never heard the gospel, you cannot believe the gospel. “Faith comes by hearing.” And just as God sent John the Baptist to be a witness to his Son, so too should we understand that we’ve been sent by God to bear witness about Jesus.

We will consider why it is people reject or receive Jesus, but John the Baptist’s ministry tells us that such rejection or reception begins with gospel proclamation. If we do not share the gospel, if we don’t testify to the identity and salvation found in Jesus, then people cannot believe in him.

How is your witness to Jesus? Are you drawing attention to yourself, or are you pointing others to the light? Are you decreasing so that Jesus might increase in your life? Do you recognize that as a Christian, you have been sent by Jesus to be his witness “in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8)? The light of the world has so engulfed us with his glory that he now sets us up as a city set upon a hill. You must recognize that you are a witness bearer.

Who around you this week could you bear witness to Jesus? Is there a coworker you need to take out to lunch? A neighbor you need to invite over for dinner? A family member you need to call?

We need to tell those around us about Jesus. We tell them about God's great love for sinners, demonstrated through the sending of his Son to bear our judgment on the cross. And we implore them to repent and believe in Christ. Sharing your testimony with others can be an effective way of bearing witness for Christ. Tell others about your life before Christ, about how you lived in rebellion against him. And share how you heard that precious gospel, were convicted of your sin, and trusted in Christ. Describe how your life changed. Explain how you repented as you submitted yourself to Jesus and his good word!

Church, the coming of the light of life and the salvation so freely given to us by Christ should explode out of our mouths as our hearts swell in gladness and joy and praise to Jesus. How can we not bear witness about the light? See how he has illuminated our darkened hearts!

But as we testify about Jesus, people will have two very different reactions to Jesus. They will either reject him or receive him. And so, as John the Baptist testifies about Jesus, the default response of our own fallen human nature is to reject him. And so it will be evident over the course of Jesus' ministry in John's gospel.

2. The Rejection of Jesus (vv. 9-11)

So John the Baptist is *not* the light but functioned as a witness to the true light. Look at verse 9: "The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world." Jesus is the "true" or "genuine" light. And as the Word, who was with and was God, shines in the darkness, this light, the text says, "gives light to everyone." Now, as we will see, not everyone will believe in Jesus, so what does John mean when he says that the "true light, which gives light to everyone"? John has in mind in v. 9 not the acceptance of the light but the revelation of the light. In other words, Jesus' coming into the world, the incarnate Word made flesh, was a historical, physical, objective, and verifiable act. Jesus' coming was not hidden or secret, nor is it a mystical inward experience in the soul. Shockingly so, as we will see as the prologue develops, the eternal Word becomes flesh.

So we have John, the prophetic witness of the true light. And then we have the objective revelation of the true light coming into the world. And what will be the response to Jesus? How will we human beings respond to the revelation of God's Word? Verse 10 gives us the tragic answer: "He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him." We didn't recognize him. We didn't know him. We weren't concerned about it. We rejected him.

John can't help but point out the thick irony in all this. The one who made the world has come into his world, and "yet the world did not know him." The creation failed to recognize its creator. The apostle Paul talks about how we every person reject the creator, even before Jesus came into the world.

If our sin has so dampened our senses to be unable to perceive the creator from his creation, of

course, we cannot recognize the creator who entered into his creation. Even though creation declares the glory of God (Ps 19:1), our failure to comprehend the plain evidence doesn't bode well for our ability to recognize the "true light" that has come upon the world.

In Core Seminar, we are currently going through a series on Christian Apologetics, an excellent and helpful set of lessons planned by Pastor Justin Eldridge. But if you were here this morning, I spoke extensively about using the Natural Law as a way to help disarm objections to the Christian faith. Such tactics are helpful and can be useful as we share the gospel with our neighbors. But no matter how much evidence we gather, no matter how logical our reasons, the eyes of humanity are blind to the light. We are, by nature, truth suppressors. The true light came into the world, and the world did not know him.

The apostle Paul was a master of apologetics—go read his dialogue in Athens at the Areopagus in Acts 17. But Paul, with all his skill in evangelism, his sharp apologetic mind, and his unashamed boldness, would later write to the Corinthians, "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor 2:14). By default, no one accepts Jesus. We only reject him. And so John lets us know in advance of his gospel the irony and the tragedy of Jesus' coming—"the world did not know him."

Perhaps this would be a good time to discuss briefly the use of the term "world" or "cosmos" in John's gospel. Typically, "the world" in John's gospel is used in a negative sense. It does not merely refer to the earth and its inhabitants in a neutral material description. Rather, the world in John's gospel is, as D. A. Carson put it, "the created order in rebellion against its Maker."¹ And it is this world, including the rebellious human beings like us, who subdue the earth, who failed to recognize the identity of Jesus.

Might anyone on earth recognize Jesus for who he is? Might anyone welcome the "true light" coming into the world? Does all of humanity reject Jesus? John stresses the severity of our rejection of Jesus by emphasizing that even his own people, the Jewish people, failed to receive him. He writes in verse 11, "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him." Israel, God's covenant people, to whom God gave his Word through the Law and the Prophets, failed to recognize their messiah when he arrived. If any people had been trained to identify the light upon his arrival, it was Israel. And yet, they, too, did not know him.

Over the course of John's gospel, he will recount seven signs that testify to Jesus' messianic identity and his identity as the Son of God. And even though Jesus' ministry was accompanied by marvelous wonders, the Jewish people did not receive him. In fact, as the signs grow in intensity and power in John's gospel, the opposition escalates in anger and bloodlust. The growing animosity of the Jewish leaders will culminate in a conspiracy to execute Jesus. They not only rejected Jesus. They wanted to kill Jesus.

The rejection of Jesus isn't a Gentile thing, nor a Jewish thing. It's a human thing. Our natural proclivity, blinded by the corruption of our sin, is to reject Jesus. We are creatures in rebellion against our creator. And even though the true light came into the world, we wanted nothing to do

with him. We did not know him.

John's words here slap us with a reality that he will unpack over the course of the gospel. We like to think of ourselves as pretty smart people. Through logic, reason, intuition, and so forth, we think of ourselves up to the task of recognizing God should he come to us. However, we possess a spiritual blindness, unable to recognize the plain, verifiable fact of Jesus' identity. Our spiritual perception stems from a sobering fact about us. Why did we reject the light? John 3:19-20 answers, "And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed." Why do we fail to recognize Jesus as the Son of God? It's because we love the darkness. We enjoy our sin. We'd rather continue in our works of evil than love Jesus. And we certainly don't want our works of darkness exposed by the true light of Christ.

So even though John the Baptist bears witness to Jesus, and even when the true light comes into the world, we did not "know him," and we "did not receive him." Is that where you are this morning? Are you living in rejection of Christ? You've heard about Jesus. The witness of the gospel has hit your ears, but each time you hear it, you reject the true light for your works of darkness.

Maybe you haven't heard the gospel, and if you haven't, listen up! I'm getting ready to share it with you. The gospel message at the heart of Christianity is really quite simple. We are sinners in rebellion against our creator. The Father has sent his Son into the world to save sinners like us by dealing with the penalty of our sin upon the cross. Jesus' death on the cross atones for our sins and reconciles us to God. On the third day, the blameless Jesus rose from the grave in resurrection. Anyone who turns from their sin and puts their faith in Jesus will be saved. Anyone who believes in Jesus as the "true light," as the Son of God who has come into the world, will be forgiven and cleansed and enjoy the freedom of a life lived unto the Lord. And if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as your savior and Lord, you can have eternal life. Over the course of our study of John, he will implore us time and again to believe in Jesus.

And so, on behalf of God, I implore you—do not reject Jesus but receive him! Bend your knee to him today. Behold the light of the World! But even as I plead with you to respond to Christ this morning, perhaps even now, you shield your heart in rejection of him. And that's not surprising, John recognizes that our sinful nature rejects Jesus. As rebellious creatures, we rebel against the creator's claim upon our lives. We loved the darkness and hate the light. And friend, your hardness of heart isn't just you. This is all of us. Every human being has rejected Jesus. I, at one time, calloused my heart against God just as so many had done in this room, just as you may be doing now. But what changed? If everyone rejects Jesus, how can it be that anyone receives him? If we are all spiritually blind, how can we recognize, let alone believe in, the true light coming into the world? How can any of us be saved?

And yet, John tells us that people *do* receive Jesus. There are those who recognize Jesus as the light. How can this be?

3. The Reception of Jesus (vv. 12-13)

Verses 12 and 13 give us amazing good news. “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

Notice that verse 12 tells us that receiving Jesus means believing in Jesus. The text says we must believe “in his name.” And by this, he doesn’t mean that the name of Jesus is a mystical name to confess, but John refers to believing in the totality of Christ. We cannot take part of Christ but the whole Christ. If you will receive Jesus, it requires your belief in what he has said, in who he is, in what he has done. There is no third, halfway response to Jesus. You can’t sit on the fence when it comes to Jesus.

We live in a world where people want to like Jesus but do not wish to follow Jesus. Most people craft a Jesus of their own imagination, not the Jesus revealed to us in the testimony of God’s Word. And even already, in just these short few verses at the start of the gospel, we have seen that this Jesus is the *eternal* God who alone possesses light and life for the world. This Jesus who demands that we obey him, who calls us to pick up our cross and follow him, this Jesus to whom we must confess as Lord and God. Those who receive Jesus believe in the Jesus revealed to us in the Bible, not the homemade curation of a Jesus of their whims. Receiving Jesus means believing that all that John will teach us in this gospel about Jesus is true. And this is no mere intellectual agreement with the facts of the gospel, but a bending of the knee to him, a glad welcoming of him as our king, or a dynamic personal relationship with him. Believing upon Jesus is to personally entrust your soul to him, to give to Christ the entirety of who you are. It means that you withhold nothing of yourself, and you place all of your life in his hands.

So now that we know what it means to believe upon Jesus, we still have that nagging question—who then can receive him? If we all by nature reject him, how is it that any one of us might have faith in him?

John tells us that all who receive Jesus have had it granted to them by Jesus. The saving faith we profess in Jesus is due to the hidden work of the Spirit of God, who causes sinners to be born of God. The text tells us that Jesus “gave the right to become children of God.” John is introducing a theme he will pick back up in a bigger force in John 3 when Jesus is talking with Nicodemus. We must be born again. The light of the world must overcome our darkened hearts before we believe. In order to see, we must be healed of our spiritual blindness. To be a Christian means that we must be born again.

And if you are a Christian, if you have truly believed upon the whole Christ, then you have been given the right to become a child of God. Faith is the result of God’s work of the new birth. In our confession of faith, the new birth is described in the article “Concerning Regeneration.” Regeneration is the technical term for Jesus’ teaching on the new birth. And in our confession of

faith, we confess together that regeneration “is a work of God’s free and special grace alone and that its proper evidence appears in the holy fruits of repentance and faith, and newness of life.” In other words, the new birth is a work of God’s grace upon the heart, overcoming our hardness of heart so that we respond of our own volition to the gospel with repentance and faith.

And how does one become born of God? John makes it clear that the new birth is God’s doing. It is his “free and special grace alone.” John makes it clear that this new birth is “not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” You can’t be physically born into God’s family. To be a Christian has nothing to do with an ethnic identity. No man can force by will for someone to become a child of God. Human effort cannot achieve grace. It must be freely given by a sovereign and gracious God. And to all who have received the light, who believe in the name of Jesus, “he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

And if I can address the younger generation for a moment, the children in the room. Your parents may be Christian, but you don’t become a Christian by having Christian parents. You must be born again into the kingdom of God. So do not think you are Christian just because your parents are members here. No, you must have personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you must be born again! Put your faith in Christ, and know that we are all praying for you, that you may experience this miracle of the new birth and so may be a child of God.

But you may have been a Christian for quite some time and may have never realized nor understood the miracle God did in your heart to bring you to faith in Christ. But a miracle he did perform! To be saved by Christ, to receive him, and to believe in his name is to have been born of God. Our salvation is God’s doing! And all who are truly born again produce the fruit of repentance and faith!

And so we circle back again to our key question. Why is it that people reject Christ? Why is it that people receive him? Why do people respond so widely to the testimony of Jesus, the proclamation of the gospel? And John helps us answer those questions. We reject Jesus because of our sinful, rebellious hearts, and this rejection is our default as rebellious creatures. But in order to overcome that rejection, God must pour out his grace. He must give us eyes to see. He must cause us to be born again. And as we are born again, we respond with repentance and faith. We believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and cling to him as our cherished God and king. We love him. We obey him. We live for his glory.

And so we keep sharing the gospel. We pronounce God’s judgment—“For all have sinned!” We herald God’s grace—“Christ has saved us from our sin.” We call forth a response—“Believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.” And we trust that in the faithful proclamation of the Gospel, the Lord will work as he sees fit.

Sadly, some will reject Jesus. As our confession of faith states, “Nothing prevents the salvation of the greatest sinner on earth, but his own inherent depravity and voluntary rejection of the gospel.” And even when people reject Jesus, we keep sharing the gospel. We keep imploring them to respond to Christ. We keep praying that the Spirit of God will work in the hearts, causing

them to be born again.

But some will gladly receive Jesus. As we proclaim Christ, the Spirit of God will do a hidden work in their hearts. Their hardness of heart will be softened. Their consciences will be pricked by the conviction of their sin. The Lord will cause them to be born again, and in eager hope, they call upon Jesus to save them. And by faith, they will be saved.

This teaching of the new birth should give us incredible encouragement to evangelize. Do you realize what this means? There is no one too far gone for Jesus to save. There is no sinner too rebellious, too hard-hearted that God cannot save! Even the most stalwart rejectors of Christ can find their heart changed in a moment and find their knee willingly bent before the Lord Jesus. So, do not stop sharing the gospel! Don't be discouraged when people reject the gospel. Let it only embolden you to pray for them and to ask the Lord to grant the miracle of the new birth.

Christian, let me urge you to preach and pray. To your coworkers, persist in telling them about Jesus. To your wayward child, keep sharing the gospel—even if it's the millionth time! And by all means, keep praying! The power of salvation isn't in the evangelist but in the God who saves! May all our knees be stained with dirt for having spent extended times before the Lord pleading for the Lord to save our neighbors and friends. Our failure to pray for our lost friends and family reveals a bad theology—we think they are too far gone to be saved or we doubt God's power to save. Because if we truly believe that only God can make one become a child of God, then you best believe we'd pray without ceasing!

And Christian, may the message of this text fill you with great joy. What a blessing it is to be a child of God! How gracious it is, that God would save us. Think about your own testimony for a moment. How many times did you hear the gospel before you believed? How many times did your parents, did your pastor, did your neighbor tell you about Jesus? But at some point in time, perhaps at a time you can no longer remember, the Lord caused you to be born again. Upon hearing the gospel, he gave you the right to become his child. And as you heard the testimony of Jesus you went from rejecting Jesus to receiving Jesus. You were born again, and you put your faith in Jesus to save you. Praise God for his work of salvation!

And if you are here today, perhaps the Lord is doing such a work in your heart today. Your rejection of Jesus is melting away even now, not because of my eloquence, not because of any logical arguments, but by the Spirit of God. Your heart has been changed by God's power at some point over the course of this sermon. You've been born again! Respond this morning by believing in the name of the Lord Jesus. Find me afterward, and we would love to encourage you and partner with you in your newfound faith!

