

John 1:6-13

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[0:00] Good morning. Please take your copy of God's Word. Join me in John chapter 1. Our text for this morning is John chapter 1.

A little over a year. On the first Lord's Day, I introduced the book and gave a summary of it. We spent the last two Sundays looking at John's prologue where he introduces Jesus to us with three titles and two characteristics.

First, we see that Jesus is the Word, the physical representation of God. We see that he is preexistent, that he is the creator, that he is self-existent, and that he is the unquenchable light. God stands, conquers darkness. John spends the first five verses establishing Jesus' deity. This is the aim of what he is doing in the prologue.

Jesus is God. It is a decorative statement. This is what he is trying to accomplish. C.S. Lewis, speaking in 1942 and then published in *Mere Christianity* in 1952, gave the following argument concerning Christ.

[1:41] And I quote, I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Jesus. I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God.

That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher.

He would either be a lunatic on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg, or else he would be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was and is the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse.

You can't shut him up for a fool. You can spit at him and kill him as a demon, or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher.

He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. Now it seems to me obvious that he was neither a lunatic nor a friend, and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that he was and is God.

[3:02] End quote. John makes some audacious claims in the first five verses, and they are claims that Jesus is going to reinforce again and again and again across the book.

How we respond to these claims makes all the difference in the world. And we're going to see two responses to these claims in our text today.

Before I read it, I want to remind you, beloved, that this is God's word to us. It was written for his glory and our good. That we might believe its promises, obey its commands, and have affection for its author.

May we hear it and respond accordingly to it. John chapter 1, verse 6 and following. There was a man sent from God whose name was John.

He came as a witness to bear witness about the light that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light which gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

[4:12] He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 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.

So we see in our text today three simple points. Number one, a reliable witness. And we're going to see witnesses again and again and again.

Sometimes Jesus himself, sometimes his works, sometimes people saying things about him, and that's the case this morning. We're going to see then rejecters of who Jesus is, and then we're going to see believers.

So first, a reliable witness. And we can see this in verses 6 through 9. And John continues to pick up this language of light. So when we're seeing all of this language about light, we're thinking about Jesus.

Jesus is the light of the world. And there we see a man sent from God whose name was John. A different John than the John that wrote this.

[5:30] That's John the Apostle. Here we're talking about John the Baptist. I think it'd be better to say John the Baptizer, although I don't mind claiming him at all.

So we will call him John the Baptist. And he comes as a witness. Witness to what? To Jesus. To who Jesus is.

That people would believe. John the Baptist's intention, his point of his ministry, was the very same as that of John the Apostle. That people would repent and believe in Christ, have deliverance from their sin, and eternal life in him.

John the Baptist, I'm making the case, was a reliable witness to Jesus as the Christ. Because he was divinely appointed. He was sent by God to be a witness to Jesus as the Christ.

We see that there in verse 6. There was a man sent from God. John the Apostle is telling us that John the Baptist was sent by God himself.

[6:38] We can read a bit of John the Baptist's ministry and then his predicted birth. Matthew chapter 3, verse 1 through 3 says, In those days, John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 40, verse 3. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord.

Make his paths straight. So Matthew tells us that this is the prophet of Isaiah chapter 40 and verse 3. Sent from God.

And in Luke chapter 1, verse 13 and following, we can learn, An angel says to Zachariah, John the Baptist's father, Your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.

And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.

[7:55] And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.

So John the Baptist's entire mission was to prepare the way for the Messiah, for the Christ, and point others to him, not to himself.

John the Apostle, who wrote the text before us, is careful to note in verse 8, he was not the light. John the Baptist, not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

John the Baptist was also clear on this matter. He famously declared in John chapter 3 and verse 30, He, Christ, must increase, but I must decrease.

He sought to magnify Christ with his life. John fearlessly called people to repentance and faith. John the Baptist suffered and died rather than compromising the truth.

[9:11] In every way, John's testimony calls us to look away from ourselves and behold the true light, Jesus Christ. John the Baptist's ministry was about drawing people's gaze to behold Jesus.

And John the Apostle employs him in what fairly could be framed as the introduction to this book to do that very same thing, to draw our attention off ourselves and draw our gaze toward Christ.

So we see a reliable witness, and we'll see that pattern again and again throughout John the Apostle's book. Secondly, though, we see responses to this declaration, Jesus is the Christ.

We see rejecters, verses 10 and 11. There it says, He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.

He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. This is a theme developed through John's writing, the tragic rejection of the divine Jesus as the Christ, specifically the rejection of him by the Jewish people.

[10:30] Praise God, not all Jewish people rejected Christ. You can even back up a little bit to what Luke had to say about John the Baptist and the people being prepared.

But largely, there was a rejection of Jesus as the Christ by the Jewish people. Let me just show you with some selected texts throughout John. There's a pattern that repeats again and again, a theme that's being developed, and I believe it's being developed, that we would not be a people who reject Jesus as the Christ.

So John chapter 5 and verse 18, this is why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

That was a blasphemy in their mind, and it would have been if it wasn't true. The Spirit who gives life, verse 63 and following. There it says, It is the Spirit who gives life.

The flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe, for Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.

[11:50] And he said, This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father. And then verse 66 says, After this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.

So when the teaching got difficult, they bailed. John chapter 7, verse 28 and following. Jesus proclaimed as he taught in the temple, You know me and you know where I come from, but I have not come of my own accord.

He who sent me is true, and him you do not know. I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me. So they were seeking to arrest him.

But no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not had come. He says, You don't know God, but I do, because I came from him. God sent me, and they sought to kill him as a result.

John chapter 10, verse 20. Many of them said, He has a demon and is insane. Why? Listen to him. John chapter 12, verse 37.

[12:58] Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him. And this rejection, we know, ends in Christ's suffering and death on the cross.

Widespread by the Jewish people, and in our day, this rejection of Jesus, of the Christ. Why does this happen? Paul tells us in Romans chapter 1, verse 18 and beyond says, For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world and the things that have been made.

So they are without excuse. Darkness doesn't love light. Light causes darkness to scatter. And so man in his sinful state wants to hide away from Jesus that their sins would not be exposed.

And this category of people, if you want to reduce us most simply, we have those who will reject Jesus as the Christ and those who will receive Jesus as the Christ.

[14:32] which brings us to our third and more expansive point. Third, believers. Believers.

Verses 12 and 13. There John writes, 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.

Now I was careful here to use the word believers rather than receivers, which is in the text. I so wanted to alliterate my point, reliable witness, rejecters, receivers, that work so well together.

But I think clarity is very necessary at this point, and I think that John thought so too. He states in verse 11, his own people did not receive him, or as I've said, rejected him.

And then at the beginning of verse 12, he turns his attention to others, the other group who did not reject, but received him. At this moment, however, he does something peculiar.

[15:55] He qualifies his previous statement. He doesn't just leave off there, but who did receive him, he gave the right to become children of God. He could have done that.

I think he certainly could have, but he qualifies and he adds clarity to what he means. And I think we should especially stop when things like that happen in the scripture.

Why? Why? It feels like a redundancy, doesn't it? What's he doing here? What does it mean to receive Jesus? John's telling us that very thing.

If we are to receive him, then we need to believe in his name. That's what it means to receive Jesus. It is to believe in his name.

The word rendered, believe, is the Greek verb *pistou*, which conveys far more than mere intellectual agreement with a set of facts.

[16:57] It's far more than that. The original readers would have understood the word in that way, but we tend not to. It carries the kind of idea that we're so confident in a thing that it's going to shape how we act in relation to that thing.

It's not just an assent. It's just not intellectual agreement. There's so many people today who will go, I believe in Jesus. Just saying it with your words doesn't necessarily mean you believe the way the Bible uses this word.

This is critical. We need such careful clarity at this point. To believe carries the idea of full trust, personal reliance, and wholehearted commitment.

You may have heard the example before of the parachute. I did this with my boys on our couch where we jumped off the couch like we were jumping out of a plane. Well, catch me if I fall on the ground is an easy thing to do.

It's different altogether when you're the next one out the door. It's that kind of confidence. You put it on and you know it's going to do the thing that it's designed to do.

[18:14] That's how we're to believe in Jesus. To believe is not simply to acknowledge the historical existence of Jesus but to entrust yourself entirely to him.

All that his name represents his person and his work his saving power and implies a surrender of the will a confidence that Jesus alone can save and an active ongoing dependence upon him. That word is packed full of meaning in the original. The text before us doesn't mention it but we also must be sure to understand that true *pistuo* is in step 14 and 15.

Now, after John the Baptist was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God. Listen to the words that Jesus says, proclaiming the gospel of God as Mark records it for us.

This is the good news. The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel.

[19:31] Now, there's much to be said about what the gospel itself is but what are Jesus' instructions in response to the gospel? The way he calls people as he says, repent and believe in the gospel.

Repentance, that word at its very core means to change one's mind. So, contextually we understand that it is a turning away from sin.

It's a rejecting of the way of this world and belief is what we're turning to. So, we're turning away from sin.

Repentance rejects the world. Belief takes hold of, receives Christ. Belief is not passive ascent but active, living faith that transforms the heart and produces obedience.

Biblical belief is the very foundation of saving grace, a total entrusting of oneself to Christ as Lord and Savior. So, why all the time on this matter?

[20:41] Why be so careful at this point? I think that John's being very careful at this point. Because the gospel of Jesus Christ needs to be clear.

If we're going to be sorted into two categories, those who receive Jesus Christ, those who reject Jesus Christ, and this message is the saving message, we have to be so clear.

The gospel is by itself an offense. Just by itself, the gospel is offensive. It first kills so that we can live.

It first shows us how wretched we are so that we turn from that wretchedness, we repent, and we turn to the righteousness of Christ.

When we get it just right, it's offensive. We should not add to that a lack of clarity or a lack of depth. [21:47] We should be so careful here. I worry, and I mean this from the very bottom of my heart, I worry with great anguish, probably more than I should, that much of our modern Christian practice is creating vast swaths of false converts.

And I'm not suggesting that we're immune to this. False converts, people who think that they are in Christ and they are not.

I am grieved to think that this morning there are many well-meaning people giving lip service to God, but their hearts are far from Him.

And that there are churches that don't seem to be pressing against that at all. Just think with me for a moment about some of the language used in calling people to saving faith.

So, if you back your mind up just for a moment, I met you from Mark chapter 1 and verse 15, how is it that Jesus called people repent and believe in the gospel?

[22:55] This is what he said said, but we get phrases like, say yes to Jesus. Salvation is a miraculous, divinely wrought miracle worked in the heart, not a casual agreement.

Ephesians chapter 2 verse 1 and following, Paul there writes, and you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind.

That should hit. If you were not in Christ, that should convict your heart. If you are, you should remember, yes, that's who I once was, dead, a servant of the devil, and destined for wrath.

And then you get this beautiful conjunction in verse 4, but God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

By grace, you have been saved. This is a miraculous, divinely wrought, beautiful thing that happens in all those who believe in Christ.

[24:30] To say yes to Jesus makes it so paltry. Ask Jesus into your heart. That's another phrase.

The Bible nowhere portrays Jesus as some destitute stranger that needs your invitation to do anything He is the Lord of the universe.

Think about how He's been introduced to us in John chapter 1. He's not asking your permission. I don't care how you work out God's sovereignty and all the details of your life.

He doesn't need you to ask Him to do the things He intends to do. John chapter 10, verse 27 and following, My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me.

I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

[25:29] That's a declaration of power to save. You have not once, nor will you ever, we don't have sheep around here, you'll never see a sheep asking a shepherd for anything.

Another one, make a decision for Christ. I won't unpack the problems with this phrase at the moment, but today's text has something to say concerning it, which we will address momentarily. And then my final example, this brings us back to our text, receive Jesus into your heart. Beloved, we need to use biblical language when calling people to respond to the saving message of the gospel.

Yes, people need to respond to a call, but a call to what? Repentance and faith. Repent and believe.

This is the language we use because it's the language that the Bible uses. It's the language that Jesus uses. We ought to call people to repentance and faith with great earnestness and explain

with great care what repentance is and what belief is.

[26:52] We have to be sure the gospel of Jesus Christ is clear and the way people should respond to it is also clear. Now, John says that those who believe in his name, Jesus gave the right to become children of God.

to be a child of God is to be lifted from the ash heap of sin and set among the princes of heaven. He who was once a rebel is now called beloved.

He who was once far off is brought near and has a forever home. The child of God is adopted into the divine family, clothed with Christ's righteousness, loved with an unshakable love and granted an inheritance that neither time nor any power can take away.

To be God's child is to walk under his smile, to rest in his promises, to bear his discipline with hope, and to await his glorious appearing with joy.

To be a child of God is not an abstract principle, but a felt reality. Oh, I hope you feel what it means to be a child of God.

[28:17] How good it is to belong. Oh, how wonderful to have God look at you and declare mine. Those who believe in Jesus' name, he gives the right to become children of God.

God how? How? How does this happen? What is the impulse for it? John doesn't pull any punches here.

He wastes no time dropping his plum into the depths of God's magnificent grace. John tells us in verse 13 that those who Jesus gave the right to become children of God became children, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

John makes three negative statements and one positive in answering this question. How is a person born again? He says, negative statements, not of blood.

No ethnic or national claims can save us. Can't say we belong to a certain people group and therefore, we are saved.

[29:36] He says, nor of the will of the flesh. No desire of the will, apart from grace, can save us. You can't effort your way.

I'm going to do it. I desire to do it, therefore I'm going to do it. You need the grace to respond in faith to the call of the gospel. Nor of the will man.

No religious system can save us. Not following the rules and checking the boxes. How is a person born again?

He makes one positive statement and he needs only one, as he says summarily, but of God.

those three little words could take up our time for the rest of the spring and on into the summer. In fact, I could argue that those three little words will be our awe-filled contemplation for all of eternity.

[30:39] The point is, we have not nearly the time this morning to unpack them. And, frankly, I don't think John would want us to delay too long here.

He's going to give us plenty of opportunity in his writing to consider the doctrine of divine election. So, for our attention to verse 13 this morning, I want to address those of you who may have your fists up at the very idea that God does all the saving work, that we contribute nothing to our salvation.

Just put them down. I think that the doctrine of divine election has been the focal point of so much unnecessary division.

So, just keep your hands at your side and let me ask you a couple of questions. Let's see if you answer them the same way that I do. I'm asking you the questions, I'm going to answer my own questions.

Number one, apart from Christ, apart from Christ, are you utterly sinful? Left to yourself, do you possess within you any good?

[31:55] Apart from Christ, are you utterly sinful? And I would say yes. Apart from Christ, apart from his saving work, apart from his imputed righteousness given to me, I am utterly sinful.

I'm sinful to my very core before that happened, before he gave me his righteousness. I believe this because of Ephesians 2 verse 1, I read it to you earlier, you were dead in the trespasses and sins.

Secondly, do you think that apart from Christ? You can recommend yourself to God by anything that you have done.

If you were to stand before God and plead your case before him, why do you not deserve eternal damnation? Why do you instead deserve to be his child?

Do you have anything in you that you have done that you think you could actually stand before him and make a reasonable case? To that, I would say no.

[33:04] I would say no. I need the righteousness of Christ. I need my penalty paid by his death. I need his perfect life given to me in that beautiful thing called the great exchange where I am justified.

That way I can be declared in God's court. Not guilty. Not only not guilty, but perfect. You have kept my law and you are welcome here.

I can't plead my own case. All I can plead is Christ. He did it. He accomplished it on my behalf. So do you think, apart from Christ, you can recommend yourself to God by anything you have done? I derive this in Ephesians chapter 2 verse 8 and 9. For by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. I have nothing to boast in in myself except Christ. Thirdly, if you have been saved by Christ, are you now meant to sustain your faith by your own power?

[34:21] I would answer to that question no. I was saved by him. His spirit made me alive. I was capable of turning from my sin and turning to him.

He saved me and I now am sustained by that very same power. He didn't save me and then leave me alone to my own devices. Praise God.

Paul says in Philippians 1.6, I'm sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. If you have been saved by Christ, are you now meant to sustain your faith by your own power?

No. Fourth, if you have been saved by Christ, are you being kept by grace until God calls you home or Christ returns?

If you have been saved by Christ, are you being kept by grace, by Christ, until God calls you home or Christ returns? And to this I would say yes. John 10, verse 27 through 29, I read it to you already.

[35:36] My sheep are my voice and I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

God now there are a lot of people who would answer these questions differently. There are people who claim to be Christ followers who would answer them differently and that opens up all sorts of problems.

I hope you answer these questions the same way that I did and if you did then we have much to agree upon. We can get into the nuance of it all but at the end of the day this is my understanding of depravity, divine election, justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone and my perseverance and preservation to the end.

That's it. If you answer those questions the way I answer those questions we are on the same page. So preserve your armaments for real battles and settle into John's gospel account with me as we observe reliable witness again and again truth and find yourself believing.

Jesus is the Christ the anointed one sent by God that by grace through faith in him we would be called his children.

[37:10] This is after all why John wrote this book. He's going to say some stark things to us but don't forget John 20 verse 30 and 31 and I'll read this and then we'll pray.

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book but these are written 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.

Let's pray together.