

## 2. The Saviour - the children of God

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[ 0 : 01 ] Well do be seated and we'll bow our heads and our leads in prayer. Our souls reborn awake and rise from their long sleep of death.

On heavenly things we fix our eyes and praise commands our breath. We thank you dear heavenly father for our brother Isaac Watts who grasped these things and put them so clearly and expressed and distilled the Bible's teaching about the new birth in this hymn.

And our prayer dear father is that you will help each one of us here today not only to understand these things but to experience them for ourselves. What we long for and need more than anything else is to know you and to know the power of the rebirth, a second birth in our own hearts and lives. For those of us who are Christians dear father please encourage us today and in the days ahead to stand firm for Christ. To be unashamed of him, to speak of him to others.

And for any here today who are not yet Christian believers we pray that you will lovingly have mercy upon them and draw them to Christ. And help them too to share and to know the joy of being a Christian, one who belongs to Jesus.

[ 1 : 31 ] So please dear father speak to us, help us as we read together and think about the first chapter of John's gospel. And may there be fresh light on our path and joy in our lives as we seek to know you better.

And we ask these things in Jesus name. Amen. Well let's look up there and I want to read part of John's gospel chapter 1. If you've got your visitor's Bible you'll find this on page 886.

Page 886. I'll read the first 13 verses only of John chapter 1. This opening section of John's gospel is sometimes referred to as the prologue to John's gospel.

And it's a little bit like an overture to a musical. Where various themes which are going to be developed and expanded later on in the book are taken up and just referred to very briefly.

Light and darkness, belief, life and that sort of thing. So just notice those as I read the first 13 verses now. In the beginning was the Word.

[ 2 : 44 ] And the Word was with God. And the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him.

And without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life. And the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness.

And the darkness has not overcome it. 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 enlightens everyone was coming into the world. 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.

[ 3 : 49 ] 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. Amen. This is the Word of the Lord to us. And may it be a blessing by his grace. To our hearts.

Now the first five verses of John's Gospel are literally prehistoric. They take us back to a point before time began.

A point you might say before humanity was even a twinkle in its father's eye. But when we get to verse six here. We suddenly arrive with a bump in the first century AD.

In about 29 AD to be as exact as possible. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. Now this John in verse six is of course John the Baptist.

[ 4 : 46 ] Not to be confused with the author of the Gospel who is John the Apostle. Often referred to as John the Evangelist. So in these verses here, verses six, seven and eight. We have John the Evangelist writing about John the Baptist.

And I want to point out something about verses six to eight. Which I think will help us greatly to understand what John's Gospel is all about. And how John the Evangelist has structured his Gospel.

Just look with me if you have your Bible open at verse seven. He, that's John the Baptist, came as a witness to bear witness about the light. Now the light of course is Jesus.

And why, according to verse seven, did John the Baptist bear witness to the light? The reason is that all might believe through him.

So John the Baptist bears witness to Jesus for the express purpose of persuading people to believe in Jesus. That's what John the Evangelist is all about.

[ 5 : 46 ] And John the Baptist too. John the Baptist is not saying to people, I want to testify about Jesus because I think you'll find my testimony interesting. No. He is saying, I want to testify about Jesus so that you will make a radical move.

From belief to unbelief. I'm not just trying to tickle your interest. I want you to become believers. So verse seven. Why does John bear witness?

So that all might believe through him. And this theme of bearing witness or bearing testimony is one of the central themes of John's gospel. In fact, what John the Evangelist is doing in all 21 of his chapters is gathering together many different strands of testimony.

He's a little bit like a barrister, an advocate who's presenting his case by drawing together various strands of testimony. And the testimony that John the Evangelist is gathering together is all testimony about Jesus.

It is not primarily about God the Father or about the Holy Spirit. Although God the Father and God the Holy Spirit are both very prominent in John's gospel. In fact, in John's gospel, even the Father and the Holy Spirit testify to the truth about Jesus.

[ 7 : 03 ] So in John's gospel, we have so many different witnesses testifying about Jesus Christ. The Father testifies to him. The Spirit testifies to him. John the Baptist bears testimony to him.

The Old Testament scriptures speak of Jesus. The miracles that Jesus performs testify to his identity as the Son of God. John the Evangelist testifies to Jesus.

Many different individuals who appear in the gospel also testify to him. Like, for example, the woman at the well of Samaria who meets him. And, of course, Jesus testifies about himself.

A lot that he has to say in the course of John's gospel concerns himself. His identity, his miracles, his origin, his death and resurrection, his relationship to the Father and to the Holy Spirit, his mastery of the devil.

John's gospel, you might say, is a testimony about Jesus Christ. You might say that testimony is its middle name. John, testimony, gospel. Now, I want to say something very important here.

[ 8 : 07 ] So if your neighbour has just begun to put up the Zs, it can happen, can't it? Just give him a loving little nudge in the ribs because what I want to say is very important at this point. And it's this.

The testimony which John the Evangelist gathers in his gospel is presented to the reader so as to bring the reader to believe in Jesus and the consequence of believing in Jesus is that the reader will have life in his name, eternal life.

So if we can get these three words in the right order into our minds, it will really help us to understand John's gospel. Testimony leads to belief, which leads to life.

Okay, those three things. Testimony leads to belief, leads to life. It's the gathered testimony which persuades the reader to believe in Jesus and that leads to eternal life. That's the simple pattern of John's gospel.

If you get that into your mind, open John's gospel at any point and that will help you to understand any chapter. The testimony leads to belief, which leads to life. And here in chapter 1, verse 7, we have the first point in John's gospel at which the Evangelist flags up his great theme that testimony will lead to belief.

[ 9 : 23 ] Now having said that by way of introduction, I'd like us to look at verses 9 to 13 in which the Evangelist shows us that there are two ways of responding to the coming of Jesus into the world.

Two ways, only two ways, of responding to the arrival of Christ in the world. Every person in this room is responding in one way or the other at the moment.

There's no third way. The first is the way of rejection and the second is the way of acceptance or receiving. So we'll look at the way of rejection first.

And verses 9, 10 and 11 describe the way of rejection painfully and poignantly. Now look at verse 9. It starts rather encouragingly and hopefully. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

Now that's hopeful, isn't it? There's the world, the first century world, full of turmoil and darkness, full of ignorance and sin and suffering. And into this darkness, suddenly a light begins to shine.

[10:27] It almost feels like the arrival of the United States cavalry, doesn't it? Over the hill.

Ba-da-ba-da-ba-dum. Here they come to the rescue. Help is at hand. Light for our darkness. And the first part of verse 10 is also rather hopeful.

He was in the world. In the world. Not distant, not light years away, but present in the very world.

And look at the next phrase. And the world was made through him.

Well, all the better. Nobody knows the needs of a thing better than the one who has made it. If your boiler breaks down in this winter weather, you'll probably ring up the maker to come and fix it, won't you? Here's Jesus, who's the creator of the world, and he's there.

He's arrived. So here is the hope of the world, its maker, and he is present in the world. But halfway through verse 10, there is a terrible jolt.

Yet, the world did not know him. He was in the world. It was his world. It was made through him.

And yet, the world did not know him. This is the great tragedy.

[11:30] It's the great sadness that the world that he made did not know its maker when he arrived. The word know really carries the force of recognize.

The world did not recognize him. They mistook him for somebody else. They thought that he was just the carpenter's son. We know Jesus. That's what people said. Of course we know him.

He's a nice boy. We always thought well of him in Nazareth. We've known him ever since he was a little lad, a well-behaved young man. Mary is his mother. We know James and Joseph and Simon his brothers. We know his sisters.

We know his father Joseph. We've known Jesus ever since he was a boy in short pants. Joseph and sons, join us. 95 Main Street, Nazareth. Telephone, 0141-881-1973.

We know them very well. So they did at that level but they didn't recognize him. And if verse 10 shows the tragedy of the world not recognizing its maker, verse 11 shows us in even sharper focus how sad the situation was because verse 11 says that he came to his own people and his own people did not receive him.

[12:39] If he'd gone to Iceland or Tasmania it might have been a bit less surprising but he went to Israel to the land of the Jews the land of God's covenant people and they didn't receive him.

His own people didn't receive him. He wasn't an Englishman or a Scotsman. He was a Jew of impeccable ancestry of the very tribe of Judah and they didn't receive him.

That verse 11 there that sad verse it makes me think of perhaps one of the great landowning families of Scotland or England in the 18th or 19th century. The sort of thing we get portrayed in Jane Austen's novels or other books of that era where perhaps the head of the family the Honourable So-and-So goes away for 6 or 8 or 12 months trading and looking after his business in the Caribbean or India or wherever he's got concerns and eventually having been away for many months he comes home to his estate in Perthshire or Gloucestershire or wherever it is.

And of course he can't wait to get home after his long journey by sea. He's looking forward to seeing his family and his lands and of course he wants a hot bath and a good dinner as well. So he travels for several days from Portsmouth or wherever he lands and eventually he rides through the gates of his own estate he gallops up the long drive he looks at his house standing there looking so welcoming in the evening gloom with the lights twinkling in the windows and smoke puffing out of the chimneys and he gallops up to the great front door of his house he leaves his horse he runs up to the stairs he raps on the door open up he says nobody opens I'm home it's the master let me in and then he hears the door being barred and locked against him he sees a face peeping out through the net curtains then the shutters go up and somebody shouts back at him from the inside go away we don't want you here you don't belong here it's his place how does he feel grieved shocked angry of course isn't this exactly what happens here in verse 11 he came to his own and his own people did not receive him that's what happened to Jesus the people of Israel the people

whose prophets for hundreds of years had been foretelling the coming of the Messiah and yet they said when he came we're not having you and although he spoke to them with grace and love and unparalleled authority and understanding when they began to realise that he was claiming to be not only their Messiah but the Son of God they not only refused to receive him they determined to do away with him they determined to find some excuse for pretending that he committed a capital offence so that they could murder him and pretend that it was a proper judicial execution they hated him him the most gracious man in the world and in barely three years they succeeded in their plan now when you take verse 10 and verse 11 together you realise that it wasn't only the Jews who didn't want to know him the Jews of course are the people of verse 11 his own people who didn't receive him but verse 10 shows that the

Gentile world equally refused to recognise him Jesus is not only the son of David and therefore the rightful king of the Jews he's also the son of Adam and therefore the rightful king of all of Adam's descendants so the bitter truth that verses 10 and 11 force us to face is the truth that both the Jewish world and the Gentile world do not want to receive Jesus as king remember how the Jews eventually said to Pontius Pilate we have no king but Caesar we're certainly not acknowledging this man as our king and the Gentile world will characteristically say we want no monarch except ourselves we will opt for self-rule every person here every person in Glasgow who is not a Christian has opted for self-rule you are your own master the human heart in its natural state when it's stripped down of all its pretensions when it's prepared to look at itself honestly the human heart has to admit that it is a self-ruling heart that's our nature that's the message of verses 10 and 11 it's the way of rejection the world refuses to recognize Jesus and his own people refuse also to receive him now friends isn't it a good thing therefore that the next verse verse 12 begins with the word but because John is about to show us that not everybody has hardened their heart against Jesus we all start that way none of us is born a Christian every one of us starts out in life with a Christ rejecting heart that opts for self-rule but as verse 12 puts it delightfully some people do receive him some do believe in his name so this brings us to our second point and that is the way of acceptance or the way of receiving

[17:58] I'm sure that verses 10 and 11 will make us very thoughtful and I hope sad because they convey the sadness that lies right at the heart of John's gospel right at the heart of the Bible but verses 12 and 13 are the best of news if only we have ears to hear it let me read them again here's the 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 and doesn't John the evangelist put it clearly and simply those who receive Jesus who believe in Jesus will be given the right to become children of God and let me point out one or two things about this the first is that clearly nobody is born a child of God you and I were born as sons of Adam and daughters of Eve we're the children of men

John is telling us that only those who receive Jesus and believe in his name are able to become the children of God and at this point the Bible corrects the opinion of the world people will often say in public discourse that everybody is a child of God people say we're all God's children aren't we as though it's a self-evident truth but John the apostle says no that is not true so how is it that a person is given the right to become a child of God John explains it in verse 13 he says that a birth must take place a second birth a new birth to become a child of man you simply have to be born in the ordinary human way as all of us were with an ordinary human father and mother but those who become children of God as verse 13 puts it are born not of human blood not of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man not when a man and his wife say to each other shall we try for a baby that's the will of the flesh or the will of man the ordinary standard way in which new people are born into the world but this new birth here in verse 13 is of God it's something that happens by his will by his power his agency it's something that he does for a human being and when it happens it is both wonderful and undeniable a human being realises after being born again not only that he belongs to God but that God really now is father the new birth gives a person a new status it's not something to be proud of as you might be proud of being awarded the MBE or a knighthood for your achievements not like that the new birth is not an achievement of man it's a gracious free gift from God so the Christian is not proud of it but is deeply thrilled and deeply thankful for it who would want any earthly honour if they could be a child of the true and only God this is the great truth at the heart of Christianity that every true Christian is born again becomes a child of God and thus an inheritor of God's eternal kingdom now John here the evangelist teaches us to view the new birth from two

angles first from God's angle this is something that God bestows something that God gives it does not come by the will of man it comes from God but secondly something does happen from the human angle and John describes it in verse 12 it's those who receive him those who believe in his name who are given the right to become children of God to receive Christ means to say yes to him to say to him come into my life as Lord he must of course be received as Lord he won't come he can't come on any other terms he is after all the one who created us through whom the very world was made so to receive him is to welcome him to occupy the throne of our life

Lord Jesus we say you are the rightful king I've been living under self-rule up to now and I cannot go on like this I confess it I'm totally unfitted to govern my own life it's an insult to you for me to have kept you out of my life for all these years come in please take hold of my life humble me reshape me fit me for your service be my king and help me to be unashamed to let the world know that you are my king that's what it is to receive him and what is it to still in verse 13 sorry verse 12 to believe in his name well in the original language John is actually saying to believe into or onto his name there's an idea of movement there a person moves from one position which is self-rule or unbelief to a new position which is believing into his name and let me just use a simple rather childish illustration to try and convey what John means here you're sitting on a nice chair aren't you a St. George's

Tron red covered chair let me ask you unless you're not well or you're feeling very old let me ask you to lift your feet off the ground for a little moment that's it just move your position a little bit lift your feet off the ground so that your chair is taking the whole of your weight you may be as slender as a sparrow you may be built like an Aberdeen Angus bull but every last pound and ounce of your human frame or kilogram is resting on the chair now and the chair is bearing you up isn't it or put your feet down relax now relax now just think of it what you were doing just for a few seconds was resting the whole weight of your body your confidence on that chair to do that you had to move didn't you you had to change your position a little bit but for a few moments your entire bodily frame whether ten stone or twenty was resting on that chair and it held you up now to start believing in Jesus is really very similar we entrust the weight of our whole self we lean the whole weight of our confidence upon him if you've never done it this is the way to do it place on him the whole weight of your life your past its sorrows its sins the wastage of time all those years of self rule but also place on him your future the years that lie ahead your desire to be his servant from now on and also your eternal future your future after this life is over stake everything on him you won't be disappointed that's what you were made for we were made to become children of God so let me encourage you friends if you've never done this before why not this Christmas time receive him as your master and lord believe in him rest the whole weight of the rest of your life upon him that's why he came to rescue us to give us new birth and an entirely new life that's why the one who created the world left the heavens and journeyed all the way to the cross to that gruesome gallows so as to bear the punishment for our sins for our God rejection the punishment that we so deeply deserved he bore it for us so that we should be set free there is nothing so wonderful as this let's not be people of verses 10 and 11 it's verses 12 and 13 that speak the good news to us

I'll read them again 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 that's what it is to be a Christian let's bow our heads and we'll pray together our great God in heaven have mercy we pray upon each of us strengthen our hearts and for those who need help and encouragement to put their trust in Christ and to receive him we do indeed pray for them that you will bring them to him and bring them the joy of the new birth which is undeniable when it happens and to give them the joy too of being unashamed to belong to Jesus Christ and to confess him as their Lord in the face of the world and we pray that this Christmas time will be a time our dear Father when we are able to sing and to speak of you and to rejoice in you to honour you and to broadcast the good news about the Lord

[ 27 : 10 ] Jesus Christ and these things we ask in his name Amen Amen