

Receiving the Light

John 1:9-13

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This morning, we will be looking at the ways in which the Lord invites all to come. He is faithful, and He receives us. The question is whether we are willing and able to receive Him. As we continue in this advent series *Light in Dark Places*, we come to this next section in the first chapter of John looking at verses 9 through 13. We are looking at this first chapter of John as a way of introducing many of the themes that are covered by John in the entirety of his gospel. For him, these are central to all the things that he will unpack as he goes through telling the story of being a witness to the ministry of Jesus Christ.

As we come to this portion where we consider light in dark places, John begins to unpack the reality of our call and invitation to actually receive the light. This will be a theme he comes to over and over again. As one commentator very correctly outlined the entire gospel of John, John 1:11 through John 12 is about those who were unwilling to receive the light of Christ. And then chapters 13 to 21 are about those who did receive and believed in the light and became children of God. The beautiful part of the gospel is they were the ones that were considered the least likely to receive Him. They were the unfaithful. They were the ones who were broken and needy.

We come to John 1:9-13. Hear now God's word to us this morning.

The true light, which gives light to 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, 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. [ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Will you pray with me?

Heavenly Father, we ask for your presence with us. We pray, Father, that you by the work of your Holy Spirit through the power of your word would enable us to see the majesty and glory and truth of your light that we would receive it, that we would rest and rejoice in it, and that it would be for us a place of refuge and renewal. Help us, O Lord. Help the teacher. In Jesus's name. Amen.

This season is commonly called by the marketing strategists of the world the season of giving. In fact, there are many commercials which call it the season of giving. And I get it. In many ways, what they're trying to do is to creatively, perhaps by a slight of hand, separate me from my money so that I can use this as a season of giving. Why not piggyback on what is the Christian church's high holy period to consider ways in which we can spend our money and give? I get it. I've participated in it. I've even celebrated it. I am after all a good western American. I love me some consumerism.

But I also recognize what this idea of the season of giving has done is turn the gospel entirely on its head. I would suggest what John is saying here in this gospel is that the giving of the Lord Jesus Christ makes this not a season of giving. It makes it a season of receiving. But I also would suggest that receiving is very difficult. Are we sure we want to receive what is being given? What are the implications of what is being given? The beauty of the gospel is it tells us something which is absolutely and utterly marvelous if we are willing to receive it.

As we consider this set of verses, I want us to see in the receiving of the light two things which are clear from this brief text. First, in verses 9-11, John is describing the world's resistance. In verses 12-13, he is describing God's unrelenting purpose. The world's resistance and God's unrelenting purpose.

First, the idea of the world's resistance. What John is describing here is three different parts of the resistance all forming together. When he talks about the world, he's not talking about any particular

individuals. He's talking about all that makes up the world. For John, that is something more than just living flesh. He is talking about the whole system. The whole complexity of thoughts, understanding, philosophy, outlook, perspective, ambition, all of it has sought to resist what is being offered.

In verses 9-11, I want you to hear exactly what he's describing as the world's resistance. First, he says in verse 9, "The true light, which gives light to 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." What he's wanting us to feel is that this is first and foremost tragic because what is being described here in this resistance is the tragic rejection of the truth of the light of Christ. What's interesting about this idea of the rejection of the truth is he says, "The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world," that this light was coming as truth to enlighten our minds, and more than our minds, but our very existence, our whole understanding of what it means to be.

And then he describes here "true light." Now, the word "truth" here which is being translated as truth is something more than propositional truth. It's more than trying to understand a list of facts. He's actually talking about something which is even more profound than propositional truth, although it includes propositional truth. The tragedy is it is a rejection of what is real. It's another way of translating this word that is translated as truth. He's not just describing something which is potentially true. He's describing something which is real, that Jesus Christ has really come into the world. Another interesting thing is he describes this truth, this real existence, as light.

I finished last week's sermon by way of application by understanding that the gospel does what we call photography. It's a light drawing. The gospel intends to make us light, our very lives as light drawings of who Christ is, His grace, His mercy, His love. The word here translated is from a Greek word from which we get our word "photography" which literally means light.

What he's saying here is that this one, this Jesus, this Christ has come into the world really embodied in the flesh as the representation of all that is true and real, and He has come as light. But this is precisely the issue for us. What makes it so tragic is we, the world that is, want to reject this truth, this light.

Francis Schaeffer, a 20th century theologian and apologist for the Christian faith, understood the power and the importance of this statement when John says, "The true light has come into the world," because he coined a phrase true truth. Although it is a little awkward to say, Schaeffer was getting at who Jesus really is and all that He taught, all that He represented is itself true truth. He taught that it had a content that corresponded and corresponds to reality. And it doesn't just correspond to the reality that is our understanding, but it corresponds and transcends all of human existence. Regardless of where we are historically, it is true truth.

But more than that, and I think this is what makes it so tragic, is that fundamentally I believe as human beings we understand that what Jesus represents is true truth because if He is, it has implications for everything because this light changes everything. The reason the world did not want to receive this light and wanted to reject it is because implicitly I believe everyone who hears my voice, everyone who is gathered here, fundamentally we know that if Jesus is true truth, if He is the true light, then everything must change. What makes it so tragic is that we fear those implications. Therefore, we reject it.

More than just a tragic resistance to Christ, the world also has a very ironic rejection. This is what he says. "He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him." The irony is that although Jesus has created all things, the very things which He has created which are the very crown of His creation, human beings, human existence, simply say to our maker, I do not want you. Even if you profess faith in Christ as I do, I recognize even within the crevices of my own heart and mind and existence, I know there are places where I simply want to reject His truth and its implications on my life even though I know He is the Lord of all of life. This is the irony.

But it's more than just tragic and ironic. The world's resistance is also personal. In verse 11, he says, "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him." I do believe that John is writing here to an audience which included those who were of the Jewish background and leadership, those who ought to have known that there was a messiah being sent.

But I also believe it has another meaning. I believe it also represents not just those who were Jewish who were hearing the teaching of Christ and receiving these promises and rejecting them, but I think he's also operating on the other level that it's not just personal or particular to those of the Jewish faith in the first century. I believe it serves as an example of all of human life. When we reject the Lord Jesus, it isn't just merely tragic. It isn't just unfortunately ironic. It is very personal.

John uses this phrase, "He came to his own." Here, "his own" operates in two ways. One, it's saying He's coming back to His own house, but His house will not let Him in. In another sense, He's coming to His own people. In fact, in Jesus's public ministry, He first went to His own people, even His own family, even His own town, His own hometown. Yet they did not receive Him. They rejected Him.

In another sense, His coming to His own house also represents all of humanity, all of human life. This again feeds into both its tragedy and its irony if we consider not just the architect but also the builder. If we at least receive the scriptures on its own merit, then what it's saying is that the architect and the builder built a beautiful home and said, I want you to live here. I want you to be here with me. And I'm going to come back to you. And when He does, we simply change the locks, and we want no party with Him.

It isn't just a bland or a mild rejection of propositional truth. It isn't just rejecting the idea that the world was created by God. I can reject that as a propositional idea. No. What is being rejected here is quite personal. It is the person who is God, of Jesus Christ Himself who came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him.

But as I said, it doesn't just speak of those who were of the Jewish faith in the first century. Consider what the prophet Jeremiah says in chapter 7 verse 25,

From the day that your forefathers came out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day. Yet they did not listen to me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers. [ESV]

This isn't just pointing the finger at one particular group or religion. This is the nature of the human existence. Day after day, year after year, moment after moment, there is the rejection of the personal and the person of Christ.

This is the world's resistance that John is describing. If we were to stop there, it would be very hard to say merry Christmas. But the reason why we say merry Christmas, the reason why we celebrate is we celebrate what is said next in verses 12 and 13. "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." The beautiful truth and reality of the gospel, the central doctrines of orthodox Christian faith hold to the reality of the world's tragic ironic and personal resistance to who Jesus is and who God says He is. But God's response is one of unrelenting purpose.

There are two things that I want to bring to our minds this morning with regard to what John says here in verses 12 and 13. What an amazing response that God says He wants to give. That's what he says. He says, "To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." God is revealing Himself not as a God of revenge, not as a God who is just unpredictable, not as a God who is untrustworthy, not as a God who hoards his power and authority and majesty and glory and grace. He is a God who gives, and He gives, and He gives.

And I want to say this. You've heard me say it before. I'm not the first to say it. Our God in His unrelenting purposes gives gratuitously. He gives to the unfaithful which is what we heard sung. He has come to those who were sick. He has come to those who are broken and needy. He has come to sinners. He has come to the great unwashed masses. And He says, I give myself to you. More than that, in giving myself to you, I make you my children.

There is nothing like being a parent and finding your child when you are wanting to give them a gift, and they're in such a bad mood. In fact, they seem so angry at you that they're either over tired or unhappy, and they just let you have it. What that does to a parent is the last thing you want to do is give anything to an ungrateful snotty nosed child. We've all had that experience, and we all feel that human response of fine, I'm not giving anything to you. Clean up your act. Go to your room and clean it up. Find a job. Do something, but you're not getting anything from me.

This is a very human response, and one that is quite understandable unless you're the child. But what is really amazing is when we really consider the hard work of being a parent, the hard work of giving and choosing to love in the face of rejection from our children, that is where the rubber meets the road in regard to parenting. And I would suggest to you that that is the heart of the gospel that our heavenly Father who has created us, who's given us a home, who has withstood and listened to our rejection whose response is I want to give to you.

This is why this is not first and foremost a season of giving. It is a season of receiving. Do you know what is on offer to you? Can we not rejoice and sing and say, O Lord, if this is true of you, what John witnesses and proclaims and professes about you being true truth, how amazing is it that in spite of our rejection, you are a God who is found to be giving? O Lord, have mercy. But that is the place of rejoicing, right there when we are finally willing and able to recognize our rejection yet His response of giving.

This forms the next and final part of John's declaration. It is because our God isn't just giving. He is gracious. Here's what's interesting. One might say if he had just stopped at verse 12, "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God," in some sense that would still agree with this response of you know what God? I'm right. I'm going to do everything I can to show you I love you and want to receive you. In one sense, it would be very easy to ask, well, how is God giving? He's just giving to those who have already said they're willing to receive it.

But then there's verse 13 which is marinated in the reality of grace. Who are these that received Him? These who received Him were those who were born having nothing to do with their own will, or their own imagination, or their own logic, or of their own work of trying to get their way to God. No. This is God's work from beginning to end. It is because God has prepared us to receive. He so revealed how gracious in His giving He is that we cannot help but say, Lord, have mercy. Help me in my unbelief, but I believe.

What is being described here is God's will. God's purpose is to make us His children. God's mission is unrelenting in the undoing of death, in the dismantling of pride, and the detonating the rejection of His gracious love.

And it's here that I want to pause before I close. Imagine for just a moment if you will with me. Even if you are a Christian, I want you to camp out on this idea. And if you're not a Christian, I ask you just for the moment to consider this. If what John is saying is true, why would we ever want to reject a truth that says God in Jesus Christ has created all things that we might enjoy Him? And then when He's given it to us, we say we do not want any of it. But in the face of our rejection, God's face towards us is unrelenting mission to show us how gracious and loving He is.

Do you need grace today? Where are you in need of mercy? Where are you in need of renewal? Where are you in need of mending? Where in your heart of hearts are you most wanting to stiff arm God and say, I want nothing to do with you? At that place, I want you to hear that God's unrelenting mission is

He already knows it. And what He offers for us is something that will dismantle our pride, and in its place, He will give us eternal grace.

C. S. Lewis in his well-known work *Mere Christianity* says this.

"According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil is pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all of that, they are mere flea bites in comparison. It is through pride that the devil became the devil. Pride leads to every other vice. It is the complete anti-God state of mind. It is pride which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began."

And I would suggest to all who can hear my voice whether you are a Christian or you are not a Christian, I would say to us that our chief sin is one of pride. There are places where we simply want to put on our suits, and we want to put on our own socks and boots, and we want to get to marching and say, hey God, we've got this. We do not want to be considered charity cases. In our heart of hearts, we do not want to receive what is on offer. And yet God in His grace and His light comes into the dark places of our pride, and He says in the face of our pride, I give to you anyway. I give to you my Son. I give you my love. I give you my mercy. And I give you my grace.

This is not a season of giving. It is first and foremost a season of receiving. Have you received this light? It is this light who makes us children, this light who gives us unbreakable joy, this light who gives us peace and a place of refuge, not of our own doing, but of the doing of the Lord Himself in His Son. Jesus has come to us, and we rejoice this Christmas that Christ has come to sinners like us and given of Himself that we might become children of God to the glory and majesty and honor of the Father who sent Him. And to our great and undying delight, the Lord has come. Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the truth of this truth, that the light has come, and that we can receive this light. Father, we pray for your Holy Spirit to break our pride, to open our hearts, to remove the blinders from our eyes that finds us rejecting the light of Christ. And in your unrelenting gracious mission, O Lord, help us to receive anew and to be renewed by that light or to receive that light for the very first time. Lord, undo death, dismantle pride, and detonate our rejection with your marvelous love. In Jesus's name we pray. Amen.