

The Witness And The Light

John 1: 6-13

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It's good as always to see you here to worship our Savior. What a privilege to come to this book and to open it together. If you would, open your Bible to John chapter one, as we continue working our way through this wonderful gospel together.

You know, we live in a world that understands and values the significance of eyewitness testimony. Just think of some of the examples of how this is true in our culture. Obviously our court system is dependent often on reliable, credible eyewitnesses. Often the verdict of innocence or guilt is built off of these eyewitness testimonies.

The same thing is true, of course, when it comes to journalism. When a title hits the newspaper that is somewhat sensational, the right response first is to say, what is the source from where did this person get this information? Is it reliable?

Even in daily life, sometimes with friends and family, when we're telling a story of how something happened, it could even be a funny story, but we can tell that we're not convincing our audience. We look around the room for someone who was there to get them to affirm that what we're saying is true.

We also understand that not only is it important to have witnesses, but reliable witnesses, witnesses who have credibility, witnesses who have a track record of integrity. And if the witness is called to the stand to defend something that requires a particular kind of expertise in that field, we want to know that they have degrees and that they have the life experience that qualifies them to testify about that particular matter.

And generally speaking, most rational human beings, when presented with eyewitness testimony that they deem to be credible, will believe what is being said, even if it's difficult to do so. The apostle John understands this. And last week, we began our journey through the Gospel of John, and we began with this all-important question, who is Jesus Christ? That is a question that John will answer for us over and over again.

And John understands that he needs to prove his argument, and part of that will be to show us the credible eyewitnesses who give testimony to the truthfulness of who Jesus is. We'll see that even this morning in our passage together.

We've learned so far that Jesus is indeed God. He is one with the Father and the Spirit, yet He is a unique person. We looked at the doctrine of the Trinity briefly last week. John opens his Gospel in the first five verses, speaking of the Word and helping us understand from the beginning that his theme will be the divinity of Jesus Christ. **Jesus as the Son of God.** That is the overarching theme of the Gospel. It's the argument that John is making.

The first 18 verses that we're in the middle of are the prologue to the book. They're really a summarization of the wonderful themes that will be spoken of in greater detail as we get into the rest of the book. Because of that, I've chosen to give a little more of an overview of

the verses in the prologue, knowing that we will get more deeply into each of these topics as we continue along in our study.

And so today, we come to John 1, verses 6 to 13, and continue this wonderful study. Let's read together verse six:

6 There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light. 9 There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11 He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Clearly, John is giving us a simple and yet wonderful truth this morning, that **We are to glorify Jesus, the true light who grants adoption to every born-again believer.** Glorify Jesus, the true light who grants adoption to every born-again believer.

In order to look at these verses together, we'll see two descriptions this morning of two different individuals. **Description number one** is **The Faithful Witness** in verses six to eight. The faithful witness. In verse six, he begins, *there came a man sent from God whose name was John*. Now, first of all, notice immediately the distinction between this man, John, and the Word that we looked at last week. There is a change in the verb that is used here.

Remember, we focused on that word “was” last week. The word “was”, he was continually existing in the beginning. We talked about the eternality of the Lord Jesus Christ, but when we come to verse six here, this man, John, is said that he *came*. The distinction is intentional. John is unlike Christ in that he is merely a man. And yet at the same time, though he is merely a man, he is a man sent by God. He came for a very specific purpose and reason.

This is none other than John the Baptist, of course, as he is mentioned by all of the gospel writers. His ministry was essential to paving the way for the coming of Messiah. This is the first mention of John the Baptist here in this gospel, but it won't be the last. As I mentioned, this is sort of a summarization, but we will come later in verse 19 to John's ministry and his message, and we'll dive into it more deeply there.

But I do want us to consider this. How does the apostle John know that John the Baptist was sent by God? How can he say that so verifiably? It's because of what we have in Luke's account. John understood that John the Baptist was sent by God, and that was made clear through his birth.

You remember his parents, Zacharias and Elizabeth, were not able to have children until much later in life when they were past the age normally of childbearing, far past the age. His father also served as a priest and was chosen providentially by lot to go into the Holy Place for the burning of incense. While he is there in the Holy Place, the angel Gabriel appears to him and says this to him, Luke 1, beginning in verse 13:

13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. 14 You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. 15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb. 16 And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. 17 It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

So this is how we know verifiably that John the Baptist was in fact sent by God. God gave public testimony through the visitation of the angel Gabriel and the signs accompanying John's birth that he would be set apart for a special reason. And so John the Baptist then, we might say has the credentials, he has the reliability to be a witness and a testifier to the identity of Jesus Christ.

So what was John's ministry exactly? Notice how it's described. He came, verse seven, *as a witness, to testify about the Light*, as a witness to testify about the Light. John's purpose on this planet was to serve as a witness, a testimony, to the identity of the Messiah, here referred to as the Light.

The reason he's calling Him the Light is he's now moved from that term, the Word, though he'll return back to it, now to the Light, speaking of the same person, the Lord Jesus Christ. He introduced this back in verses four and five. *In Him was life*, that is in the Word was life, *and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it.* He's continuing now to refer to Jesus in this way. John the Baptist then, his purpose was to come and give testimony to the Light who is Jesus Christ.

We come to verse 19 here in a couple of weeks, we'll see even more definitively just how clearly John performed that ministry of preparing the hearts of the people and testifying to the identity of Christ. But let's consider this this morning in keeping with our passage. What was it that John the Baptist was seeking to accomplish through this ministry of serving as a witness of the Light? Notice back in the text at the end of verse seven, it says *He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that* (that is for this reason) *all might believe through him.*

So John the Baptist's purpose in his ministry lines up with the purpose of the apostle John in the writing of this gospel, as we saw last week in the purpose statement there in John 20, 30, and 31 particularly, that he's writing these things so that you may believe. John the Baptist came preaching that we might believe.

The text is not indicating that all would believe. In fact, John's going to make it very clear here in a moment that all did not believe, and today we know sadly all do not believe. But it was the heart of John the Baptist to come and testify in such a way that his heart's desire was for all to come and to believe through his ministry that Jesus definitively was the Messiah.

What we need to understand this morning before we move forward is that because God Himself testified to John as a witness, his testimony is still valid today. It is captured for us

by the gospel writers, multiple accounts given that John did his job, and as we'll see definitively, even by John's pen later in his gospel, John the Baptist pointed right at the Lord Jesus Christ and said, this is He, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. And so that means it's valid for you and I that we must heed the witness of John the Baptist, the one testified to by none other than God himself.

And I say that for this reason, if particularly this morning you're an unbeliever, if you're with us and the truth is you're still not convinced about who Jesus Christ really is, that perhaps you, like many others, have convinced yourself that the reason you don't believe is because there just simply isn't enough evidence, that if you just had eyewitness accounts, if you just had some kind of evidence than you would believe, understand the issue behind not only your unbelief but all unbelief in Jesus Christ is not a matter of evidence.

We have plenty of evidence. God has made it clear, and here we have just one example of many that will come in the gospel of John of a faithful witness testified to verifiably by God Himself, and this witness has testified to the Lord Jesus Christ. If you are an unbeliever this morning, understand that the heart of your unbelief is not a matter of evidence. It actually is an issue much more serious than that, and John will get to that here in just a moment as we'll continue to work our way through this passage.

But in verse eight, he makes a very important clarifying statement. He says, *he*, that is John the Baptist, *was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light*. Now, why would it be important for John to make this clear to us? It's because John the Baptist's ministry was very effective. I mean, people came from miles around on foot out into the wilderness to hear this man preach. Apparently, his preaching was enthralling.

This strange man dressed in odd clothes, who ate odd food, who positioned his ministry in a place that was unexpected, but people were coming to him in droves to hear him preach. Many of them were being baptized in response to his message. He preached a message of repentance, preparing the hearts of the people for the coming of Messiah.

In fact, John the Baptist was the last of the Old Testament prophets, the prophets that came in the style of the Old Testament, the Old Covenant before the New Covenant came. It had been 400 years, roughly, since a prophet, a true prophet, had spoken and preached in Israel. And so the people were, to say they were hungry is an understatement.

Here is a true prophet of the Lord proclaiming the word of the Lord. And because his ministry was so effective and his preaching was so well-received by many, not by all, but by many, many began to say, maybe John is the Messiah. Maybe this is him. Maybe he's the prophet that was to come, that Moses prophesied of. Now, John the Baptist will make it clear that was not true, but the apostle John also wants to make it very clear John's role was to testify to the Light. He himself was not the Light. And so we ought not to be confused, even though God did mightily use him in his ministry.

Now that brings us to verse nine and description number two, which will take up the bulk of our time this morning. **Description number two, The True Light**, beginning in verse nine. What we see here are three realities concerning the true light and the reception or lack

thereof of the true light. **Reality number one**, we'll call the **Light's Enlightenment**. The light's enlightenment. Look back at verse nine:

There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.

Now, just as we saw last week, there's theology communicated in the precision of the words that John is inspired to use. This is actually pretty easy to read and understand on the one hand, and yet when you read it slowly and thoughtfully, there's a lot of theology about our Savior communicated in the words that are chosen here. And we see that in verse nine.

Notice again, the repetition of the verb "was". So *There was the true Light*, this continually existing, on the one hand, but then he says this same Light that was, *which coming into the world*. Now, how is this possible? We have this One who was, and yet there is a point in time at which He comes into the world. How can both of those two things be true?

This is the first introduction in John's gospel to the incarnation. He will clearly say this in verse 14, but he's hinting at this here. The Light was, and yet the Light came. The only way that that is true is because this Light is the God-man. Two natures, a divine nature and a human nature in one person, the Lord Jesus Christ. We'll dive into the significance of the incarnation more next week as we come to verse 14, but we're introduced to it here.

The key point though in this verse is not the doctrine of the incarnation, but rather the effect that the incarnation had because he says *There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man*. Now, that's a curious phrase. What does that mean? That in coming into the world, the Light enlightened every man? Well, there are a few common interpretations that are suggested for the meaning of this word "enlightened". Let me begin, first of all, by mentioning why I don't believe that it is a couple of other common views, and then we'll get to what I do believe in context as being said here.

First of all, I don't believe this is a reference to what Paul speaks of in Romans 1 of God's revelation generally through creation and conscience, that there is in man a conscience and there's creation, and so we're therefore without excuse. That is true, and it's taught clearly in Romans 1 and other places, but I don't think that's what's meant here because if you notice specifically, this enlightenment comes in conjunction with the Light coming into the world. That is, there is a connection between the incarnation, the coming of Christ, and whatever this enlightenment is.

Secondly, I believe this really can't refer to Christ's coming and giving inner illumination to every human on the planet as if when He came, everyone immediately knew truly who He was. We know that but can't be true because in context, John's going to explain in the very next verses that when Jesus came, the world did not know who He was. They didn't recognize Him, and so this is not some kind of worldwide inner illumination.

But rather I think the best interpretation of what this enlightenment refers to is not an internal reality but an external reality. Jesus comes as the Light piercing into the darkness, and that Light as it shines, Jesus coming in the gospel that He preached, as it shines on the dark and fallen world, it divides. It separates into two groups, those who reject the Light on

the one hand and those who receive the Light by repentance and faith. That's what John's going to explain as we get further into this passage.

I believe the point is the Light coming into the world has this dividing effect. D.A. Carson says it this way: "In John's gospel, it is repeatedly the case that the light shines on all and forces a distinction." So the idea is there really is no option of neutrality when it comes to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Light comes into the world. Even today, the Light has come, and there's a sense in which it's continually going forth through the preaching of the gospel, as we share the gospel and as His word goes forth, and it always has this dividing effect. There is no sitting on the fence. There's either embracing Jesus Christ for who He says He is, or there's the rejection of Jesus Christ, but there's no neutrality, and that's the idea here. There is this universal enlightenment, and that enlightenment has a dividing effect, as we'll see in the next two realities, because the next two realities focus on the responses to this enlightenment of Jesus coming into the world.

Reality number two is The Light's Rejection, the light's rejection. Look back at your passage here. Verse 10:

He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.
He was in the world, the world was made through him, and the world did not know him.

Again, John is masterful with his inspired pen. This is simplistic language, and yet it communicates vast theological truths about our Lord. Notice he says that Jesus *was in the world*, again, a reference to his incarnation taking on humanity, but he also references Jesus as being the one through whom the world was made.

So again, we have these dueling realities. He's in the world, and yet He made the world. He's the creator of all things, and yet astonishingly, though the creator comes to His creation, plants His feet on the ground, what is the reality mentioned thirdly in this verse? ...*and the world did not know Him*.

The world didn't know its own creator. Now, the word "world" is used throughout the Gospel of John in a variety of ways, but primarily, the most frequent use of the word world in John refers not to, don't think about the globe itself, but humanity, and specifically fallen humanity, humanity as it is in its fallen state. Because if you think about the world in the sense of the globe, Richard Phillips brings out an interesting point. The world outside of humanity did seem to recognize Jesus as its creator because the wind and the waves obeyed Him. The fig tree obeyed Him. The water obeyed when He said, turn into wine. These objects that were created responded immediately to the creator's voice.

It was fallen humanity that did not recognize its creator. And so in this case, I believe that is what this is referring to. The world here is the fallen world system. So why doesn't mankind understand when Jesus comes who He is? Paul explains the spiritual realities that are going on behind the scenes in man's heart in 2 Corinthians 4, verses three and four. Listen to what he says. He says:

3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 4 in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

So the god of this world, Satan has blinded the minds of the unbelieving. The unbelieving world is presented as trapped in sin and darkness. Their minds so darkened that they cannot grasp the light of Jesus Christ. The gospel shines on them in the sense that they hear the gospel. Some unbelievers can even articulate verbally the different tenets of the gospel, and yet it has no effect. It does not penetrate the darkness of their hearts. It does not cultivate true belief and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is made even more clear as John mentions the second group that did not respond by receiving Christ. He goes on to say in verse 11: *He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.*

Now, what's the difference between the group mentioned in verse 10 and the group mentioned in verse 11? In verse 10, the world doesn't know Him, he says. In verse 11, we're told that He comes to His own, and His own did not know Him. Who are these two different people? Well, as I mentioned in verse 10, I believe this is a more generalized description of the fallen world, fallen humanity, but he seems to hone in particularly on the Jewish people here in this verse when he calls them His own.

Of course, Jesus is born a Jew. The prophecies of Christ are made to the Jewish people. It is clear, as we studied in our mission series, that He would come through the line of the Jewish people. The Jewish people had the prophecies of Christ. They had Messianic Psalms. They were the people that if you asked them what are going to be the signs that accompany the Messiah, they could have told you, and yet He comes to His people, and they deny Him. They don't receive Him. If anybody on the planet should have known and received Jesus, it would have been the Jews, we would think, and if anybody among the Jews especially would have known and received Him, it would have been the Jewish leaders, the priests, the scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Sanhedrin, and yet no, they led out in the rejection of Jesus.

There were some, of course, that did come to believe in Him, but the vast majority of both the Jewish people and the leadership among the Jewish people denied Him, rejected Him. How can that be? After all that God has done to make it as plain as day that Jesus is Messiah, how can that be? Well, it can only be because of what Paul said in the passage that we just read. This is a description of just how dark the darkness of the lost soul really is.

This is what is meant by spiritual death, an absolute inability to bring ourselves to God, to even appreciate and understand the gospel and our need for the gospel. This is why Paul refers to our state before coming to Christ as spiritual death, Ephesians 2:1: *And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,*

And I say all of this to you this morning because again, if you're in that category of unbeliever, you have not yet come to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, again, the issue is not evidence. The issue is that all of us are born initially in this state of spiritual death and darkness, separated from a holy God, incapable even on our own to come to the

Light and understand the significance of that Light and to believe in Christ. Paul says, this is the real root issue, spiritual death.

But there is hope, there's hope for every single one of us. All of us begin in that condition. Every person in this room, every person in the planet begins in that spiritually dead situation, but the Bible and John here is going to tell us there is exceedingly good news. There is hope. Listen, there's hope for you if you're an unbeliever this morning, and if you're a believer who has been praying for and pleading for a family member or a loved one or someone that you're longing to know the Lord who only seems to harden their heart against the gospel further and further, there's hope for them.

Why? What is this unimaginable hope that comes to us in **reality number three: The Light's Reception**, the light's reception. Look back at verse 12:

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,

Now again, these are what I would call summary statements of what is going to be more fully explained in the rest of John's gospel. John is going to describe in great detail the rejection of Christ by many, but he's also going to describe the reception of Christ by others.

There were those who received the Light of Jesus Christ and the gospel. And so we understand then that the Light of Christ does penetrate the darkness of the soul. The Light of Christ can penetrate into that spiritually dark and dead place. Hope is not lost then. Some of those on whom the Light of Christ shines will in fact come to believe and turn to Jesus Christ. And what is the result for those who receive the Light correctly? To them, he says: *He gave the right to become children of God*

Just think on that for a moment. Adoption into the family of God's sons and daughters of God. This is a truth, of course, taught throughout the New Testament. When it says He gave them the right to become children of God, it's not as if they earned this right and so He bestows it to them because they somehow earned it by their faith or something like that, but rather it's an expression to say that God graciously gives the privilege of adoption to every son and daughter who receives Him and that having the right of adoption means they have all the privileges that come with being a son or daughter of God.

Now we could spend the rest of the morning just outlining what the New Testament says about the benefits and privileges of being a son or daughter of God, but just think for a moment very quickly about a few of the wonderful realities that are ours as sons and daughters of God. A right relationship with God. Forgiveness of sin. The eternal love of God. Eternal fellowship with God. A future inheritance as joint heirs with the only begotten Son. Friendship with God. An eternal home with God where we will be with Him forever.

These are just a few of the many that we could go on and describe, but when he says that to those who received Him they received this right of adoption, what he's saying is all the privileges of being a son or daughter, all that I read and more, those are yours in Christ. But this is the special unique privilege only of those who have received Him, it says. So I think it's pretty important we understand what does it mean then to receive Him? Who are these

people and in what way did they receive Him? And he goes on to describe that if we just combine that with the next phrase,

12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,

Even to those who believe in his name. So those who receive Him are characterized as being those who believe in His name. The word believe is a very familiar word in the book of John. It's a word that we will return to over and over again. And this morning I'm going to introduce us to this word, but we will unravel it over and over again as we come to it throughout John's wonderful gospel. It's one of those key words that you can't get away from, even again, showing up in the purpose statement of John, *so that you may believe*.

So what does it mean then to believe in Jesus? If believing is the dividing line between those who remain in darkness, not children of God, and those who are adopted, who receive the Light, then I think we need to understand what the word means.

Again here, I think it's helpful to begin by talking about what the word does not mean. And one misconception that is often taught about the word believe, I think probably based on only understanding the English usage of the term, is that to believe in Jesus is simply to mentally agree with or have mental assent or affirmation of certain key facts about Jesus. As if we, if I can check the box on these three facts and say, yes, I believe those, then that is a biblical understanding of the word believe.

That is, that's an inadequate description of how the term is used over and over again in the New Testament. Now, let me back up and say this, are there key historical facts and truths about Jesus that you must believe? Absolutely, absolutely there are, but it is more than just cold, hard facts and checking boxes. Sure, I believe Jesus came. Sure, I believe he died for our sins. Sure, I believe he rose again. And the word is consistently used, if you just study the word in any quality Greek lexicon, you will come to understand that the word is used, yes, to include believing those truths about Jesus, but also this idea of trust, to come to personally trust in the Lord Jesus.

Probably the most respected Greek lexicon today gives this simple definition: "Believe is to consider something to be true and therefore worthy of one's trust." (BDAG) What does that mean? What does that indicate? Well, first of all, let's finish the rest of the phrase because we don't want to just look at the word "believe" in isolation from the rest of the verse because he says specifically that these are *those who believe in His name*. They believe in His name.

Now, we've talked about this before, but the idea of the name, particularly the name of God in the Bible is significant. It's often used as a placeholder for God Himself. To believe in the name of Jesus then is to believe in the fullness of who He is, the fullness of who He's revealed Himself to be. All that the Bible then teaches us about Jesus is included in this believing in His name. Those who receive Jesus, another way of saying it is they receive Him as He truly is, as He has revealed Himself to be.

Now, John has already begun to unravel for us who Jesus is. So, for example, one must come to believe that Jesus is God in human flesh who has existed eternally, who created the world, one with the Father and the Spirit, and yet an individual, unique person. It means if He is creator, He is Lord of all. It's to understand that if He is God, He's worthy then of our worship, and He's worthy then of our submission. To be the adopted sons and daughters of God is to come receiving Him for who He really is and trusting in Him.

There is this personal recognition of need for Him and that my relationship to Him must now be determined by who I understand Him to be. There's this reorientation to God that comes with true faith. That's why often the Bible uses the two words repent and believe. Jesus, when He comes preaching the gospel in Mark 1, says repent and believe the gospel in verse 15. Sometimes the word repentance is used without the word believe, and sometimes the word believe is used without the word repentance. The idea is they're combined together.

It's not that they mean exactly the same thing, but when a person comes to trust in Jesus, there's an understanding of who He is and an understanding that I am turning from my sin to the Lord Jesus. That is not to say, as some often misunderstand, that we're saying that you must clean up your life and then come to Jesus. This is an instantaneous reality that happens in the heart all at the same time.

The Bible speaks of both repentance and faith as gifts from God. This is a radical realization of seeing the light, beholding the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, and realizing I need to trust in this Jesus Christ and submit myself to Him. He is my only hope of salvation.

This is the idea of those who believe in His name. Perhaps you're here this morning, and like so many who live where we live in the Bible Belt, you grew up, you went to Sunday school, you've heard all of the truths about Jesus. Maybe you know all of the facts, and maybe you would even check them all off and say, yeah, I believe all of the facts, but have you ever personally come to the place in which you've put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ when you recognize, no, it's not just an external reality of things that I believe. I personally need the Lord Jesus Christ. I need to know Him and submit myself to Him, and coming to Him as my only hope of salvation. This is saving faith.

But earlier, as we think about this, we need to consider the fact that we learned that our real issue, the reason, what keeps us from this saving response to Jesus Christ is not evidence or a lack of intellect. At the end of the day, it is spiritual deadness, darkness of sin.

Here's the real question, how does one trapped in the darkness of sin, blinded by the god of this world, ever come to receive the Lord Jesus Christ? How's that going to happen? If we're dead and can do nothing to save ourselves, how in the world can we come to saving faith? Well, this is the first of what will be many instances in the Gospel of John where we have this wonderful, God-given tension, in the good sense of the use of that term, between human responsibility and divine sovereignty.

These are here spoken of as those who received the Light and believed in Him. And yet, John's going to close out this section by explaining the deeper reality behind that reception of Christ and faith in Him. Notice verse 13: *who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

Now think for a moment, who does the word “who” refer to? When he says those *who were born*, who is the who? He's referring to those who received Him and believed in His name. That is who he's referring to.

And notice, John is peeling back the curtain now. He's giving us behind the scenes the spiritual realities that happen behind faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And he's going to begin to teach us about spiritual birth. This is why he uses the word born, who were born. We'll get to this in John three with the discussion between Jesus and Nicodemus and being born again. But he's sort of teeing up that discussion here of the spiritual birth. And what he's going to do is give us four descriptions of the spiritual birth. Three of them are negative, that is, what the spiritual birth is not, and one positive, what the spiritual birth is.

Look at the verse again. Notice he begins, those *who were born*, and now the next three phrases are negative. They're born, *not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man...*

Now stop there just for a moment. A couple of things. One, he's distinguishing physical birth from spiritual birth. They're not the same thing. That is to be born again, to have spiritual new birth, is not a matter of bloodlines. With physical birth, we have two bloodlines coming together in that new baby that's born. This is not a matter then of ethnicity or having to be from a certain people group. It has nothing, that has nothing to do with the spiritual birth.

He also says, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man. Depending on your Bible translation, it may say, nor of the will of the husband, because the Greek word for husband and man in this case is the same word. And in context, context is what helps us choose between them. But honestly, the meaning is the same. What he's getting at is the spiritual birth has nothing to do with human will in the same way that physical birth is two people getting married and desiring to have children, even though God is obviously sovereign over the gift of human birth as well.

The spiritual birth is not like that. It's not a matter of physical processes or the will of man being exerted for that to take place. Instead, what is it? Phrase number four, who were born *of God*.

The spiritual birth is a birth that God Himself produces. Those who receive the Light and believe with saving faith are those who have been born of God. As He will tell Nicodemus, you must be born again.

Let me just quickly explain this and we'll come to it again as I said in the future. But he's explaining why it is that when the Light comes into the world, there are some who reject that Light, but there are these others who come to receive the Light. Why, how can that be possible? What separates these two groups of people? Is it that one has more education? Is it one group is smarter or one group is more righteous than the other? No, it's none of that.

None of those human realities. The issue is regeneration. That's the theological term the scriptures use. It is to be made new. This is the process in which that spiritual death becomes spiritual life. Titus refers to this in Titus 3:5:

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,

Theologically, what must happen when you hear the gospel preach, repent and believe the gospel, in order for that to happen, something else must happen first. God must produce this spiritual new birth in which we are regenerated so that now we have spiritual eyes to see and a spiritual mind to understand. And He even gives us the gift of repentance and faith that we can respond and receive the light of Jesus Christ.

This is a theological explanation for why these received the light and why they came to have saving faith. And it's a reminder to us that when it comes to our salvation, all the glory goes to God and God alone. In fact, as we think about how to apply this passage to our own lives, I think it's proper for us to phrase each of them in this way. Give glory to God in four different responses to this passage.

Number one, **Give God glory by Trusting His Witness.** To give God glory in part is to agree with God. When God says something is true, to say yes, that is true. And when God sends a witness and testifies to that witness and the witness then speaks on God's behalf and says this or that, it is glorifying God to believe His testified and affirmed witness. In this case, John the Baptist gives testimony to Jesus Christ as the God man, the savior of the world. So give glory to God by believing the witness that God sent.

Secondly, **Give God Glory by Trusting In His Son.** To believe in him, to not be like those who reject the Light but coming to the Light, receiving the Light by faith. This obviously begins at salvation. If you're lost this morning, this is the place to begin. If God is stirring in your heart conviction over sin, maybe you're realizing that you've had sort of a head knowledge about Jesus but never really personally trusted in Jesus in repentance and faith, then cry out to Him now in your heart, calling out to Him for forgiveness of sin and confessing your faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and you will be saved and adopted as a son or daughter.

But I think it's also important to understand that when we come to believe in the name of Jesus, that does not cease to affect us at salvation but continues to affect us throughout sanctification. Continue believing in the name of Jesus, that is believing daily and reminding yourself through meditating on Christ of who He is, who is this Jesus and how should that affect the way I think and live my life? This helps us in the battle with sin.

When you're discouraged, when you're tempted, when you're anxious, when you're afraid, when you're frustrated, when you're sick, when you're worn out, turn your mind back to the Lord Jesus Christ and believe in His name. What do I mean? Call to mind the character of the Lord Jesus and remind yourself this is my Savior, my God, my King, even my friend who is with me even now. As we learned in Hebrews, He even intercedes for us and sympathizes with our weaknesses, which means He is actively engaged in our lives to help us in the battle with sin. So fan into flame, reignite your faith in the name of Jesus. Recall Him throughout the day.

Number three, **Give Glory To God By Living Out Your Adoption.** If you're a believer in Christ today, this passage says you're a son or daughter of God and with all the rights and privileges that come with being His child. Just think about how much encouragement and

motivation that brings when it comes to thinking about our eternal security. If you're adopted, if you're a son or you're a daughter, that's not going to go away. He's brought you into the family at this point. And if you're a true believer, you've been adopted. This is why he'll go on to say later, Jesus will say, listen, no one can take you out of my hand. No one can take you out of the father's hand. Our adoption as we think on that should affirm our understanding of the eternal security of our salvation. Even with all we've done, even with all the things we still do in the daily battle with sin, and He loves us, He holds us fast, and He won't let go.

How do you give glory to God for your adoption? One, by giving Him thanks. And two, by living as if that's actually true, as if you really are a son or daughter of God, which would include both the battle to fight sin as we're conformed more to His image, but also to realize the freedom to run back to Him when we fall flat on our face. That He loves us and He receives us as a father receives a son or a daughter. He's eager for us to return to Him when we sin.

And number four, **Give Glory To God As One Who Is Born Again**. Recognize that God gets all the glory for your salvation and everything that comes with it, including this process of sanctification that you've now entered into. Understand it this way. Take, for instance, when you read the Word, and I hope you read the Word as a regular habit of life, and you're reading the Word, and at times the Spirit illuminates the Word to you in such a way that you see and understand the text in a way that you hadn't seen before, in a deeper way, or you see an application to your life from that text you hadn't seen before. This is part of what we call illumination, the Spirit illuminating God's Word to us and applying the Word to us. Understand that only happens to believers. It only happens to you if you're born again. Where did that come from? God, so give glory to God.

Thank you, Lord, for showing me this, for applying this to my heart. It's even God who gives us the ability to appreciate the created world around us and to see the glory of God in it. When you see a sunrise and your heart leaps for joy and you begin to worship God, where does that come from? You're born again, the Holy Spirit is actively working in you so that you now see the world rightly, as we should see it. Give glory to God for that.

We are those who get to hear the songs of the heavens, as the psalmist says, that the heavens are declaring the glory of God. Believers, hear that song. We see in creation the glory of God, why? Because we're born again, because He has done a work in us and is continuing to do a work in us, so give Him glory for being born as one of His spiritual children. Glorify Jesus, the true Light who grants adoption to every born-again believer.

Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we ask You would help us in this regard. We're so overwhelmed at You as we think on these truths that John reveals to us and reminds us of here in this passage. Help us to leave this place marveling again at our Savior and who You are and what You have done and are still doing in us.

It is baffling to us that You would save us. It's baffling to us that You would adopt us and call us Your children, we who were once Your enemies, now seated at Your table as sons and daughters and friends of the King of Kings. We pray that these things would give us

confidence in Christ to walk in the newness of life that He has given to us with joy, with increased love in our hearts for our Savior. We ask it in Christ's precious name, amen.