

Christmas 2022

Sermon #3: To Those Who Believe

John 1:6-13

Ray Anderson ---- December 11, 2022

Merry Christmas, people of Grace! Merry Christmas too, to you that are home and are tuning in today. It's a privilege to be with you this morning and to open up the Word of God to you. It has certainly opened me up this week.

During the Christmas season, in order to keep it fresh in my mind, I like to meditate on different aspects of that first Christmas. We know the whole story now, right? So, to go back and capture in it in a fresh way is helpful and renews the spirit of the season. So, I like to look at it from different perspectives or experiences of the different characters that were involved in that first Christmas at the birth of Christ and His coming.

Over the years as I've done this, my favorite is the experience of the angels. They knew what was going on. We know they sang about it, they announced the birth of the Christ child to the shepherds in this spectacular way. But what led up to that? How did that come about?

So, if you'll allow me to indulge my imagination a little bit, I'd like to tell you the story behind that. The angels are watching all this unfold. They had visited Mary and told her about who her child was going to be and His significance. They're seeing Jesus prepare, and again, they know what Jesus is up to. But there doesn't seem to be any plan for a triumphal entry. The God of the universe is coming to visit humanity and it's happening in a little stable in a little town.

The kings won't come until later. There's no fanfare. The angels are on the ready. *Lord, just give us the word and we're going to go tell it on the mountain and sing that Jesus Christ is born!* But no orders come. It just doesn't seem right. Someone has to say something. The King of Kings, the God of the universe, the Creator of everything, is coming to humanity. God Most High is becoming flesh and the angels can't contain themselves—in my imagination.

Finally, one goes boldly to the Lord and says, *God, let us light up the sky. Let us sing of the birth of this child. Jesus is coming to the world! Somebody's got to tell them!*

And so, God says, *Okay, see those shepherds down there at night around that campfire? You can tell them. But just them.*

The angel says, *Okay, I need some volunteers for this. Who wants to volunteer for this mission?* And a many angels hold up their hands and say, *Yeah, I'm in.* He says, *Okay, we've got to start off slowly.* He goes down and makes this initial announcement to the shepherds and then—boom! The skies light up and a myriad of angels begin to sing—*"Hark the herald angels sing, Glory to this newborn king."* See, someone has to tell the people what's going on, what's happening here.

See, the arrival of a significant person shouldn't be looked at in a normal kind of way. And we do this today, right? A judge enters the courtroom and the bailiff says, "All rise. The honorable Wilford Smith is here." When the judge enters the room, the tone of the room changes. Everyone is expected to stand up.

We do it in sports, especially in basketball, because we can make it dark. The lights go out, the spotlight begins to roam the crowd, and the announcer comes on and calls for everybody's attention. And there's no doubt that the home team has taken the arena.

We do it when the president enters the room. We play "Hail to the Chief" and everyone is expected to stand. Because when someone significant enters the room, someone's got to call attention to it.

They did it when Queen Elizabeth entered. They sang "God Save the Queen" and you were expected to bow, because the queen was here.

And so, to me, these angels making this announcement makes perfect sense. *Someone's got to tell these people that Jesus is born!*

Well, our passage today as we're going through John chapter 1 starts with another person—an announcer—John the Baptist. It's thirty years after the birth of Jesus and Jesus is going to publicly reveal His true identity. And someone needs to call attention to the fact that a significant person is coming on the scene. And so, we read in verse 6 in chapter 1 of John:

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning the light, so that through him all might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only to be a witness to the light.

John the Baptist makes it perfectly clear when he makes these announcements: *I'm just the announcer. I'm not the light. Jesus is from God. Jesus is greater than I am. He's the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Don't look at me. Look at Him. Focus on Him.*

In this passage, it helps us to see that there needs to be an explanation of who Jesus is, because of what it says in verse 5 where Kevin left off last week. Verse 5 of chapter 1: **"The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it."**

The idea is not that the darkness even could overcome it, because darkness gets driven away when light comes. But the issue here is that the darkness didn't comprehend what was happening. It didn't understand. It didn't grasp the significance of the coming of the Light. The people in that darkness didn't understand the significance of who Jesus is in this arrival. And so, someone needed to stand up in the midst of that and tell the people, *The Savior of the world has come. He's right there! Don't miss this! This person is significant.*

Isaiah wrote it this way in chapter 9 of his book. He says, **"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.**

John in verse 9 says, **"The true light that gives light to everyone has come to the world."**

That's what is unfolding here in this first chapter of John. And John, already in these first verses, has shown us the significance of this person of Jesus, and he's telling us how we're supposed to respond to Him. In the first verses he says that Jesus was there from the beginning; He was the Creator of everything; He is God in the flesh; He's the Light of the World. He'll go on in the next verses to talk about the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us.

See, the Light of the World is come. An announcer needed to point out the significance of that Light's arrival.

And John is going to tell us now, in terms of how people respond to that light. He's going to map out two particular ways, but let's look at verses 10 through 13:

"He was in the world"—notice John has made a shift here. he's been talking about Jesus in reference to being the Word and the Light—now he's talking about Him being a person. **"He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him. ¹¹ He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of**

God—¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God"—a spiritual birth, a new birth.

So, he switched from the metaphor of Light and Word to a person. He has come.

It says that He came unto His own. Certainly, there's a specific part of that, that He came to the Jews, to His own people, God's chosen tribe. But He came to all humanity. He makes reference to creation, so it's all of us that He comes to, the firstborn.

But they didn't recognize Him. Jesus was unrecognized. They didn't see the significance of who He was. Therefore, they didn't receive Him as the coming one, God in the Flesh, Light in the darkness, the Creator who is visiting His creation.

There's an interesting progression here in this section of the passage. Follow it here. It's Recognize—Receive—Believe—Become.

If you don't recognize Him and who He is, that He is the one sent by God, and is God in the flesh, visiting His creation; then you won't receive Him as that. So, the announcer tries to tell you who it is.

Or if you do recognize who He is and you receive Him as that king, you still have to take the step to believe in His name, to believe who He is, embrace Him, in order for you to become a child of God.

Response #1: Don't Recognize --- Don't Receive

John outlines these two responses. The first response is to not recognize Him and not receive Him. There are people then and certainly now that we see that don't care about the things of God. They feel safer in the darkness. They don't want to recognize the significance of who Jesus is, because if you recognize that and receive Him as God in the flesh, then you have to become accountable for how you live your life and who you are. They don't want to receive Him as that kind of king. They may accept Him as a good man and really as a great teacher. That Golden Rule is a good thing, right? But they're not going to recognize it and receive Him as God become flesh. Even though the evidence is clear and presented to them, they don't embrace Jesus in those ways.

Now before I tell you about the second response of those who do recognize Him and receive Him and believe, let me explain what John is doing in this first section of this gospel.

You need to see that the way He's writing this is going to point us to the significance and will emphasize the importance of this second response, and particularly, the central idea of this response, the most important response we need to have to Jesus.

These first eighteen verses in John chapter 1 are written as a poem. No, it doesn't exactly read that way to us in the English version of this. But in the Greek, people of that day would have recognized it as a poem. And it's a particular kind of poem called a chiasm. What that means is that verses 1 through 11 point to a central idea in 12. And then verses 13 through 18 support that central idea. The best way to think of a chiasm is like a big "greater than" sign. So, you have verse 1 and 2 that actually relate to verse 18. Verse 3 relates to 17, and on down. And it comes to this point where the poem has a hinge. And a hinge has three parts to it--each of the side pieces, but most particularly, the pin. The pin is what ties it together. It's what allows it to pivot. And so, for this chiasm particularly, the hinge and the pin are located in verse 12. So, it's important to see—and again, he does this for emphasis so that you don't miss what is the most important part of responding to Jesus.

So, it goes this way. Verse 12a is "Yet to all who did receive Him ..." That's one part of the hinge. Verse 12c is "... He gives the right to become children of God." It's held together by verse 12b: "...to those who believe in His name." That's the key. See, salvation is by faith, believing. Faith is our expression of believing in His name.

Response #2: Receive Him, Believe in His Name

So, the second response goes like this. We start with recognizing who He is, receiving, believing, and becoming. In his gospel, John is going to build this beautiful picture, a beautiful case, to help people recognize the significance of who Jesus is. And by recognizing Him, he's encouraging people to receive Him and to believe in Jesus.

He's already told us in these first few verses of chapter 1 that Jesus is the Word, He's the Creator, He's the Light. By the end of chapter 1 he is going to show us or attribute seven titles to Jesus. The titles come from the disciples that are encountering Jesus for the first time. Here's what they are:

- The Lord
- The Lamb of God
- Rabbi (or Teacher)
- Messiah (or Christ)

The One who Moses and the prophets wrote about
The Son of God
The King of Israel

But all those are titles—they're not names. And we're to believe in the name. God is One. We talk about the Trinity and how God is one expressed in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And he has one particular, unique name. It's called Yahweh. It means "I AM."

We first hear about this name and God revealing it when God says it to Moses at the burning bush incident. After He gives Moses instructions—*I want you to go back and rescue my people out of the slavery of Egypt*—Moses, in his questioning of God, is saying, *Is this really a smart idea? Let me ask you one more question. When I go back to those people and they say, "Who sent you?", who do I say sent me?*

And God says, *Yahweh—I AM that I AM. I AM has sent you.* And Moses goes, and we know the rest of that story.

As you read through the Gospel of John—and I've decided I'm going to do that this Christmas season—you'll find that there are seven times when Jesus claims the name "I AM." He says:

I am the Light of the World.
I am the Bread of Life.
I am the Resurrection.
I am the door for the sheep.
I am the Good Shepherd.
I am the way, the truth, and the life.
I am the true vine.

John builds into his gospel these seven statements and proclamations from Jesus saying "I AM." Jesus will say that one more time before He's gone. In the Garden of Gethsemane on the night when He's betrayed and the soldiers come to arrest Him, Jesus asks them, "Who are you seeking?" And the soldiers say, "We're looking for Jesus." And Jesus' response to them is, "I am he." He's claiming to be God, God in the flesh, the one and holy name of God, the Most High name of God. "Yahweh" is who Jesus says He is.

Now John is going to write in his narrative of the gospel, for every encounter a person has with Jesus, this question: How are they going to respond to Jesus and His revelation of who He is? Are they going to believe in Him? Or are they going to reject Him?

In John chapter 20 he writes why he chose what he did to write in his book. John says this: “Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ but these were written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.”

The pin of this poem is believing in the name.

So, what’s the deal with this name? Look what Paul wrote in Philippians chapter 2. He says, “Therefore God exalted Him”—Jesus—“to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

It’s a name that is above every name. There will be a day when everyone who did not recognize Jesus and did not receive Him will bow and acknowledge Him as the King. The agnostic, the atheist, the rebel, the lover of darkness—everybody in heaven and on earth and under the earth will bow.

Paul writes in Ephesians 1 again about this name and Jesus’ exaltation--that He’s been exalted “far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but in the day to come.” Do you get that? It’s a unique name that we’re believing in; it’s a unique person who we’re believing in. And it’s true for all time—the current age and the one to come.

But not only that—it’s a unique name in all places. “There is no other name under heaven ...” In Acts 4, it’s written, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

As you listen to the Christmas songs during this season, listen for all the titles that we’re giving to Jesus. Listen for His name.

See, recognizing who Jesus is, is one step. And hopefully that leads to someone being willing to receive Him as the One. But you must believe in the name in order to become a child of God. We’ve heard what the name is and who owns that name.

But what is this believing thing? Sometimes we make it a mystery and confusing. But I think the best way I describe a belief or biblical faith is this. It's a transfer of trust. I'm transferring my trust from being good enough, being well-behaved enough and doing all the good kinds of things I can do to make me acceptable to God; and I'm transferring my trust to the person of Jesus. And that trust goes to the One who did something that I couldn't do for myself. And He is someone I am not: He is the living God.

So, it's this transfer of trust. You shift your weight from yourself to Jesus.

Sometimes we make this kind of a mystery, and it's really tragic that we do that, that *There's something unique about this kind of belief, and I don't know if I have it or not, or if I have enough of not.* Sometimes we make it something that we measure and that's generally based on one story in the Bible about a father who brings his son to be healed by Jesus. And the disciples can't do it, and Jesus comes back, and the father says, *Look, I believe, but help my unbelief.*

And we take that one incidence and make faith something we measure and quantify. That's not what that story is about, actually. The reason he doubts is because the disciples can't do it and they're supposed to be followers of this great King. It's not a doubt in Jesus at all. So, there's none of this measuring faith. Faith is not quantitative; it's qualitative. It's not how much I have; it's who I have faith in. Misplaced faith is tragic. So, you need to know who you're putting your faith into.

And this type of faith we actually know how to do, and we do it all the time. When you drove here this morning to church, you trusted a lot of people that you do not know, that they would follow the rules of the road and that everybody can get to their destination safely. You transferred your trust, not in your defensive driving skills only, but to other people.

When you get on an airplane, you put the full weight of your trust—you are all in—until you have to get off. So, you go and you get on that airplane and you are trusting that that plane, that pilot, those mechanics and those engineers, and the whole system of transportation, will safely get you to your destination. You transfer your trust. You can't go halfway through the flight and say, "That's all the faith I have. Let me off this plane." They'd say, "That's not how it works, Mr. Anderson. Sit down and buckle up. We're going to go the whole way." It's a transfer of trust for them to do something I can't do for myself.

When you go see a doctor, after you've sort of self-diagnosed and self-medicated with over-the-counter stuff and it hasn't worked, and you go see a doctor, and he or she prescribes a medicine to you or a treatment plan, and you choose to do their plan over your plan, that's biblical faith. You've transferred your trust. Now you trust them for reasons—they have a title, education, and experience that you don't. They know stuff that you don't know, and so you move from your self-diagnosis and self-treatment to their treatment plan. That's biblical faith. It's a transfer of trust. We know how to do that. We do it with people with titles and with people that we deem trustworthy. That's why it's so disturbing when someone we've trusted violates that trust and they're not trustworthy.

What John is doing in his gospel here is writing his gospel in a way so that you will know that Jesus is trustworthy, that He's unique among all people. He's going to give Him all kinds of titles, He's going to keep pointing to Him. Jesus is going to claim seven times that He is I AM.

Just in this first chapter in these first verses he's shown us that Jesus was from the beginning—He's the Creator. Through His birth and now in His public ministry you can trust Him. You can believe in His name. And if you believe in His name, you get to become a child of God. This kind of trust is summarized in the pivot point of this poem: "To those who believe in His name ..." It's a transfer of trust.

Philip Yancey is my favorite author. I've read all of his books, and in his book *The Jesus You Never Knew*, he writes this: "[According to Jesus, what I think about Him and how I respond will determine my destiny for all eternity.](#)"

Many times, for many people, biblical faith or believing in His name is really expressed by calling out to God in prayer. That certainly was true of me when I was sixteen years old. One summer night in the quietness of my bedroom that evening, I called out to God. And I said, "God, if you're really there, I want You to come into my life. I want to experience Your peace and forgiveness that I've heard about. So, come in and take control."

I didn't know much biblically. But something happened. Something changed at that moment in time. And I keep reflecting back on it. Ray Anderson became a child of God. God's Spirit testified to my spirit that Ray Anderson is a child of God. Now I didn't have immediate changes in my behavior or my attitude. That did get better over time by choices I made. But something happened when I chose to believe in the name of Jesus.

If you believe in His name, it says that you will be given the right to become children of God. The children of God have privileges. They have rights that others don't. They invoke the power when they invoke His name, so we pray in the name of Jesus. The children of God get provisions. They get an inheritance. They get protection even in the midst of suffering and the pain of this world. They get a promise about a future. Children of God get those things.

I love it when in Romans, Paul writes this. It says, "For all creation" —all of creation, the animals, other people, the angels, everything that is created—"waits in eager anticipation for the children of God to be revealed." Isn't that fun? They want to know who it is.

Are you one? Are you a child of God? Is that one over there? How about that one there? Are they children of God? It will all get revealed.

That's why, I think, it says that there's this celebration in heaven when the inhabitants of heaven hear of someone has believed in the name of Jesus and has become a child of God. *We've got to celebrate this. Look over there! Ray Anderson trusted Christ!*

The question that John builds into his gospel throughout is that in these encounters with Jesus there's this question about if they will recognize and receive Him. And those who are receiving Him, will they believe? Or will they be one of those who says, *No, that Jesus is not all that special. I don't need Him. I don't acknowledge who He is.* Will they believe in the only name given in heaven or earth by which they must be saved?

Or what about us? What about you? Have you taken that step to recognize and to receive and to believe, and then become a child of God? If so, let's take this Christmas season and remember who came as this little baby. See, we get to hear the rest of the story and we've trusted in Him, so we pack all that knowledge into this little baby and we celebrate. Our King is born! This is where His revelation to the world started.

Now there are those among us and maybe listening to us who maybe haven't recognized who Jesus is or haven't received Him. And therefore, they haven't believed that Jesus is God come in the flesh. They haven't believed in the only name by which they must be saved. Maybe this Christmas season is your season for spiritual birth. Maybe it's time for you to embrace and recognize and receive and believe who Jesus really is.

Believing in the name of Jesus is expressed by calling out to God in prayer, much like I did. Here's an example of a prayer:

Lord Jesus, I recognize that You are the one true living God come in the flesh. You are my only hope to forgive my sins and to overcome my shame. I transfer trust to You and ask that You come and take up residence in me. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

We're going to leave that up on the screen for a little bit longer for those of you who of you who haven't recognized and received and believed, for you to consider that for yourself. There's nothing magical about those words, but it is the heart's desire to put your trust in Jesus that makes you right with God. And you can do that right here, right now.

If you have trusted Jesus and you've recognized and received and believed and become, then you don't have to keep praying a prayer like that again and again. Let God's Spirit testify to your spirit that you are a child of God, and take the opportunity to thank Him for what He's done and the privileges and the rights you have as a child.

And here's what you get to be: you get to be an announcer. For some today, maybe I'm the announcer for you. But you get to be an announcer and tell others that that's the one—Jesus. *Jesus is the Messiah. He's God in the flesh. You need to pay attention to Him, not me. Don't look at my life—it may not be a pretty picture. Look at His, though. He's different from the rest of us.* You can be that announcer to someone else.

So, Grace, let us gather in this Christmas season as children of God and celebrate and rejoice at the coming of our great Savior and King, Jesus. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, thank You that You saw us in our need; that You developed a plan. And You gave us announcers in our individual lives, and in this situation, John the Baptist, that by pointing to Jesus, people might believe, and in believing, they might have life in His name. Lord Jesus, we celebrate You. We thank You. We do so in Your great name. Amen.