

PM John 1:1-14 "...to as many as received Him"

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Preacher: Rev John Sharp

[0 : 00] Looking at this morning, and so the reading is the same, John chapter 1, and reading the first 14 verses. Very well-known portion of scripture.

John chapter 1 at the beginning. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

Through Him all things were made. Without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of all 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 testify concerning that light, so that through Him all might believe.

He Himself was not the light. He came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him.

[1 : 09] He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him. Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.

Children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision, or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.

And we have seen His glory. The glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Amen, and may God add His blessing to the reading of His Word. I want this evening to continue basing our thoughts on this first chapter of John, these opening verses of John's Gospel.

But before we come to that, the key to John's Gospel we find at the end of the Gospel, because John tells us why he has written the Gospel. We don't need to try and work it out.

[2 : 14] He tells us why he wrote the Gospel. In John chapter 20, verse 31, he says, But these are written, that you might believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you might have life in His name.

So, he tells us that he writes for three reasons. He writes that you might believe, that you might trust in Jesus, and that you might understand who Jesus is, His identity, and you might understand His purpose for coming into the world, the work that He came to do.

These are written, that you might believe, that Jesus is the Messiah, which points us to the work that Jesus came into the world to do as the Saviour, the Son of God, pointing us to His identity.

Who is Jesus? Well, the first chapter, in fact, of John, tells us everything we need to know in answer to that question. He is God Himself.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He's identified as God Himself in verse 1, the Creator of the Universe in verse 3, the source of all life, in verse 4, and then later in the chapter is the Messiah, in verse 41, the one promised in the Old Testament to be the Saviour, in verse 45, and so on.

[3 : 49] So, John points us in these opening verses of the Gospel to the identity of Jesus. And I suppose in a sense, as we read the Gospel, everything must fit into one of these reasons for John writing.

Either encouragement to believe, or pointing us to the identity of Jesus, or to the work of Jesus. Jesus came into the world to be the Saviour, to give His life on the cross for our salvation.

And there again, in that first chapter, we have the words of John the Baptist pointing to Jesus and saying, Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. And it's all there in the first chapter.

This morning, we were looking at Jesus as the light shining in the darkness. The Gospel begins, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not understood it. And later in John's Gospel, in chapter 12, at verse 46, Jesus says, I have come into the world as a light to bring truth and understanding.

[5 : 14] I have come into the world as a light so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. Well, having set before us Christ in all His glory and grace as the light of the world, John also shows us in this first chapter how we should respond to Jesus.

And it's that flip side I want to look at this morning. that the primary focus of the chapter is to point us to Jesus, who He is and what He came to do. But the secondary side of that is our response to this Jesus.

And it seems to me that the first chapter spells out some of the ingredients of an appropriate response. A response just as relevant for us today as it was when John was writing his Gospel.

And so I want to unpack that a little bit. John shows us four appropriate responses to Jesus.

Understanding, acceptance, submission, and testimony. And I want to look at each of these in turn.

[6 : 31] And I suppose with each of these headings there are questions. are you seeking to understand Jesus better? It's always worth reminding ourselves that when Paul prays for the church at Ephesus the crux of his prayer is I pray that you may know God better.

And no matter how well we understand God we can all understand Him better. Are we seeking to understand better? Secondly, the simple question have you received Him into your life?

Accepted Him as your Savior? Thirdly, are you submitted to the Lordship of Christ?

It's one thing to say I trust in Jesus I believe that He is my Savior. It's another thing to walk day by day submitting to His leading and His Lordship.

And fourth question in what ways do you bear testimony today to Jesus? Well let's have a wee look at each of these headings in turn.

[7 : 46] Understanding, acceptance, submission and testimony. First of all understanding. John wants to engage our intellect.

He wants to inform our minds. Jesus is the truth, the light coming into the darkness of our mind.

And we don't respond to God in some sort of intellectual vacuum. I'm really quite annoyed when folks say that to have faith is to somehow or another take some leap of faith into the dark.

scripture never asks us to take some leap of faith into the dark. It always asks us to trust God, to trust Jesus on the basis of sufficient evidence.

I think it's in John chapter 5 that Jesus encourages people to believe in him and he gives a whole sequence of areas for belief. To believe in the promise of the Old Testament that he is now fulfilling.

[8 : 56] To believe in the evidence of the word from the father that people heard at his baptism.

This is my son. To believe in the evidence of his miracles and so on.

He asks people to believe in him on the basis if you like of the evidence before their eyes. Faith is not some leap in the dark but a trust based on sufficient reason.

Now we're told that John the Baptist shows us an understanding of who Jesus is with reference to John the Baptist.

He says down in verse 30 this is the one pointing to Jesus I meant when I said a man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.

and he was before me and that's one of the themes that we find in John's gospel. It comes up again in chapter after chapter that Christ existed before he was born.

[10 : 10] He was the eternal son of God. and it seems that John who is in fact older than Jesus John recognises something else.

He acknowledges that Jesus existed in the realms of eternity and saw in him something of divinity.

And we're reminded on that theme of later in the chapter when Jesus is discoursing with the Pharisees.

He says before Abraham was born I am. I existed before Abraham. So John shows us that he understands in some way something of who Jesus truly is.

And he also shows that he understood something of what Jesus came to do. Verse 29 The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, look the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And when John says this he is indicating that he understands how all the pictures of salvation down through the centuries which involved the sacrifice of a lamb going back to the Passover in Egypt and the Passover that the Jews had celebrated down through the centuries.

[11 : 36] this whole idea of a lamb being sacrificed to take away the sins of people. Something central in the Old Testament.

John points to Jesus and says, look the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. So John acknowledges that in part he understands who Jesus truly was and what he had come into the world to do.

And this particular understanding of John the Baptist is clearly based on God's revelation.

In verse 33 John the Baptist says, I would not have known him except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me the man in whom you see the spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.

So John tells us that he had a special revelation as to the identity of Jesus. And we too have the revelation of God.

[12 : 45] We have the revelation of God in the created world all around us. Think of Psalm 19 which celebrates how God has made himself known to the whole world through his created order.

God and then that psalm goes on in the second half to see how God has made himself known through his revealed word. God reveals himself in creation and he reveals himself in scripture and revelation is the key to knowing anything about God.

And the simple question is is our mind open to God's revelation or is our thinking governed by our opinions and prejudices.

Professor James S. Stewart once said Christianity is the revelation of God not the research of man.

Christianity is the revelation of God not the research of man. Jesus himself said I am the way, the truth and the life.

[14 : 02] And truth needs to be laid hold of to be understood. Are we trying to increase our understanding of Jesus?

So first we need understanding in our response. Then we need to respond in the realm of our wills. Our minds need to be informed but then in the light of that knowledge we need to act.

And what are we asked to do here? Well simply to accept Christ as saviour and lord. John 1 verse 12 to all who received him to those who believed in his name he gave the right to become children of God.

To all who received him. If we receive him if we open the door of our heart and let Christ in then he births us into the family of God.

Not simply the negative that our sins are forgiven but we're told something far more wonderful than that namely that we will become children of God.

[15 : 11] To celebrate my 25 years in the ministry my congregation presented me with Holman Hunt's famous picture Christ the light of the world. And you may be familiar with that picture it's a gloomy around the edges and there's a door and the doors all encompassed about with vines and weeds and what not door and Christ is seen on the outside knocking on this door a door with no apparent handle and the explanation we have told is that the handle is in the inside.

It's a picture challenging us to do something in relation to Christ namely to open the door of our life and let him in.

To all who received him have you received him? Have you opened the door to your life? And do you keep the door open day by day?

Understanding, acceptance, submission. First we respond with our minds seeking to grasp what God has made known to us.

We need to respond with our wills, trusting Christ for salvation. We need to respond with our hearts. Jesus tells us that the key to everything in a sense is loving God with all your mind and heart and strength and soul.

[16 : 47] And if we accept Christ into our lives then he comes as Lord and we therefore need to go a step further and that is submit to his Lordship, his ruler power over our lives.

And going to back to John the Baptist in verse 29 again we're told that John saw Jesus coming towards him and said look the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

This is the one I meant when I said a man who comes after me has surpassed me or literally who ranks before me.

So John indicates that Christ surpasses him, ranks before him. Now remember here is John at the height of his popularity crowds flocking to him.

Was he jealous when Jesus came along to diminish his being in the limelight? No, John points his followers away from himself and tells them to go and follow Jesus.

[17:57] He wasn't concerned about being center stage. And that sometimes can be a problem for us. We all like a supposed to be center stage.

But what is the center of your life? Is it yourself? Or is it Christ? Have you submitted to his lordship? Abraham Kuiper, the famous Dutch theologian politician, he was prime minister of Holland around about 1900, said this, there is not one square inch of human life over which Christ does not say, I am king.

And as a politician he sought to work that principle out in the realms of politics, in the realms of industrial relations, in terms of education, and so on.

Not one square inch of your life over which Christ does not say, I am king, and have a right to rule. So understanding, acceptance, submission, and testimony.

[19:18] John's testimony is really quite clear as he encourages his followers to leave him and to go and follow Jesus. Down in verse 34 he says, in fact, I have seen and I testify that this is the son of God.

I have seen and I testify who Jesus truly is. And this response of testimony runs through the whole of that first chapter.

As we go on in the chapter in verse 41, we find that Andrew has come to Jesus and found out something about Jesus. And then in verse 41 we read the first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him we have found the Messiah.

In verse 45 we're told Philip found Nathanael and told him we have found the one Moses wrote about in the law and about whom the prophets also wrote, Jesus of Nazareth.

In verse 49 we're told that Nathanael declared, Rabbi you are the son of God, you are the king of Israel. And so as you go down through this chapter we have a sequence of one person finding another and testifying, telling them that they have found in Jesus the Messiah.

[20:45] And then at the last supper we find Jesus saying to the disciples, it's chapter 15 verse 27, you also must testify for you have been with me from the beginning.

well we've not been with Jesus from the beginning as it were, but we still are called to testify concerning him. Which raises questions for us, when did we last speak to someone about Jesus? When did we last invite someone to worship? It's often been said that the church is not a yachting club for our personal pleasure, but rather a fishing fleet, bearing in mind that Jesus said I will make you fishers of men.

And this task of testify, or evangelism if you like, it's not for the few interested in that sort of thing, it is simply a reasonable and appropriate response to Christ.

Something that our Lord calls the whole church to be engaged in. So John helps us to see Jesus in all his truths and grace and glory.

[22:01] And he indicates to us something of an appropriate response, seeking to inform our minds with the truth of God, seeking to act upon that information and receiving Jesus as our saviour, seeking to place the Lord at the centre of our lives, submitting to his rule and authority, and seeking to tell others, sharing the good news of God's love.

So John shows us in the chapter what an appropriate response to Jesus looks like. But he also indicates another response, and that's the response of rejection.

Back in verse 10, he was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

And we're reminded that Jesus divides people. Some accept him, others reject him. In John 10, verse 19, we're told the Jews who heard these words were again divided.

Many of them said he's demon possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him? In John 11, we find what I find perhaps the most astonishing reaction of folk in scripture.

[23:31] In John 11, we find Jesus bringing the dead Lazarus back to life. And what do we find? John 11, 45, many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary and had seen what Jesus did believed in him.

Right, that seems reasonable. He just raised someone from the dead. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

So from that day on they plotted to take his life. The response to Jesus doing this remarkable miracle, defeating death, was to plot to kill him.

And so we learn that many of the Jews around did not receive Jesus yes, they were soundly religious, yes, they were perfectly sincere, but they rejected Jesus.

Rejected him because he didn't fit in with their thinking. Rejected him because it was convenient to do so, because to accept Jesus would perhaps involve certain inconveniences.

[24 : 44] enemies. And so they rejected Jesus and therefore did not receive the right to become children of God. And beyond the Jews of Jesus' time, the world at large did not receive him.

Too busy with its own pursuits, too busy to have time for Jesus, and they too did not receive the right to become children of God. Does?

Well, we do not reject Christ, I hope, yet there can perhaps be a practical rejection when we fail to carry out in action what he asks of us, whatever it might be.

And we need to look honestly into our lives and confess our failures before him, seeking to resolve to become more faithful. Going back to that painting of Holman Hunt, showing the door entangled with weeds, is the door of our life as clear and open as it should be.

And perhaps it's always worth remembering that when Jesus said behold I stand at the door and knock, it was in a letter addressed to the church, not to unbelieving outsiders, but to the church.

[26 : 11] And Jesus said I stand at the door and knock as the door of our life as clear and open as it should be. The first chapter of John is one that never ceases to amaze me, it's a magnificent portion of scripture.

Shows us Jesus as the living God, creator of the universe, shows us God made man, shows us Jesus as Lord and King, shows him as the Christ, the Saviour, the Lamb of God, who lays down his life for us.

It shows us Jesus the light of the world, shining in our darkness. But if the primary focus of the chapter is upon Jesus and who he is and what he came into the world to do, then there is this secondary focus, namely how we respond to him.

And as we thought of understanding and acceptance and submission and testimony, I coupled with each of these a question at the beginning and with them I close.

Are you seeking to understand the Lord better? Have you received him into your life, opened the door to him as Saviour?

[27 : 42] Do you submit to his Lordship? And in what ways do you bear testimony to Jesus? John in his Gospel tells us, to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

Let us pray. Father God, we thank you for this marvellous portion of Scripture, which in a way tells us all that we need to know about who Jesus is and what he came into the world to do.

It also points us to how we should respond, seeking to grow in our understanding, accepting unreservedly Jesus as Saviour and his Lord and then seeking to testify to who he is and what he has done.

And so help us to be a people who bear these marks. In our Lord's name we pray. Amen. Thank you.