

Rejection

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. As always, if you'd like to learn a little more about us, you can go to FCCgreensburg.com or you can check out the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

But hey, we are excited today to get into the Word of God. But like always, let the Word of God get into us so that it can change these hearts to truly beat for the Lord.

Now, today's message is number four in the series called Word Alive, our Christmas series. We are going to be in John chapter 1, starting in verse 9.

And the title of the message is Rejection. Now, when you hear that word rejection, I wonder where your mind goes. Is it the old NBA player Dikembe Mutombo wagging his finger after rejecting a shot in basketball?

Or is it probably, like me, a little sadder of a place? One of my kids' favorite Christmas movies is Home Alone. One, two, and the third one, which, by the way, is very underrated because it doesn't have Macaulay Culkin in it, but it's really good.

[1 : 10] But I think we'd agree that there's nothing like the original Home Alone. And in that movie, you have Kevin, who just feels like everyone is picking on him as the youngest.

And after he gets in big trouble over attacking his antagonistic older brother, Buzz, and even spilling the milk and the soda, causing all kinds of chaos, he is sent to the attic for the night as everyone glares at him.

And he feels completely rejected by his family, which then, in his mind, even though it wasn't true, they disappear as he gets a taste of being alone at the holidays, torturing Marv and Harry, who then feel their own rejection in prison.

I even think of my childhood. I remember being in junior high, hanging out one summer at the Greensburg pool. And you know how it often goes with junior high boys just looking for a girlfriend. And we were swimming, talking to these girls, when one of them said that she would never like me because of my red hair and freckles. And while I just called her like a poo-poo head or something and laughed it off, you know, there was a reason.

[2 : 19] There's a reason I remember that 30 years later. The rejection hurt. And it made me in that moment feel less than. Now, this is the time where you go, aww.

Thanks for the comfort. But you know, rejection, it's real, isn't it? It doesn't just stop in our childhood. It can be felt in a marriage. It can be felt with your parents or even by your kids, at work, in the community, sadly, sometimes even at church.

And while I'm sorry to start on a depressing note, it's important that we understand that our Savior knows this more than any of us as he was rejected by those he came to love and to save.

Maybe even some of us. And before we go there, welcome back to week number four already of our Christmas series called Word Alive. We've been walking through John chapter 1, so feel free to turn to the Gospel of John.

We're going to be in verse 9 today is where we're going to start. John's about four-fifths of the way through your Bible. John 1, 9. And in this series so far, we've really jumped into some deep teaching on Jesus, discovering his true identity in our lives, that he's God.

[3 : 34] He's eternal. He's a part of the Trinity, three in one. Father, Son, Holy Spirit. He's creator. He's life. He's light. And last week, we talked about a witness to the light, John the Baptizer, and even how we are called to the witness projection program as we shine the light of Jesus in this world.

More important than collecting titles or money, toys, contracts, scholarships, or anything else this world offers, more crucial is knowing the zoe.

Remember that? The life and the hope that we have in Jesus. So what's our vision statement here at the church? What's our why?

And you've heard us say this a lot. Jesus first in everything. So as we look at this difficult topic of rejection that can easily bring some strong emotions, let's start in John 1, verse 9, as we read our main passage today.

And remember, the previous verses just told us all about John the Baptizer who came as a witness to the light. And then God's Word says this. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

[4 : 51] He, Jesus, was in the world, and though the world was made through him. Let that process. Though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.

He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Rejection. And listen, it always blows me away to know that what Jesus did for me as the true light who came into this world.

Because like you, I can think back on my life, I can think about my past and my sins, even my current struggles, and I can wonder how God can love someone like me with all I've done.

It is so easy to be filled with shame and regret. It's so easy. And it's so easy to also let our humanness, our flesh, question the identity that we've received as born-again believers washed clean by the blood of Christ.

But every time I go there, I'm reminded of a skit by the skit guys called God's Chisel. Write that down. Google it later. You will not regret it.

[5 : 56] It's called God's Chisel. But there is a line in that skit where the God character is talking to this man who's struggling with shame. And the guy says something that I've said myself.

He said, God, I've let you down so many times. And what the God character says back absolutely rocked my world and I've never forgotten it.

He says, Child, you didn't let me down because you were never holding me up. Yes! Yes! So church, I am so grateful for the love of Christ, the true light that gives light to the world who came to set us free from the chains of guilt and shame and sin and rebellion and lust and lies and more.

And there's no number of good deeds. There's no big checks in the offering or religious rule following or bartering with God that can get and earn that gift. It is a gift of God's grace that each of us have the free will to decide whether we will open it or not.

But when you truly open that gift and listen, there's a lot of counterfeit faith out there. But when you truly come all in to Jesus, according to God's word and its truth, everything changes.

[7 : 11] And if you have your outline, go ahead and fill this in. The true light brings authenticity. The true light brings authenticity. It brings real.

So if you remember back to the first nine or ten weeks of this year, we preached through a series revealing our new vision, mission, and values. The vision answers the why question, like we said earlier.

Why do we exist as a church? We already said it. Jesus first. When he's first, everything else falls into place, right? Matthew 6.33. Now the mission is, how do we accomplish Jesus first?

Well, here's how we do that. We help each other belong to, believe in, become like Jesus. And then we have five values or core values that work as parameters or guardrails that keep us on track.

They answer the what question. And I want to read our second value exactly as you'd find it on our website, FCCGreensburg.com.

[8 : 17] If you went on there and you went to the What We Believe stuff and you saw our mission, vision, values, you can click on where it says authenticity is our pursuit. You hit the little plus sign there and then the whole paragraph comes up.

And I want to read that to you right now. It says, Authenticity is our pursuit. While each of us have sinned and fallen short and continue to be a work in progress, Romans 3, we are recipients of grace who desire to be authentic, transparent, and real in how we live and show the love of Christ to those around us.

We believe that a lost world isn't looking for perfection. Instead, they need to see authenticity in the church that shows in everything we do. Now, let's look at 1 John, or let's look at John 1, 9 again, and let's kind of break down this main part of our passage.

It says, The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into this world. Now, the first question we have to ask is, what does John mean by true light?

And that word true is used 28 times in the New Testament. And kind of like the word zoe that we talked about a couple weeks ago for life, John uses elethanos, translated as true, 23 times in his letters.

[9 : 35] And it's easy to understand. It means genuine. It means authentic. It means real. In other words, there are, though there are, and have always been, false or phony, here today and gone tomorrow, are lights that appear real, but quickly lose their shine and let you down.

But I'm so grateful. I am so very grateful that Jesus is the true light of the world. And as Hebrews 13, 8 says, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

But you know this. That doesn't stop Satan from trying to steal, kill, and destroy anything that belongs to Jesus, including us. He's constantly trying to extinguish the light Jesus brings into our lives.

And he often uses regular, even sometimes good things, to do that. And let me just be a little extra vulnerable with you here for a moment. Share one of my struggles.

One thing that I tend to run to when I get overwhelmed, when I get stressed, when I get frustrated, I run to food. Because I really like good food.

[10 : 41] And by good food, I mean it's really bad food. And it's not that food is bad in and of itself. It's the overindulging and unhealthy food that takes its toll on us.

And for me, that's an idol that I struggle with. A false light that I too often run to instead of the true light of Jesus. And back in 2019, I began a journey that lasted a couple years where I lost about 50 pounds and man, felt so much better.

Felt so much better. But over the last five years, I had slowly put on about 35 of it back on. And about four weeks ago, right after we got back from vacation, I hit numbers I hadn't seen in a while and I was just kind of depressed about it.

And I just repented. I repented to God for not taking care of the temple that He's given me. And I said, enough. And I'm on that healthy journey again, asking God to guide me each step.

So please pray for me. But I share this only to say that all of us have different idols that we run to instead of the authentic, true God of the universe. Maybe food is a battle for you too.

[11 : 50] Maybe it's alcohol for you or some other drug that you run to instead of Jesus that feels like it takes the edge off the day, but you know, in the end, it's going to destroy everything. Maybe it's a new relationship which can only be a blessing if God's in the center of it.

But it was never meant to be an altar where we worship. Maybe it's success in business or whatever you do. Maybe it's religious activity and rules and legalism, even religious emotionalism. Church, we have to stop running to lights that quickly fade because we have the true light of Jesus that gives victory over the darkness. And when we walk in the light, as He is in the light, transformation happens.

Change happens. Freedom! happens. Thank you, Braveheart. And guess what else happens? Real, genuine, authentic faith.

Not perfection, as I just showed you, I clearly don't have, but authenticity. I like how John makes it clear that words are cheap. In 1 John 3.18, he says, Dear children, let us not love with mere words or speech, but with actions and in truth.

[13 : 02] And I have to tell you, when we go out to eat from time to time on a Sunday after church, and it's just maybe once a month, something like that, we're always the last ones to get there after, you know, finishing up services and closing everything down, that kind of stuff.

I mean, we don't beat the Baptists, we don't beat the Methodists, we don't beat the Apostolics, or anybody, even the heathens for that matter, okay? So we see a lot of different flavors of church people when we get seated.

And listen, I could care less how fancy someone's dressed up, I could care less if their hair's up in some fancy do, or even whether they're a pastor, they're a pastor, they're an elder, they're a deacon, whatever other title that people have to make them feel good.

What I care about is shining the light of Jesus to our waiter, to our waitress, even others who don't know Jesus as Lord and Savior. Because I know that all of us who claim Christ have just been at a worship service where we were singing out worship and praise to Him.

We've just studied the Word of God for growth. Many of us have just taken the Lord's Supper and looked inwardly at our hearts. So how sad when we enter the restaurant where they know where we just came from and we choose to be rude or uppity and then we don't even tip well.

[14:18] Shame on us if that's true. Instead, why don't we be what the Bible tells us real, genuine, authentic and shine the love of Christ because we are children of the one true light.

So here's how the Holy Spirit inspired John to say this in John 13 verses 34 and 35. He says, A new command I give you.

Love one another as I have loved you. So you must love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.

Because when you're really walking in the true light of Jesus, that light will shine to others in a real and authentic way. And then the second thing I want you to see is the true light faced rejection. Rejection hurts, doesn't it? And if you live long enough, you'll be rejected many times over in several different ways all seasons of life. And I'm not sure it gets much easier to face because we're all that little freckle-faced, red-headed, pale boy at the pool getting shot down by the tan mean girl, right?

[15:26] So let's read John 1, 10 and 11 now. This is our main passage. Let's read it one more time. God's Word says, He, Jesus, was in the world and though the world was made through Him.

Just imagine that. I mean, He created everything. We've already talked about that in previous weeks. It says the world did not recognize Him. He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him.

Now, I'm a big proponent of putting yourself in someone else's shoes, but I'm not sure we can do that well with God. I can't fathom with that rejection what that rejection felt like for Jesus, be it 100% man, 100% God, but John just reminded us that the one who created everything was rejected by His own creation.

Psalms 95, verses 4-7, In His hand are the depths of the earth and the mountain peaks belong to Him. The sea is His for He made it and His hands formed the dry land.

Come, let us bow down and worship. Let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker, for He is our God and we are the people of His pasture, the flock under His care. He is that awesome. So the very one who made everything in the universe beyond what we can see faced rejection by those He loved.

[16:45] And this passage shows a rejection from the world as a whole but even the Jewish people that He was born into. So let's walk a quick journey to see some of that rejection that Jesus faced on this earth.

And it starts in His hometown. Jesus grew up in a region that was looked down upon by a lot of Israelites. They said, could anything good come from the town of Nazareth and Galilee?

Even those from His hometown said, isn't He just a carpenter's son? We know His family. He's just one of us. Even His own family. Referring to His public ministry, preaching, healing, casting out demons, which He had been doing, Mark 3:21 says this, when His family heard about this, they went to take charge of Him for they said He is out of His mind.

That's His own flesh and blood, right? That's His own family. I guess not flesh and blood, but His family that raised Him. But I wonder if any of your families had said that when you truly surrendered all to Jesus, that when you gave it all to Jesus, I wonder what they said when you went against man's traditions and you actually followed the Bible's teachings.

And then there were two of His very own disciples who rejected Him very publicly, even though you could say they all did because they scattered. But Judas, a man Jesus had poured into for three years, was not only a crook with their treasury, but He also allowed His greed to lead him to betray Jesus with a kiss for 30 measly pieces of silver.

[18:19] And then there was Peter who proclaimed boldly that no matter what the rest of those cowards do, the rest of the crew do, if they abandon Jesus, he would stay and stay true.

And what happened? On the night Jesus was betrayed, Peter, scared for his life, denied following, even knowing Jesus, he denied Him three times. And this disciple was in the inner circle of three that Jesus was the closest to.

Praise God, He was forgiven, restored, even commissioned to feed the sheep by Jesus over breakfast. Aren't you glad that the Lord forgives us when we deny Him by our poor choices? And then you have the larger group of Pharisees, the legalistic religious leaders. You have the Sadducees, which was the liberal wing. And then you have the other prominent Jews in the ruling class that not only rejected Him, but they lied about Him.

They conspired against Him. They arrested, beat, spit upon, crucified the Messiah who came to set Him free. And yet it all backfired as the veil was torn in two.

[19 : 23] The sky went dark, an earthquake shook the earth, and some who had not believed before looked upon His body and said, surely this is the Son of God.

And then on the third day, everything changed. This wasn't just another crucifixion of a wacky religious zealot looking for fame and fortune and grandeur. This is the one true God who loved you so much that He died on the cross to take your place, my place, and then He rose from the grave, conquering death, offering zoe life to all who would pick up their cross and follow Him.

And yet He was rejected time and time again, doing it all for you and me. So let me take this last six, seven minutes or so and ask each of us a big question.

Am I rejecting Jesus' light in my own life? Am I rejecting Jesus' own light in my own life? And if so, how am I doing that?

And listen, I'm not here to challenge your salvation if you're a born-again believer in Christ, if you've repented of your sins, been baptized into Him. But we do need to look inward at our pursuit of honoring Jesus with every single inkling that we are.

[20 : 40] This can't just be a religious activity or a family tradition. It has to be, according to Scripture, a personal relationship with Jesus where we are seeking by the Holy Spirit's power to look more like Him every day.

Not perfection, but sanctification. Sincerity in being a disciple of Jesus, pursuing Him as the treasure we seek, knowing Him intimately as He guides my life.

You know, before the railroad became mainstream in America, and even when it did in rural areas, many people would travel using a stagecoach. That was a horse-drawn carriage, basically, that could work as transportation system.

You even see this on the little house on the prairie. So kind of picture that. So going back roughly 175 years, there was a stagecoach company that was looking to hire drivers through kind of a dangerous mountainous area.

So when they began interviewing these drivers, they asked the question, well, how close can you drive to the edge of the cliff as you round the mountain? Well, the first applicant said he could drive within three feet of the edge.

[21 : 48] And the boss thanked him for his time and called in the next applicant. The guy said he could drive within one foot of the edge. He too was thanked as they called in the third guy. But when asked the same question, he responded much differently.

He said, I would drive the coach as far from the edge as I possibly could. And this guy was given the job. You know, there are so many who claim Christ who live the same way.

How close can I get to the edge without falling off? What's the least I can do to follow Jesus? How far can I go before it's technically wrong? How much can I straddle the fence of this world and still call myself a believer?

And yet, Jesus isn't looking for half of us. He isn't looking for even 99% of us. He wants all of you because he gave all of him. He wants all of me.

He wants everything because he knows that one foot in, one foot out lifestyle won't satisfy. And I can't help this Christmas season to think of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

[22 : 51] This ordinary teenage girl from a disrespected town who didn't have much that the world would envy, but she sure did love God with all her heart. And when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary to share God's plan to use her to bring the Savior into the world, she was frightened.

Of course she was. And yet, he calmed her fears, sharing the wonderful news of the Messiah, of Jesus, and how her role in God's perfect plan was to be his earthly mom, to have him as her child. Now, let's pick up here in Luke 1, verse 34, as we see her response. How will this be, Mary asked the angel, since I am a virgin? The angel answered, the Holy Spirit will come on you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

So the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth, your relative, is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month.

For no word from God will ever fail. And then I like verse 38. Here's where I want to focus. Mary says, I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled.

[24 : 05] Then the angel left her. Now, Mary wasn't looking to get as close to the edge as possible. She was all in. She chose to be faithful to God's call on her life. And we can do the same as we look

inward today as believers and say, Lord, there's some junk in this heart that I can't let go of on my own.

There's bitterness. There's behaviors that I don't know how to get rid of. Lord, I still hold on to that rejection which has produced insecurity that I need you to speak into. I surrender it all over to you right now.

I want to be all in. Now, can I speak to those in the room, those listening, wherever you are who don't know Jesus as Lord and Savior?

There's a reason God has put you on to this message. Not because of me, but all because of His grace. And I get how overwhelming it can be when you first start learning God's word.

I've been there. Remember, I didn't grow up in church. I didn't know anything about the Bible. I became a Christian at 18. So I get it. Sometimes it feels like you're drinking from a fire hose.

[25 : 13] I also get that some of you have probably been mistreated by religious people. Listen, Jesus was too. So thank you. Thank you for listening. We're so glad you are.

And today, I want you to know that you don't have to go on living like you have. You don't have to bear all the weight that you carry because you have a God who loved you so much that He came to dwell among us to be that light showing us the heart behind the kingdom of God and He wants to bear those burdens.

But it's this simple. He created you to have a relationship with Him. He loves you. He died for you. And today, He wants to be the Lord of your life. But He can't force you.

Let me put it this way. He won't force you because that's not true love. He wants you to see the sacrifice Jesus made for you and the hope He offers.

And He wants you to come like the prodigal son running home into His loving arms. But it starts with a heart that's ready to turn away from that sinful lifestyle, to repent, to ask for His forgiveness, to surrender everything to the Lordship of Christ in your life.

[26 : 21] Listen, you don't have to go try to get cleaned up on your own and then come back. He's got the soap. You just have to come in and let Him wash you clean.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we are so very grateful for how Your Word has just spoken over our hearts today.

Thank You. Thank You, Jesus, for taking that rejection. Rejection like none of us on this earth will ever understand because You took the rejection of the whole world and You took it on Your shoulders and You gave Your innocent life for our guilty ones and You did that to say, I love You big time.

So thank You, Jesus. We worship You. We adore You. We thank You that You are the risen Messiah who offers us life in His name, in Your name.

So Jesus, right now, we just pray, I pray, if there's anyone listening to this who doesn't know You as Lord and Savior, that today can be a day that changes everything as they come all in, as they make that decision to repent and be baptized into You just like Your Word says.

[27 : 36] So Father, work on hearts, work on my heart, stir us, and make us more and more into the image of Jesus. We love You. And we pray all of this in the name above all names, the name that every knee will bow before, the name that I love, the name of Jesus.

And God's people said, Amen. Hey, I want to give you this quick invitation. I kind of just did, but let me just lay this out here for you. If you have questions about your faith, if you have questions about giving your life to Jesus, even about our church and how we can come alongside you and bring you into this body of believers so you can have that support system of growth.

Once again, we are First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana. My name is Ray Sweet. I'm the lead pastor. And you can call us in the office. We'd love to start that communication with you.

812-663-8488. That's 812-663-8488. Or you can email me at ray at FCCgreensburg.com.

Hey, God bless you. Merry Christmas and have a great day.