

Sunday Evening English - Receiving The Lord

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[0 : 00] We can turn back to the passage we read in John chapter 1, and I'd like us to sing together by verse 12. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

The verses that we read there, verses 1 to 18, are normally regarded as the prologue to John's Gospel. Usually, but not always, but usually, a prologue is the last section of a book that's written. Because its purpose is to summarize what's going to appear later on in the book. So it's possible for us to just look at this summary and then take the various details about it, and see how John expands them in the remaining chapters of his Gospel.

Of course, when John wrote his Gospel, 60 years have passed since the life, the stories that he mentions took place. So it's not only a factual account of what happened, but it's also, from a human point of view, a set of reminiscences that John is recalling. And often, when we look back on life, we highlight the important features that may have taken place at a particular time.

John is highlighting, or summarizing, the most amazing three years of his unique life.

I mean, John was a highly privileged individual. He was called to be an apostle, one of the founders of the Christian Church. By the time he writes this Gospel, he is no longer living in Israel. But as far as church history tells us, he is now living in Ephesus. So he has been taken throughout the world, in the task of setting up the kingdom of Jesus, and of seeing Jesus work through him to do incredible things in all the places that he had been in his over 60 years of discipleship. But the years that stayed in his memory were the three years that he spent with Jesus. And indeed, towards the end of his

[3 : 55] Gospel, he tells us where the details that he records came from. Because at the end of chapter 20, he says, now Jesus did many other signs, now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples.

So John is writing about the things that he and the other disciples saw. And they want to pass on to us those details.

Obviously, John didn't see what he mentions in the first five verses. Because that is describing life before John himself was born.

But from verse 6 onwards, we have his personal experience. Because we know that the Apostle John was a disciple of John the Baptist.

And he mentions John the Baptist briefly there in verses 6 to 8. And of course, that must have been an interesting time as well, mustn't it?

[5 : 09] Because John the Baptist is the forerunner. The forerunner of the Messiah. And he was telling this message that he's about to come.

That the one that they had looked for, for centuries in the nation of Israel, the message of John was that the light is about to arrive.

And of course, when he was saying that the light is about to arrive, he was indicating that the darkness was about to end. That the years and the centuries in which the Savior had not come, and although there was light, as it were, in the distance, at some stage he would come.

But John the Baptist said, he's about to arrive. And John the Apostle, as we know, was gripped by that. The Lord had worked in his heart.

And this was John's priority in life, waiting for the Messiah to appear. And when he did appear, John mentions two consequences of that arrival.

[6 : 25] The first consequence, we could say, is mentioned in verse 14, where he says, we have seen his glory. When we saw the Messiah, it says, John, we just didn't see an ordinary person.

We saw someone who was full of glory. And the glory that he had was divine glory. And he showed that glory in lots of different ways, such as miracles, because we're told by John in chapter 2, about the wedding in Cana, that that was where Jesus first showed his glory.

And he showed his glory in other ways as well. And that's what John writes about in his Gospel. So that means that even on the cross, the glory of God was revealed.

So that's one of the features that John recalls from these three years of Jesus' public ministry, that there was given to him this amazing privilege of seeing the glory of Jesus on display.

But the other feature that he mentions is the one that's mentioned in verse 12. And that is that others realized who Jesus was.

[7 : 49] Although Jesus came to his... There in verse 11, he came to his own things. Because the word there doesn't mean people.

He came to his own possessions, we might say. And one would expect when somebody comes to their own things that the people who are living there would recognize the owner.

But we know that when he came to his own things, his own people did not receive him. In the main, the Jews rejected him.

But John points out, and we can imagine him as he writes these words, and he looks back to 60 years ago, to scenes that have long since gone, and to faces that, in a sense, are only memories.

But he remembers that they believed in Jesus. And I'm sure as he sat there in Ephesus, or whatever, he wrote the gospel, and he recalled all these people coming to know Jesus, that his heart was warmed, even by the mere memory of their embracing the Savior.

[9 : 10] So I just want us to think briefly about this verse, this second aspect of the three years that John recalls, about people who received Jesus, and believed in his name, and who were given the right to become children of God.

The first thing I want us to think briefly about is, who was received? Who is Jesus? Well, there's lots of things that John even says about him here, in this first set of verses of his gospel.

For example, he tells us there, in verse 3, that he is the creator of everything. He's the son of God. He's the creator of everything. And he, as it were, keeps the whole universe in existence. And that would be a wonderful feature of Jesus to focus on.

But I don't want us, really, to think about that one just now. Instead, there's three things, I think, that do come out from this passage, about Jesus, that we might think about at this moment.

[10 : 41] And the first thing is, his humility. And his humility is seen there in verse 14. That the word became flesh.

Now, we may look at that and just think, well, all that John is saying is that the word became human. And, of course, he is saying that. But the word that's translated flesh, means humanity at its lowest.

I mean, how would we expect Jesus to appear? The son of God. What would he look like when he arrived? What kind of thing would he do to create an impression?

We know when important people come to our locality, that it's inevitable that they'll be preceded by something designed to make an impression.

And in a sense, there's nothing wrong with that. But what did Jesus do when he came? Well, he became flesh.

[12 : 01] No one, when he arrived, thought there was anything important about it. When he was born, we know, as our Catholicism tells us, he was born in a low condition.

He was at the bottom, we might say, of the pile. He hasn't even got a space, a nice space, in which to be born.

He is born into this world, even as he arrived, as an outcast, where no one has got any time for him.

We might not be surprised that they don't have time for one another. But when the most important person there is, the eternal God becomes flesh among us, we would assume that those who are in the vicinity would at least take a glance.

But they didn't, apart from the shepherds, who the angels gave a special message to. But there he is, Jesus, the humble one.

[13 : 23] And John wants us to notice that. And his life, afterwards, is marked by humility. And he shows that in all kinds of ways.

He describes his own mission as, I am among you as one who serves. That his entire life was spent serving.

that the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and give his life a ransom for many. John, I am sure, was there when Jesus began his public ministry.

When he was baptized by John the Baptist. and we can picture the line, the queue, waiting to be baptized by John.

Because we are told the whole countryside went out to him. Daily there might be hundreds being baptized by John the Baptist.

[14 : 33] As they are all preparing for the arrival of the Messiah. and one day Jesus joins the line. I mean, who is in this queue?

If we were standing there looking at this procession of people coming up to John the Baptist to be baptized by him and someone said to us, who are these?

The answer that would be given because of what John said is that they are sinners. That they are professing that they want to depart from their sins and so on.

And there is Jesus and humbly he joins this queue and there he is numbered with the transgressors.

Although he has never committed one sin and there is nothing wrong in his life. but everybody else in that line they are only carrying their own sins.

[15 : 47] As Jesus joins the line he is not carrying any personal sins of his own but he is carrying all the sins of his people.

That is what John the Baptist has said about him, didn't he, when he pointed them out to Andrew and to John behold the Lamb of God who is taking away the sin of the world.

He didn't say to behold who will take away but at that moment as John pointed to him as Jesus was walking somewhere nearby he said at that moment he has got a burden on his shoulders and he is going to carry it to the place where it will be taken away.

So there he joins this line composed of sinners and you know he wasn't ashamed to do so.

He could have said to them I am different from all of you but he didn't. And as we look at him in the line where is he in the line?

[17 : 00] does he push himself forward to the front to make an impression? Well when we read the accounts of his baptism we discover he is last in the line.

And when all the others have been baptized John deals with Jesus. Almost as if Jesus was saying I am at the back of the queue because I am carrying more sins than the ones in front of me.

And John wants us to think that Jesus became flesh. And of course his humility didn't stop there. nor did stop with service nor did it stop with washing his disciples feet but he humbled himself to the point of death on the cross.

And if he was numbered with the transgressors at his baptism then he is also numbered with them at Calvary. And there he is dealing with our sin.

[18 : 31] A proud man couldn't take one sin away. the most humble of men took away all the sins of his people.

But he did that because he went down. And John wants us to focus on that. My three most wonderful years says John was spent watching a man making himself lower and lower until he went down to the point of death.

So that's one thing we can say about him. But no Jesus came with a message. And I suspect that's why he's called the word.

There in the first verses. When we say a word, we pass on a message. If we don't use words, people don't know what we think.

They don't know who we are. In the beginning was, we could say, the message. And he was with God, and he was God, he's God's spokesperson.

[20 : 06] He's coming to say something. And if his life was marked by humility, his message was marked by hope.

He spoke about going to the cross. If anybody else had ever spoken about going to the cross, that's a message of despair, anybody else who ever went to a cross, after being in court, and so on, well, that was the end of it.

In a short time, they would be dead, and that's it. But when Jesus spoke about going to the cross, he never spoke about it as the end.

Indeed, he regarded going to the cross as the door into something incredible. Not just as a door into something incredible for us, but also into something incredible for him.

Because he was going to come out of death, on the other side of it, on the third day. And when he came out of death, what hope he brought into the world.

[21 : 28] sadly, one of the words that we use that has changed its meaning drastically, is the word hope. We have turned it into some kind of vague thing.

I hope to do this, or I hope to do that. And whether we do it or not, may not matter too much. But when the Bible uses the word hope, it's never in that sense.

The hope that Jesus came to give to us through his message and through his actions on the cross, and subsequently is guaranteed events in the future.

And in his gospel, he speaks about what he can provide. As he's, for example, shortly before he goes to the cross, what words of hope does he have?

Well, how about in my father's house are many rooms? If it were not so, I would have told you, I go to prepare a place for you.

[22 : 44] And if I go, I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, there you may be also. these are not the words of someone who regards the cross as the end.

These are the words of someone who regards the cross as something he has to go through in order to ensure that his disciples and all others who trust in him are going to be with him in his father's house forever and ever.

And what a wonderful message of hope Jesus has. He brings light into a future that we cannot see. Without his words, we don't know the future. but through his words, we can look up to his

ascension, to his glorification, to his return, to his creating the new heavens and the new earth and all these blessings that he's going to bring about in the future.

And it brings light into our lives. And there's a certain sense in which we should not speak about the future as a mystery.

[24 : 12] because we've been told what's going to happen. And Jesus himself will ensure that it does. And the third thing that we can say about him, in addition to him being humble and having a message of hope, is that he brought his message right into the lives of people.

hope. And in this gospel we have accounts of Jesus' repeated occasions where he stressed to individuals and to groups and sometimes to large groups that through him they could have certainty as they faced the future.

He sought them. and it's marvelous to go through this gospel and read about Jesus seeking sinners. He was a seeking savior.

That's why he came. He came to his own things to find people who were lost. And as John himself indicates, some of them received him and received him gladly.

what do you think of Jesus? What do you think of his humility?

[25 : 50] What do you think of his message of hope? What do you think of someone who seeks sinners? Who actually seeks the opposite of himself?

and gives to them the gospel and offers to them all the blessings connected to that, which we'll think about in a minute.

So that's the one who was received. Secondly, what does it mean to receive him? In a sense, John tells us, he says there in the second clause in verse 12, who believed in his name.

So receiving is an expression of believing. But there's many other aspects to believing apart from receiving. There's a certain sense in which we could say that as far as this context is concerned, although we can use the word in lots of scenarios, but as far as this context is concerned, the word receive is the initial act of faith, isn't it?

I mean, that's what John is highlighting. It doesn't mean that they continually received him, but at a certain stage in their life, they responded to what they heard and received Jesus.

[27 : 21] So what does this aspect of faith point to? faith is always based on information.

And in this aspect, context here, it's based on information about two people. And the two people are, one is Jesus, and information about him, and the other one is the person believing, and information he discovers about himself.

The information that is conveyed to him about Jesus is that he's the savior. That's why he came into the world, to save sinners.

And the information that the person discovers about himself is that he or she is a sinner. And those two details are the most important information we can ever discover.

There's lots of things in life that are worth discovering. But there's nothing worth more than discovering who Jesus is, and discovering who we are.

[28 : 55] We've already thought about briefly who Jesus is. But what does it mean to discover you're a sinner? After all, none of us are liable to say we're perfect.

to discover that we are sinners means that we don't estimate ourselves through what other people think about us.

Rather, we estimate ourselves regarding what God thinks of us. What other people think about us, maybe accurate or maybe not, us.

And in a certain sense, in comparison to what God thinks about us, worrying about what other people think about us is pointless. But to discover that God regards me as a sinner, that God regards me as imperfect, that God regards me as someone who has broken his law, that God regards me as someone who snubbed his glory, that God regards me as someone who does not put God first, but puts something else, usually myself, first.

That's what it is to be a sinner. A sinner's got, primarily, it's not got to do with our outward behavior, although in a sense that is important.

[30 : 38] But sin is in the heart. It is possible, but very unlikely, it is possible to go through life and never say anything wrong, as far as listeners are concerned.

And it may be possible to go through life and never do any actions that somebody else can say is wrong. But the only people looking at that are people who look on the outside, what matters is what God sees in our heart.

And even if we did have such a kind of lifestyle that nobody could point the finger at, God can point his finger. And God can point to our numerous sins inside us.

And he can highlight the sins that we are aware of, that he is also fully aware of the sins that we are not aware of. God knows them all. And when we receive Jesus, we receive him as sinners.

It's sinners that value a saviour. And it's those who know they're sinners to some extent, because it's not possible before our conversion to fully realise how sinful we are.

[32 : 04] Whatever knowledge we have of ourselves before conversion, it's not to be compared to what we discover about ourselves afterwards. But as sinners, we receive the saviour.

faith in this initial stage involves confidence and contrition.

We are confident about the saviour. And we are contrite about ourselves. And there's no contradiction between them.

it's contrite sinners that are embraced by the saviour. And they come to him and whatever words they use, but saying to him, I'm sorry, I'm really sorry for my sins.

But I am so glad that you came into this world and lived such a humble life and that your humble life took you to the cross and that on that journey you were carrying my sins and you carried them to the cross.

[33 : 24] And when you carried them there, they were brought to a place where nobody else can find them. And you paid the penalty for my sin and as I look at you, I want to receive you.

And he comes, receiving into our heart. He comes into our lives, renews us, changes us, sanctifies us, whatever word we want to use.

He makes us new. And John saw this happening with his own eyes. He saw it happening to a woman outside Syker as she and Jesus seemed to be having a discussion.

And John watched that woman discover life, living water. And there are many others that John recalled.

And there must be surely in this reception of Jesus a sense of wonder. that he's going to save me who doesn't deserve anything.

[34 : 51] That he, the son of God, came down to the cross for me. And while this wonder will grow, because faith after conversion will grow, grow, but there must be a sense of awe, as we find ourselves face to face with Jesus, as it were, embracing him, receiving him, and observing his delight to come into our lives.

And I suppose we should ask ourselves, have we received him?

Is Jesus in your life? not?

Why not? Why not? If he's not in your life, it's because you want something else to be there.

But John is reminding us here that it's possible to receive Jesus. And even if others are rejecting him, as happened there in verse 11, even if others are rejecting him, it's no reason for us to reject

him.

[36 : 37] We can say to him, Lord, come into my heart. And the amazing thing is, he will.

There must be lots of noises going up to heaven. And most of the noises that come up from earth to heaven must sound like screeches.

But the ears of heaven are open for people asking to be forgiven. And when they pick up that sound, then we're told by Jesus himself that there's joy in the presence of the angels of God over each sinner that repents.

so that's receiving him. And having done that, we discover he gives something to us.

As John points out there in the second half of verse 12, he gave to all the ones who received him the right to become children of God.

[38 : 03] God. If John himself hadn't written it down, we might find that hard to believe.

We've got the right to become children of God. That's telling us at least one thing, that those who are believers, that their only suitable position, is to be members of God's family.

Now, they have no right to be anywhere else, but they do have a right to be members of his family.

And as we think of this status, this rank, becoming children of God, God, what higher family could they be in?

We are often curious when we meet somebody, perhaps for the first time, and we suspect we might know something about them, we want to ask them, who's your family?

And if it turns out that we know the family, then there's a special bond there, even if we haven't met the person before. But what's a membership of an earthly family, in comparison to membership of God's family?

[39 : 38] We can't be in any higher family. We always get excited, at least some of us get excited whenever there's a royal wedding, and a commoner, as they call them, becomes a member of the royal family.

Well, in the ultimate royal family, it's only commoners that join it. But all of them, once they come into this royal family, they are given the highest rank.

There's no grades among the children of God. There's not some who are on a higher shelf in comparison to others. it's not as if we are down on the lower shelf and up there in the higher shelf are the apostles.

There are not any more members of the family than anybody else who believes in Jesus. And we are given this marvelous position of being heirs of God and joined heirs with Christ.

I don't know if you ever let that phrase run slow through your mind. we are an heir of God and joined heirs with Jesus.

[41 : 00] I mean God is not going to die but he is going to share his inheritance with us. And God's inheritance is everything.

God owns everything and the astonishing thing is that those who receive Jesus they become heirs of God.

I mean Paul reminded the Romans didn't he when he said to them remember who they were most of them were slaves and Paul says to them all things are yours.

life death things present things to come all of it is yours.

He's just saying to them because you are heirs of God children of God the future is yours. the world to come the new heavens and the new earth extraordinary possessions and we can never lose them.

[42 : 30] Many a person in life loses their inheritance for various reasons but God will never lose his and he will never disinherit his children.

What he has for them will be theirs and that forever. They've got a right to it. He says that and when we get to heaven it's our rightful place because we have become children of God through believing in Jesus.

And as we close just a couple of things about this manner of receiving. We receive him freely.

There's no strings attached. He's offered to us. He offers himself. He doesn't say to us make yourself better and then you can have me.

Instead he says to us come as you are. What's the point of trying to make ourselves better? We can't.

[44 : 10] Even if we were to try it's pointless because we can't make ourselves better. And Jesus says to us freely come.

I think a lot of people find that hard to believe. And they assume that somehow or other they must try and get rid of some of their sins before they come to him.

But there's no conditions. The offer comes to us of course we'll be sorry for our sins but that's an accompaniment to faith.

We don't buy our way into God's family. It's all free. And we have to do it personally.

We can imagine a life boat and people trying to get into it and of course the reports might say a group got into it but the reality is they got into it one at a time.

[45 : 33] And Jesus is like a life boat. And he can take millions of sinners and save them but all of them go in one at a time.

They have to go in personally I would love to believe on behalf of you but I can't.

Nobody can believe on behalf of you. You have to do it yourself. It has to be your personal response.

And in addition to doing it this reception being freely and personal it's full. Jesus doesn't say to us I'm giving you a quarter of myself a conversion and then you'll discover the remaining three quarters as life goes on.

It is true that we'll discover new things as life goes on. But at the moment we believe in him for the first time we get him.

[46 : 53] We get him. All that he is at that moment becomes ours. We receive a full savior that will take the whole of this life and indeed the whole of eternity to discover how full he is.

But he's all mine. Every believer can say that. And the last thing is we receive him permanently.

This is a life changing decision. It changes our direction where we're going. It changes our destination where we'll arrive.

It's permanent. so just ask yourselves as I ask myself have I made use of the freeness of the gospel and do I have personal dealings with Jesus Christ and have I realized that he doesn't give me part of himself he gives me all of himself and that when we receive him we receive him forever.

John and these others he describes in verse 12 up in heaven tonight I'm sure they recall the time they received Jesus and as they do their hearts are filled with gladness and it would be wonderful if one day all of us join them.

[49 : 06] May God bless these thoughts to us shall we pray. Lord we give you thanks for the simplicity of the way of being converted forgive us for the way we so often complicate things and also sometimes invent things to give the impression that they are necessary.

Lord teach us that we can just go to Jesus even although he's not in our physical presence that he hears us whether we speak with our lips or with our hearts and he invites us to trust in him to receive him and when that happens we become your children.

What an amazing transaction that is. We pray Lord all of us even now if we haven't done it before would be doing so as we think about what this verse says to us that as many as received him who believed in his name he gave the right to become children of God for his name's sake Amen.

We'll conclude by singing from Psalm 119 in the Scottish Psalter at verse 57 we'll sing verses 57 to 60 and the tune is Belmont Thou my sure portion art alone which I did choose O Lord I have resolved and said that I would keep thy holy word verses 57 to 60 star has last just I called Him for and who worry and are called forty on the akan how can questa for todas That I would keep thy holy word.

With my whole heart I did entry. Thy faith that gave her free.

[52 : 04] According to thy gracious word. Be merciful to me.

I thought of all my former ways. Until thy life felt I.

Until thy testimony stood. My fears and turned high.

I did not sing or linger long. As close as lost to life.

But history I thought to thee. My self I did repair.

[53 : 24] Amen. Amen. If you please be seated for a few minutes. All the intimations for this week are on the bulletin sheet.

So I'm not going to read through many of them. I'll leave you to read through that yourself. There is a youth fellowship tonight. And that's immediately after the service just now. That will be at the Francis Street. Mance for all the young folks of the congregation.

And any of your friends with them. They're very welcome to come to the youth fellowship this evening. The service is tomorrow. God willing at 8 o'clock. There's the prayer meeting in the

session room.

There's a Gaelic service at 11 a.m. That will be in the seminary. And we expect to have Reverend Paul Murray for that service. And in the evening tomorrow evening. To finish off the communion services.

At 7.30 that will be an English service. And the seminary also. Conducted by Reverend Dr. Malcolm McLean. There is to be a short prayer meeting after this service just now.

[54 : 24] And we won't go to the door because of that. I want you to please make this as efficient a transition as possible. From now to the beginning of the prayer meeting. Without any undue delay.

So that we don't spend too much time in between that. So if you need to go out. Please. If you're staying for the prayer meeting. Just stay in if you can at all. If you need to check your car.

Please feel to do that. But we want to do this as quickly and efficiently as possible. So as quick a turnaround as possible. Please. One of our own elders will be leading the short prayer meeting.

It will just be a couple of prayers. So it won't take very long. But please. If you can do the transition as efficiently as possible. That would be highly appreciated. Thank you. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The love of God the Father. And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Be with us all. Amen. Amen. All right.

[55 : 49] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.