

I Saw The Light

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 February 2023

Preacher: Jonathan Chancey

[0 : 00] Well, let's take our Bibles and open them up this morning to the Gospel of John. The Gospel according to John. Last week we began our sermon series in the Gospel of John, and this morning we're going to pick right back up where we left off in verse 6 of chapter 1.

If you're using the Pew Bibles there in front of you, you can find that on page 833 of those Bibles. If you didn't bring your own Bible, I'd invite you to take that Bible and turn to page 833.

And we're going to read from verse 6 through to verse 13 this morning. John 1, verses 6 through 13. Follow with me as I read.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to bear witness about the light that all might believe through him.

He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.

[1 : 19] He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Let's pray once more. Lord, this is your holy word, and we pray now that you would bless the preaching of your word. May it fall on fertile soil in our hearts, we ask.

In Christ's name, amen. In January 1947, that's 76 years ago now, one of the greatest songs in country music history was born.

A woman by the name of Miss Lilybell Williams was driving home from a dance in Fort Deposit, Alabama, and the back seat of her car was her youngest son, Hank.

Hank had had a good time that night, and he was in an altered state of mind, as the story goes. He was attempting to sleep it off in the back seat of the car, and as they made their way to the house, they passed by a beacon light from the nearby airport.

[2 : 43] And so Miss Lilybell Williams called to the back seat of the car to wake up her son, saying, Wake up, Hank. We're nearly home. I just saw the light.

Legend has it that as Miss Lilybell Williams bore witness to the light, between there and his home, Hank Williams penned the words to the now famous song, I Saw the Light.

You know the words? I'm not going to sing it. I saw the light. I saw the light. No more darkness. No more night. Now I'm so happy. No sorrow in sight.

Praise the Lord. Help me out. Come on. I saw the light. Okay. Well, this morning, as we come to the Gospel of John again, continue our look here in this text, we meet a man who truly saw the light.

He came as a witness to the light, bearing witness to the light of the world. He bore witness to a lost and a broken world, calling them to respond in faith.

[3 : 52] So when you look at this text, verses 6 through 8 show us a witness to the light. Verses 9 through 13 show us two responses to the light.

This will be our outline this morning. If you're following along, taking notes, one witness, two responses. One witness, two responses.

First, verses 6 through 8. First, we see a witness to the light. Look there to verse 6 with me. John the Apostle, who is writing this book, he's introducing us to another man who goes by the name of John, who we call John the Baptist.

So he says in verse 6, There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to bear witness about the light that all might believe through him.

He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. And at first read, this is a little bit jarring, isn't it? If you're reading straight through, this doesn't really seem to fit.

[5 : 05] It doesn't really seem to flow nicely from verses 1 through 5. If you try to read this introduction to John's gospel in a linear fashion, you're probably going to get a little bit confused because he doesn't speak in a straight line.

He doesn't speak like we would normally speak. He kind of goes around in circles a bit. And so we're introduced to John the Baptist here for the first time in verses 6 through 8, but then he picks him back up in verse 15.

Then he picks him back up in verse 19 before eventually beginning the narrative there. He's just kind of running right by him quickly here. So let me tell you what I think is going on here.

This introduction, verses 1 through 18 of the gospel of John, is a beautiful mixture of theology and poetry.

It is theology and poetry. You can't read it in a straight line. It's truth communicated in a poetic way. Many in the early church called this a hymn of the incarnate Word.

[6 : 15] So these verses in poetic, theologically rich, beautiful, sometimes confusing ways, they show us who Jesus is.

But why does John just skirt by and throw in John the Baptist the way that he does? I have a few reasons. One reason, one reason I believe is that he is rooting these events in human history.

One reason why John is drawing our attention to John the Baptist here is that he's rooting these events in human history. So verses 1 through 5, you remember last week, it showed us the greatness of Christ being one with the Father, creating all things.

But now we're brought down to earth, so to speak, to see that these events that we're reading about in this letter, in this gospel, are rooted in human history.

They happen. These aren't fairy tales. They are real. There was a man. He was named John. He was sent by God. He witnessed these things as a living, breathing witness.

[7 : 24] He's validating the historical reality of the events in this book. But also, he's rooting them in redemptive history.

Redemptive history. The Old Testament prophesied the coming Messiah. It foretold the coming Messiah, and it prophesied a forerunner to the Messiah, one who would come before him and proclaim his arrival.

And so the last chapter of the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi chapter 4, 400 years before John the Baptist pops onto the scene, it says this.

It says, Behold, I will send Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And Jesus, in Matthew chapter 11, he says, John is that prophet.

He says in Matthew 11, he says, All the prophets and the law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.

[8 : 37] In other words, this John the Baptist is the last prophet of the Old Covenant. He is the promised forerunner of the Messiah. He serves as the hinge between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

So John the Apostle is helping us to see where we are in this story of redemption. And he says the forerunner is here, which means the Messiah is here, and his name is Jesus.

But you know what else he's doing? As significant as John the Baptist is, by skipping right by him the way that he does, John the Apostle is keeping the focus on Christ.

He's the main focus here, isn't he? John the Baptist is almost an afterthought, and as soon as he draws our attention to John, what does he do? Right away, he makes sure that we know that John is not the Christ.

There was a man, not God, not the eternal word, a man sent by God. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, not the light, came to bear witness about the light, the true light.

[10 : 00] He's the focus of this book. He's the focus of this story. Let's talk about him. See, John is fixing our attention on the main focus of the book.

He's fixing our attention on Christ. And if you know anything about John the Baptist, you know that he would read these words and say, Amen. This was John's message, wasn't it?

He must increase, I must, what? What does he say? I must decrease. He says, I am not the light. He is the light. Don't look at me. Behold the Lamb of God.

John is a witness to the light. And here's the application for us, church. While you and I cannot represent and imitate his position as the God-appointed forerunner to the Messiah, we can and we must imitate his posture and carry on his proclamation.

We must imitate his posture and carry on his proclamation. Does your posture look like John's? A posture that's just allergic to attention that says, Not me.

[11 : 22] Don't look at me. Don't think about me. Don't make it about me. Don't give me the credit. Don't give me the glory. Look to Jesus. See, one of the things that I love most about John the Baptist is that he is a living, breathing rebuke to our natural bent towards self-exaltation.

What does he say? He must increase. I must decrease. Imitate that posture and imitate his proclamation.

How will our lost friends and family members and neighbors and co-workers see the light of Christ? The way that God has chosen to cause sinners to see the light and be saved is by using men and women like you and me to bear witness to the light.

To proclaim the glory of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ. And so, so we must carry on this Christ-exalting witness of John the Baptist.

[12 : 34] when we lived in, when we, when we lived in Charlotte, we had the opportunity to go to the Billy Graham Museum.

And Billy Graham, as I'm sure you all are, are all aware, he was one of the greatest witnesses to the glory of Christ in modern Christian history.

He was, was a powerful witness. And we walked through this exhibit after exhibit, after exhibit, of, of his witness to the glory of Christ. And as the tour ended, we walked out, one of the workers there noticed that the gentleman behind me was wearing a LeBron James t-shirt.

And on the front of it, it said, witness. LeBron had a whole clothing line, shoes, shirts, a whole marketing campaign behind this idea that, that we are all witnesses to his greatness.

Well, as we came out, the worker, he looked at that man and he saw what was on his shirt and he simply said, witness to what?

[13 : 44] And you could tell that after walking through that whole building dedicated to a witness of the glory and greatness of Christ, that that man wished that he had worn a different shirt that day.

But church, we are so quick, aren't we? To bear witness to the greatness of all sorts of things.

Athletes, musicians, food that we eat, people that we know, we bear witness to greatness when we see it. How much more quick ought we to be to bear witness to the greatness of Christ?

we have seen the light and if we have seen it, then we must share it. And as we do, what we'll see is that people will respond in one of two ways.

Two possible responses to the light. We'll see this in verses 9 through 13. Here, we see two responses to the light of the world. There are two and only two possible responses to the gospel.

[14 : 55] rejection or reception. There is no middle ground. There is no such thing as a safe, neutral spot.

There are no fence-riding Christians. We have either accepted or rejected the Messiah. The first response we see here is to reject the light.

Look to verses 9 through 11. John says, the true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.

He came to his own and his own people did not receive him. I hope you see how absolutely absurd this is.

Do you see this? We move so quickly here in these verses from the astonishing to the absurd. The astonishing, the astounding truth is that the eternal word of God, the one through whom all things were created, the light of the world was stepping into the world.

[16 : 12] This should astound us that the creator himself was entering into his creation. The one who exists outside of time and outside of space was now entering into time.

The author of history was writing himself into the story. But how was he received? He wasn't. He was rejected by his own creation.

The world did not know him. This is the absolute absurdity of rejecting God.

This is the depth of spiritual blindness. And this is what sin is. We need to know and see this for what it is. It is foolish absurdity.

Sin is a rejection of God and his rightful rule over all things including me and including you.

[17 : 20] It is blindness to the reality of God that he is creator of all things, everything in the universe. It is blindness to the rule of God that he is Lord that we belong to him that we are accountable to him that we will all give account to him.

It is blindness to the reach of God. Now he is through the witness of nature, through the witness of the scriptures, through the witness of Christ himself in the incarnation, reaching out and communicating who he is so that we are all without excuse.

The psalmist says, the fool says in his heart, there is no God. Look what John is saying here. Look what John is showing us. John is showing us that it is just as absurd to deny that Jesus is God. This is John's message here.

The light has come, our creator has come, the Messiah has come, and he was rejected. This was a rejection of God.

[18 : 43] John wants us to know that to see Jesus is to see God. To hear the words of Christ is to hear the words of God.

To touch him is to touch God. To be near him is to be near God. And to reject him is to reject God. We see this is exactly what the Jewish people did. Look at verse 11. John says in verse 11, he came to his own people, and his own people did not receive him.

Even if the rest of the world wouldn't recognize God in the flesh, surely, surely the people of God would know him. This Jewish Messiah promised to Jewish people, spoken of through Jewish prophets, came into the world as a Jewish baby, grew up, and lived, and walked, and learned in Jewish culture, began to speak, and to teach, and explain from the Jewish scriptures that he was the long-awaited Jewish Christ, and how did they respond to him?

They murdered him. They hung him on a cross. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.

[20 : 10] This is the tragic absurdity of sin. And to this day, some 2,000 years later, what has changed?

Many ethnic Jews still reject him. Many who are of Jewish heritage, sadly, to this day, are still rejecting Christ, still waiting for the Messiah to come, still believing that they are okay with God while they deny and despise his son.

But hear me, because this is John's point. No one is okay with God if they deny his son. No one is okay with God.

Jew and Gentile alike, no one, no matter how kind, no matter how generous, no matter how spiritual, no matter how much they speak about God, no one can claim God while denying or ignoring Christ Jesus.

We need to be careful, church. In our witness, as we share the gospel with our neighbors, with our friends, in our witness, that we are not content to see people give appearance of love for God, but zero evidence of faith in Christ.

[21 : 36] Christ. That's not enough. Apart from faith in Jesus Christ, no one can know God, no matter how religious or devout they may seem.

Even as we consider our own personal relationship with God, don't bypass Christ on the way to God. You can't. Jesus says, I am the way and the truth and the life.

No one comes to the Father except by me. The more you understand that all of your relationship with God is in Christ, through Christ, by Christ, the deeper and the more profoundly beautiful you will see your relationship with God to be.

Even as we consider our own practices here as a church, as a family, we exist to magnify the glory of God in what?

In the gospel of Jesus Christ. I was told by an old mentor to never preach a sermon that I could go and preach at a synagogue.

[22 : 47] You understand what he's saying? Never preach a sermon that I could go and preach in a synagogue and not be booed out of the room. every text, every sermon, every message, every lesson, preach Christ.

Bear witness to the light so that everyone in the room is now faced with the decision, will I reject him or will I receive him?

There's another response here. Second response in this passage is to receive the light. John the Baptist came bearing witness to the light.

Why? Verse 7, why? That all might believe through him. We'll see in this book that John has a lot to say about believing. This is the first time that we see that word here.

We're going to see that one word 97 more times in the book of John. His aim in writing, our aim in witnessing, our aim in gathering, here and singing and praying and preaching this word is that all

might believe in Christ Jesus and live in light of that faith in the Son.

[24 : 08] Look here to verse 11 again. It says, He came to his own, his own people did not receive him, but to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

John is showing us here the unfathomable richness of grace toward those who believe.

all who deny him, Jew and Greek alike, are denying God and are separated from him, but all who receive him, Jew and Greek alike, man and woman alike, rich and poor alike, boys and girls alike, people from every tribe, tongue, and nation alike, to all who did receive him, he gave an unchangeable, irrevocable, eternity changing right to become children of God.

How much do you make of the fact that through faith in Christ you have been made a child of God?

J.I. Packer, he says, if you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child and having God as his father.

[25 : 51] If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all.

See, this right is an incredible gift. If you are in Christ, if you have been given this right to become a child of God, you have been united to Christ by faith, you have been given the right to become his child, and you have been given all the rights of being his child.

Think about this with me. Think about this. Because as I was studying this passage this week, I could not get past the depth of this word right. He gave us the right to become his children.

Those who receive him are given the right. He didn't just make us his child, he gave us the right to become his children. We make so much out of our rights, don't we?

Especially as Americans, my goodness. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

[27 : 17] I want to very gently poke a hole in that, because that's simply not true.

In relation to fellow man, horizontally speaking, in relation to one another, man to man, yes, of course, we have to protect and uphold certain man to man horizontal rights in order to function as a society.

It is not for man to take what is only God's to give and to take. So yes, horizontally, amen. But vertically, before God, we need to know that we have no such rights.

Who among us can look at God and claim a right to life? You forfeited your right to life when you first sinned against God.

What does Romans tell us? The wages of sin is death. It's by his mercy alone that we are breathing right now, not by right. You forfeited your right to liberty when you became a slave to sin.

[28 : 44] You squandered your pursuit of happiness when you pursued it outside of the only source of true and lasting joy and happiness. What right can anyone claim before God?

No one who has rejected Christ can claim before God any right to life, to liberty, to happiness, to anything whatsoever.

But John tells us those who have received Christ have been given a right right to become children of God.

And as his children, they have an irrevocable right to eternal life, to freedom from sin, to pleasures forevermore in the presence of God, their father.

Do you see what a blessing it is to be called a child of God? What a privilege. That's not shared with everyone everywhere. Not everyone is a child of God.

[30 : 02] This is no one's natural right to be his children. Yes, we are all his creation, but no, we are not all his children. To call God father is a precious right.

right. So how do we get in on this? That's the question, isn't it? How is anyone given this right?

Well, we see, John tells us, it's not of blood. It cannot be earned by a natural belonging to any earthly race, to any earthly family, to any earthly nation, to any earthly culture.

You cannot be born naturally into the kingdom of God. God has no grandchildren, only children. This was a problem for the Jews.

It may be a problem for some of you. You are not his child simply because you were raised in a Christian home or because you were born into a nominally Christian culture.

[31 : 10] John says no one is his child by blood. God. We see, it is not of the will of the flesh. This right cannot be earned by our doing.

It is not by works so that no one may boast. You cannot work your way into the family of God. You may have gone to church your whole life, come and sung the songs, prayed the prayers, walked an aisle, and still not get it.

There are so many who think that if they are just good enough, they are not as far gone, not as bad as some other people, that they know that they are fine in the sight of God.

This is a lie. You cannot work your way into the family of God. It is not of the will of man, John says. This right cannot be earned by our willing. He gave the right to become children of God who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

[32 : 29] There are so many professing Christians who when you begin to peel back the layers of their relationship with God at the bottom, at the foundation, what you find is not the saving grace of God and the will of God, it is their will.

John says, no, the foundation of your new birth as a child of God is not your will, but God's.

John is laying the groundwork here for a topic that he's going to come back to again and again and again, which is, as he says later, that a person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given to him from heaven.

This is a right given from God. So how is it given? It's given simply through the gift of faith.

To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

[33 : 43] Sounds almost too simple, doesn't it? You and I, we're so hardwired, aren't we? To want to work for what we get.

To want to try to earn our keep, to try to work and to labor and to strive and to do and to do and to do and to do. John says you can't earn this.

This is given, simply received by genuine faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Do you believe that Jesus is God?

Do you believe that he is worthy of your worship? Do you believe that he's risen from the grave, that he and he alone can conquer and save you from your sin, that he's defeated death, that he stands to intercede between you and the Father, that he brings us back into right relationship with God?

If so, rejoice and rest. You have been made his child. And if not, the time has come for you to stop rejecting God and to turn, to believe and to receive him by faith.

[35 : 11] Last week, we got to see three of our members baptized. I call that a low country baptism, y'all. Outside, in the rain, in my church clothes, in the hot tub, that's a low country baptism.

I don't know if you could hear the questions that I could, I was asking them over the rain and the noise. I asked them a series of questions. I said, do you, do you believe that you have sinned against a holy God?

That you've offended him with your sin, that your sin has earned you his wrath, every one of them, all three? Yes, I do. Have you trusted in Christ Jesus alone for the salvation from your sins, the light of the world, that he has lived perfectly where you have failed, that he suffered and died in your place on the cross, that he bore the wrath of God that you deserve for your sin?

Yes, I have. Yes, I do. And do you commit now to live out the Christian faith by the power of the Holy Spirit, to put sin to death and to walk by the power of the Spirit and newness of life?

Yes, I do. Church, I want to see more people in the hot tub. Don't you? I want to see more and more and more come into the kingdom.

[36 : 45] I want to see more and more be given eyes to see the glory of Christ. I want to see more given this unchangeable right to become children of God.

How will that happen unless we go and bear witness to the light? Let's pray. Lord, the decision is placed before us, not just now, not just once, but every moment.

Will we receive you? Will we believe upon you? Will we live as your children? children? We pray, Father, that if there are any here who don't know you, who are standing and living in rejection to Christ, would you change that right now?

Give them eyes to see. And for those who know you, Father, as your children, we pray that our eyes would be open to understand the depth of that gift, that we've become children of God.

Lead us to live in light of that glorious truth. And Father, we pray that as we go from this place, would we take something of a witness to share the good news of Christ with those around us.

[38 : 12] We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen.