

The Reconciling Word

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Date: 11 December 2022

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. It is great to see you all. I'm glad you have joined us for worship this morning. It is the third Sunday in Advent, so we are hurtling along, hurtling along towards Christmas Day. So it's good to be able to celebrate. I just want to say Pastor Nick was really kind to me about these cards, because last week I said after today they're scrap paper.

They're not scrap paper. They still have good information on them. So just wanted to point those out. They're great for information all the way through this month, so please continue to take advantage of them as you can. You know, as we begin this morning, I want to talk a little bit about a deep human longing that we have, and that is to belong. Because many of us experience, well, let me start this. Lots of stories in the world have, as its beginning, orphans. Think about all the orphans that you know of throughout great stories. Spider-Man is an orphan. Frodo Baggins is an orphan. Harry Potter is an orphan. Little Orphan Annie. Well, that's kind of obvious, right?

The Boxcar Children, if you're of my generation or you have kids and you pulled in, it's a great series, starts with four kids who live in a train boxcar because they're orphans.

Why is this such a powerful theme in literature? Well, it's because I think we all have a longing to belong to a family. Now, some of you have grown up feeling like orphans yourselves.

Some of you have grown up in wonderful families and yet felt like you never fit. Some of you have grown up in really dysfunctional and broken families where you were disregarded and discarded by those closest to you. Some of you may actually be orphans. You have lost parents and you've been adopted or you found your way in the world. Now, some of you have grown up in families where you have felt loved and embraced. But regardless of your family background, when we have healthy families or healthy surrogate families, we still often find ourselves disappointed or frustrated or longing for more in our familial relationships. We have a deeper longing, something that no human relationship can actually meet. Not because our families have failed us, but because our human families are finite. And the desire that we have to belong is something that God has given us to point us to something greater, a longing to belong to a part of His eternal family. And this brings us to our Advent text this morning.

[3 : 29] If you want to turn with me, we're in the Gospel of John. We're going to be looking at John chapter 1, verses 6 through 13. That's page 833 in the Pew Bible, if you want to turn there with me.

And it'd be great if you could do that, because we'll be looking at it fairly carefully as we walk through it this morning. And remember what we've seen in the last couple of weeks in the beginning of the Gospel of John, the first verses of John 1. We see this cosmic word from the beginning, a person of the triune God who reigns over all things and who is active in creating all things.

He is the life-giving word, the light that has come into the darkness of our world. Come to master it. And this leads us up to the passage that we're looking at this morning. And remember, if you remember, there's a rubric in this large section, verses 1 through 18. There's a rubric of the Word is introduced, and then we see three major things that He does. The Word is active in creation, the Word is active in redemption, and the Word is active in revelation. So Nick talked about creation last week. We're going to talk about redemption this week, and next week we'll talk a bit about revelation along the way, I think. Right, Nick? Something like that? Okay. So that's where we're going to go this morning. In this section, having talked in verses 1 through 5 about this cosmic word and these grand themes, He then dives in and connects with the real world in very important ways. And He's going to anticipate what He says in verse 14 when He says, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. And we're going to look at the coming of Jesus, the Word to this world. So let's look at John chapter 1. We're going to read verses 6 through 13 together, and then I'll pray for God's help, and then we'll dive in. So let's read God's Word together.

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.

[5 : 51] The true light, which enlightens 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. 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 together.

Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer, we pray this morning. We pray that you would be our help. Lord, for we know that in and of ourselves, Lord, we would misunderstand your Word, and we would be led astray. But Lord, because you have made yourself known to us and given us your Spirit, Lord, you have made it possible for us to understand your Word. And I pray this morning for your help. Lord, I pray for us that we would have minds alert to understand the truths. Lord, that we would have wills that are willing to submit and receive these truths from you. And Lord, hearts that would treasure and love the truths that we learned this morning. Lord, I pray for your help. Lord, that you would give me words to speak. That I might speak all that you would have me to say. And that we together might sit under your Word this morning. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

The big idea of this section of John, I believe, is that Jesus, the Word, has come so that we might belong to the family of God. So let's look at that. We're going to look at three sections of it. In verses 6 through 8, we're going to see that Jesus comes with family roots.

We're going to see in verses 9 through 11 that Jesus faces family rejection. And verses 12 through 13, Jesus comes to—well, I didn't say this rightly—Jesus comes to recreate His family for us. So that's—those are our three ideas. Family roots, family rejection, and family recreation. So let's see, for those of you who are taking notes, if you get all that. So, all right. First of all, the beginning of this.

[8 : 21] Jesus' family roots. You may be asking, why did I pick family for this? Well, there are two reasons. One is at the very end, because He talks about being children of God, being born of God, and these are family relationships. So that's where we're going to get to at the end. But at the beginning, one of the questions that I asked that you might have asked right off the bat is, why do we suddenly turn from this transcendent Word who is the bringing light into the darkness of the world to John the Baptist? And He isn't even called John the Baptist. He's just called John. And if you're confused, there are two Johns here. There's John the Apostle, who's written this gospel, but never calls himself John. So he never names himself in the gospel. And so, when he just refers to this other guy, the cousin, relatively, of Jesus, John the Baptist, right? He was a cousin once removed, we think.

So, but John the Baptist, he just says, there was a man sent from God, and his name was John. And we move from this cosmic story to this very nitty-gritty, here's a guy on the ground that everybody knows.

And as you see John the Baptist playing out, you see John the Baptist plays a really critical role in the broad sweep of the storyline of the Scriptures. Because what John the Baptist represents is the family tree of the nation of Israel, and the role of the last prophet of the nation of Israel, the descendants of Abraham, who comes and he identifies Jesus from the very start as the one who has come to fulfill all of the promises and to bring them to fruition in the world in God's redemptive work. And so we see in the second half of John chapter 1, it's John the Baptist who sees Jesus as an adult, and he says, behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And this is what John the Baptist's role is throughout Scripture. And we see him in the other, we see him in all the other gospel accounts. He's the one who comes to bear witness. And this is what John emphasizes. John the Baptist has come to say, he's the one. John the Baptist is the spotlight that shines his light on Jesus as he begins his ministry. And throughout his ministry, actually, to say, this is the one that we are waiting for. He is, and as this passage 6 through 8 goes on, he's saying, this is the one. He is the light that I'm bearing witness to. The true light that has come into the world.

The light that is the light of life from verses 4 and 5. John the Baptist is saying, he's the one. And it's like John the Apostle is pulling out his family photo book. And he's saying, remember Uncle John? Uncle John the Baptist? Remember what he said about Jesus? This is where Jesus comes from. So when Jesus enters into the stage, this cosmic word is also rooted in God's work in history and and the people of God up to that point. So this is the idea. This is why I think the family roots are

important for Jesus as we see this. He's merging the cosmic reality with this real family history so that we would know that Jesus comes to enter in for us as a human and as God.

These are the roots of Jesus as we see here. John then moves on from that in verses 6 through 8 to how the world received Jesus coming into the world. So verses 9 through 11, the true light which enlightens every man was coming into the world.

[12:22] There are two key ideas in this section 9 through 11 that we need to see. First is that he came to the world. Now, we might think that that's synonymous with saying he came to his creation.

But in fact, that's a misreading of this because when you read through the gospel of John over and over and over again, when the word world is used, this is the old-fashioned idea of worldliness that we don't tend to talk about in our 21st century church but used to be talked about in the church all the time. The world is the systems, the thought patterns, the perspectives, the morality of a world that is in rebellion against God, that rejects the God of the Bible and chooses to go a different way. And so when John says he came to the world, he's not saying he came into a neutral creation to try to figure out if he could slightly improve it. But he came to a world that was in rejection of God. So he came into this. But it is true that he came to both his creation broadly and his people in particular, right? So we see in verse 11, right? He came to his own. Verse 10, it says, he came to the world, the world that was made through him, and yet the world did not know him.

So it is true that all of creation is rejecting this word who's come in. But then particularly, he came to his own people. He came to the Jewish people who had Abraham and Moses and David, who had the Old Testament scriptures, who had seen God work in the Exodus, who had seen God work in judgment, who had seen God work in bringing people back from exile, who had seen God work in all of these ways. And they too, when the word arrived, they rejected him.

He came to all these things as the true light. We see this in verse 9. The true light means that he's the real thing. We see in other parts of the Gospel of John that we're supposed to be true worshipers in chapter 4, and that Jesus is the true bread from heaven. Not manna, which was the sign, but Jesus is the true bread from heaven. He is the true vine in chapter 15, verse 1. He is true God in chapter 17, verse 3. So John is saying, this light that's coming in, this is the real thing.

[14:58] The creator coming into his creation, the light coming into the darkness. Not as an idea, not merely as a verbal message or luminous celestial glow, but in a person, the person of Jesus. And when he comes, he is rejected. And I wonder, I wonder if we get the impact of that.

Because in the face of the cosmic word coming into his creation, coming to his people, what was the response? Hostility, questioning, distance. He was not embraced. And we have to see that this isn't just for all of creation or for the Jewish people in particular. They weren't particularly bad in the way that they responded. They knew more, and so they were responsible for that. But they actually were more of a paradigm, a picture of all of us. Maybe some of you have had the privilege of growing up in a Christian home where you didn't know a time when you didn't know Jesus. But that wasn't true for me, and I'm sure it's not true for many of you. And it certainly isn't true for much of the world.

And when you raise the name of Jesus, we shrug, say, yeah, really? Does it really matter? Does he really matter? Does he really matter? We resist? What? He claims to be God? He wants to be Lord over my life? We reject. No, I don't want him in my life. I want to do it my own way.

Rather than embrace him, we would rather pursue life on our own. Rather than submit to him, we would rather assert our own freedom from him. And rather than love him, we would treat him with casual disinterest. And John wants us to see how cosmic this offense is. It is unbelievable that the creator of the world would come and his creation would say, eh, not interested. Well, thanks, but no thanks.

Our rejection of the light of life is the reason why we live in darkness. Our refusal of the word is the reason why we live in confusion and despair. And our abandonment of this word, of this one who has come for us, is the reason for our alienation and our aloneness.

[17:47] I wonder. I wonder. I wonder this for me, and I wonder this for you. Where's your heart this Advent season? As you think about this grand story, do you find yourself shrugging? Do you find yourself too busy to care? Do you find yourself resisting, knowing that there's part of your life or all of your life where you want to live it apart from him? Maybe you know how much you long for that sense of belonging again. Hopefully this Christmas, God will meet you and restore that to you today.

Because there's hope for us. There's hope that Jesus has come for us. That though he was rejected, not only by people out there, but by us in our own hearts, Jesus, the word has come to make us a part of his family. To make us anew through himself and to make us a part of his family. This is what we see in verses 12 and 13 of our passage. Jesus came to recreate a family, a forever family, of being part of God's people. There are a couple of critical aspects in verses 12 through 13. I'm going to read it for us so we remember it, and then we're going to look at a couple of the key words here. It says, verse 12, 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 flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. First thing I want to note here is that his offer of recreation is given to all people. It says, to all who received him. Though Jesus came rooted in the Jewish people, though Jesus came out of this redemptive plan that focused on the descendants of Abraham, we now see a fullness that was hinted at throughout the whole Old Testament. This isn't a new idea, but this is a fruition of an idea that's been there from the very beginning, that the Jewish people were the stepping stone towards a greater people that would include people from every tribe and tongue and nation across the globe.

And when Jesus comes to make family, there is not one of those people who are excluded. There's not one of them that Jesus would look at and say, no, I didn't come for your people.

I didn't come for people who look like you. I didn't come for people who speak that language. But that Jesus came to all. And I have to say, one of the things that I've loved about Trinity over the years is that God's given us a little glimpse of it in this church. Not perfectly by any means, but, you know, we have people from every continent in this church every Sunday. It's pretty cool.

[21 : 08] It's pretty amazing. And if you don't know that, spend a little time after the service looking around and talk, introducing yourself to people who you don't know so that you can learn what an amazing community God has given us here at Trinity. It's part of the fruit of this offer that is given to all people. But the second thing is a recognition that Jesus comes, but, and his offer of recreation demands a response. Because though he came to his creation, right, not all of humanity, not all of his creative people are inherently a part of God's family. Being a creature is not merely enough to call God Father and Jesus Brother. Our heart that has rejected God puts us outside of that family.

And John clarifies for us to those who received him, to those who believed in his name, these are the ones who are able to be a part of God's family. To believe in his name is merely more than acknowledging what he is called. Yeah, I know that there's a guy named Jesus. It is a confession of loyalty to a person, a trust in their character, not just a label. Commentator D.A. Carson says that to believe and to receive is one who yields their allegiance to the word, who trusts him completely, acknowledges his claims, and confesses him with gratitude.

Friends, this is the offer that Jesus comes. The word comes and says, will you respond by turning away from your rejection and saying, yes, I receive you. I believe that you are who you say you are. I put my trust, my spiritual hope in what you have done. It is not merely to acknowledge Jesus, but to embrace him. Not merely to speak with our lips, but to put our whole life in knowing and following this word who has come for us. Pastor John Piper has helpfully commented on the breadth of what it means to receive.

He said this, he said, if Jesus comes to you as a savior, then you welcome his salvation. If he comes to you as a prote Burberry, then you welcome he ■ vendo confus restfully electric guitarist. Any measure or backpackers will embrace your age. If he comes to you as authority, you welcome his authority. And if he comes to you as king, you welcome his rule. I think that's a good word to help picture. What does it mean to receive him, to believe in his name? Because his name is this great name that above all names, this word of God, the second person of the Trinity, and he's come for us.

And when we receive him, he gives us the right, the privilege, the reality of becoming a part of God's forever family, becoming a child of God. And this is the amazing thing.

[24 : 52] When we receive him, we become a part of God's family. Verse 13 is fascinating though, isn't it? Because if verse 12 emphasizes this action on our part of response, we need to respond, we need to receive and believe and do these things. Verse 13 reminds us that this is God's recreative work in our hearts, that he spells this out. It's not because of your bloodline. It's not because of your heritage. It's not because of your family background. It's not because of the will of your parents or the will of your father, that you could do this, right? Born not of these human activities, but born of God. And this is the amazing thing. And we see this in lots of places in

Scripture. We'll see it in two. If you read ahead in the Gospel of John, we'll see John talking to Nicodemus about and saying to him, you must be born again to enter into God's kingdom, to be a part of his family. We see it in Ephesians 2 where the apostle Paul tells us, you were dead in your sins and trespasses. But God who is rich in mercy, because of what he's done in Christ, he has made you alive and raised you up with him to a new life where you are now his forever. This is the great work of regeneration. This is why that phrase born again became such a buzzword in the 20th century, because Billy Graham said, this is the most important thing that we could say about the gospel, that God can take us as dead people and make us alive spiritually. He can remove us from the judgment of death that comes because of sin and bring us into the family of God where we have an eternal life that is unshakable and unlosable. And here John overlays that with, and we are born of God to be a child of God and to be a part of his family. And God becomes our heavenly father.

And Jesus, our savior, becomes our brother as well as our Lord. And we are his eternal children. Friends, what good news this is that God has done this. And look, we don't have to spend the rest of our day wrestling through, well, how much of my receiving him is my work and how much of it is God's work? We don't have to do that because if you're ready to receive him, then God is at work in you.

And just do it. Receive him. Embrace him. Let him be yours. And then you'll be his. And then you won't have to ask those questions anymore because you'll know what a gracious God who has come for you.

And this is the whole message of Advent, is that he's come for you. Not because you were good enough. Not because you were religious enough. Not because you were a faithful enough church member that suddenly God looked at you one day and said, okay, you finally passed the test. You've met the standard.

Now you're my child forever. No. He has come for you in the darkness of your sin and said, come. He has come for you in the alienation and the rejection that you have given to him and said, I'm going to bring you in. I'm going to bring you in. I'm going to make you new. And you're going to be my child. And you will know my embrace. The only thing we have to do is to be humble enough to receive it.

[28 : 39] And so, friends, the longing of our souls to belong, Advent gives us good news.

To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gives us the privilege of being a child of God. What good news that is, this Advent season.

So what will you do with him this morning? It's easy for us to be distracted in this season with busyness and with lots of activity.

But I encourage you, set aside time to meditate on this great gift and the great invitation to be a child of God this Advent season.

And maybe some of you are here this morning, and this is a new message for you. Maybe you're exploring Christianity and trying to figure out what it means. Maybe you've been a part of the church for a long time, but this is new.

[29 : 48] John and Jesus and I will all want to say to you, receive him, believe in his name, and become a child of God. Let's pray. Lord, we love you.

Lord, how amazing it is that you, the creator of all things, the cosmic word, the eternal light that brings light and life into the world, Lord, that you have entered into the darkness of our sin.

By your life and death and resurrection, you have achieved a salvation that now you work in us.

Lord, we pray this morning that our hearts would receive you, that we would embrace you, that we would know the joy of being your child this morning.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.