

John 1:6-13

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, everyone. The mic is on. That's good. We're going to continue our Advent series this morning in John's Prologue. That's John chapter 1.

We're going to look up through verse 13 this morning. If you're following in the Pew Bible, that's page 886. Gospel of John chapter 1.

We're really going to focus in on verses 9 through 13 this morning, but I'm going to read from the beginning through verse 13. Let's pray as we prepare to read God's Word together.

God, in this moment we quiet our hearts before you, and we thank you that we can, in this moment, turn to this passage and read glorious truths about your Son, Jesus Christ.

Father, what a humbling and ennobling reality that you would come and dwell among us, that you would stoop to come and live in our midst, that you would commune with us, and that you would welcome us, even now, even in this place, even in this time, to commune with you in your Word.

[1 : 3 5] So, Lord, as we read your Word, as we attempt to unpack it and understand it this morning, would you come and would you speak to our hearts?

Lord, we ask all this in Christ's name. Amen. John chapter 1, verse 1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was a light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness is not overcoming.

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. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.

[2 : 4 2] 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.

So, it's another Christmas season. And that means we're all thinking about gifts, right? Are you working on your gift list for your loved ones?

It's okay, you can admit it. Thinking a little bit about presents. What gift are you hoping to get this Christmas? Maybe you're eyeing up a shiny new tablet, like a Kindle or a Nook or a Nexus.

David Pogue assures us in the New York Times that the iPad mini is certainly the best way to go. I'll let you make the call on that one. Me, I'm just hoping for a new set of earbuds for my old school wheel control iPod Nano.

Yes, believe it or not, there was a time when they made consumer electronics without a touch screen. And I have such a dinosaur piece of a fossil past.

[3 : 49] I can't figure out whether my old iPod makes me hopelessly out of date or ironic and trendy. But I'll let you make the call on that one, too, I guess.

Maybe you're not a techie. Maybe the gift that you really want for Christmas is just a nice dinner out with your spouse. Or maybe a calm evening with the family.

Maybe to see some loved ones you haven't seen in a while. It shocks me that the, well, it doesn't shock me. It's just, I think it's a reality that the older you get, the simpler but more profound your wish list becomes, doesn't it?

Maybe the gift you're hoping for this Christmas is just some comfort in the face of loss. Our prayers and tears continue to be with all those who lost loved ones this week in Newtown.

And really with all those who are grieving this Christmas. So whether it's something as silly and shiny as an iPad or as profound as the comforting embrace of a friend, we're all hoping for some kind of gift.

[4 : 56] This Christmas time. In our Advent series this year, we're looking at the prologue of John's Gospel. And last week we saw that the profundity of Christmas, the profundity of the incarnation is that in Jesus, the eternal word of God, the creator of all things, has come to begin a new creation.

The light shining in the darkness. And the darkness unable to overcome it. But this Sunday as we move forward in John's prologue, we see that this same Jesus has come to give.

In verse 12 we find two simple words. He gave. He gave. And friends, there it is. That's the message of Christianity.

That the true God, the God of Jesus, is a God who gives. Until you understand that, you don't really understand Christianity at all, I'd venture.

Many other religions will tell you of a God who demands. And many others will tell you of a God who simply accepts. But only in Christianity do we hear of a God who gives.

[6 : 11] Of a God who gives what he demands. And a God who gives so that we might be accepted. But what does Jesus come to give?

Why did this light come shining into the darkness? Why did the word become flesh? Why was the son of God born a human? What did he come to give? You can tell a lot by how someone answers that question, I think.

And in some sense, there are perfectly, there are lots of perfectly right answers to that. In fact, the book of James tells us that every good and perfect gift comes down from the father of lights. But here John is speaking about the sort of realm of our redemption.

Of all that Christ has come to give us through his saving work. What is the summit? What's the peak? What's the pinnacle? What's the most precious dimension of what he's accomplished for us?

Remember, this is the prologue. This is the introduction to John's gospel. John's like a great composer putting the most important musical motifs of the symphony right here in the opening movement.

[7 : 15] Here John is giving us the great central thesis and themes of his work. It's right here. So of all the blessings of Christ's work, what does he put as the crown of them all?

How would you answer? The forgiveness of sins? Justification? Going to heaven when you die?

These are all true and rich and good. But John points to something even more than that. The light has come shining into the darkness.

The word has become flesh not only to forgive sins and justify us, but to give us the right to become children of God. In other words, God the Son has been born a human so that in him we might be born of God.

That's the great and crowning achievement of Christ's work. Our hymns sometimes remember these things better than we do, don't they? That's one of the reasons why we sing old songs as well as new songs as a church, because we want the best of Christian spirituality from all ages, infusing our present.

[8 : 35] Because sometimes they understood things that we often forget and that we need to remember and sing. Last week we ended the service with the familiar Christmas song, Hark! The Herald Angels Sing.

Do you remember the verse? Mild he lays his glory by. Born that man no more may die. Born to raise the sons of earth. Born to give them second birth.

There it is. Jesus born a human so that in him we might be born of God. Later in his life, John will write in one of his epistles, in the first epistle, chapter 3, he'll say, Behold, what manner of love the Father has given to us that we should be called children of God.

And so we are. The fact that Christ would give us the right to become children of God is something that electrified John's whole life.

Such that when he's putting pen to paper at the end of his life and caring for his churches, he's drawn to almost speechless wonder. Behold. At the fact that God would make us his children.

[9 : 49] Why is this the redemptive melody line that he wants us to savor throughout his whole gospel symphony? Well, let's look. What does it mean to be a child of God?

John shows us two things here. And in fact, as you look at the whole New Testament, you see that it really has two ways of speaking about what it means to be a child of God.

And those two ways are sort of encapsulated in two great theological words. The reality of adoption and the reality of regeneration. And you tend to see in Paul more language of adoption.

And you tend to see in John more language of regeneration. But in fact, you know, throughout the whole Old Testament, you see both concepts at work. And I think we actually see both realities right here in John's prologue.

In verse 12, John says that becoming a child of God is a right that we're given. And then in verse 13, he says it means being spiritually born. In other words, John is saying that becoming a child of God means getting a whole new status.

[11 : 02] And a whole new nature. So let's look at both of these. When John says we get a whole new status, the right to become children of God, he's saying that something legal and permanent has happened to us before God.

In Paul's language, God has adopted us as sons and daughters. Our identity has fundamentally shifted. Think about it. How do you identify yourself?

Is it your work or your lack of work? I think that's sort of what plagues us in the West, isn't it? You meet someone and then you ask, well, what do you do? Not how do you do.

What do you do? We want to size people up right away, right? How do you identify yourself? Is it your marital status? I'm a married person. I'm a single person. Do you identify yourself by whether you have or don't have children?

By your major in college? By your sports teams that you're a part of? By the friend group you're in? When you wake up in the morning, what are you telling yourself? What are you telling yourself about who you are?

[12 : 10] Maybe you look at your job and you tell yourself, man, you know what? I am just a cog in the wheel.

And you get discouraged. Maybe you look at your past mistakes and you tell yourself, I'm a failure. So you never take risks and you never dream about what God might use you to do.

Or maybe you look at past wounds or past hurts, past ways in which you've suffered and you tell yourself, I'm worthless. No one could love someone like me.

So you hurt yourself and you hurt others. And the reality is, friends, that you'll always live out of some identity.

What you understand about your being will direct your doing. And many of us Christians are living with a very insufficient understanding of our identity in Christ.

[13 : 20] Because you see, we're not just forgiven and given a second chance to try harder. We're not even just pronounced innocent and righteous before God's law. We are God's children.

God's fundamental disposition towards you is one of favor and delight. Is there discipline? Sure, there's discipline. But if you are in Christ, then God looks upon you as he looks upon his own son.

Now, of course, there's a difference between Jesus's sonship and our sonship. Jesus is the son of God eternally and by nature. And we're sons and daughters by adoption. But God's favor towards us is the same as his favor towards his eternal son.

That's the right Jesus has given us. To enter into his father's delight. And to be a part of his family. As you read the rest of John's gospel, Jesus says some amazing things about his relationship with the father.

If you go forward and you read John 17, Jesus starts talking about the glory that he shared with the father before time began.

[14 : 35] He gives us a glimpse into the eternal nature of the triune God where father, son, and spirit existed from all time, glorifying one another. Delighting in one another.

Enjoying one another. Jesus has been born of a human so that in him you might be entered into that triune delight.

But now consider that God has bestowed on us this whole new identity in Christ, not just so we can sit around and feel good about ourselves. Yeah? Not just so that we can continue living for ourselves, but so that we might live for him.

It's like the beginning of The Hobbit. Anybody go see that this weekend? Yes, two did. Yeah, good. More. Yes, good. Anybody actually go for the midnight show?

Come on. True confessions. There are some Hobbit fans here. Well, you know, the opening chapter of The Hobbit is all about the wizard Gandalf giving Bilbo a new identity. Of course, Bilbo doesn't know anything about it at first, right?

[15 : 46] The dwarves just start showing up at his door, talking of adventure and reclaiming their ancient treasure. And little does Bilbo know that Gandalf has put a seal on his door that reads what?

Burglar. Wants a good job, plenty of excitement, and reasonable reward. Now, by nature, Bilbo is a respectable Hobbit.

He doesn't want any trouble, and he certainly doesn't want any adventure. But nonetheless, Bilbo assigns him this new, excuse me, Gandalf assigns him this new identity.

The identity of a burglar that will make sure the dwarves can get their gold. And of course, Bilbo's taken back by all that, and the dwarves themselves start to doubt whether Bilbo's the man for the job.

But Gandalf corrects them all. He says, I have chosen Mr. Baggins, and that ought to be enough for all of you. If I say he's a burglar, a burglar he is.

[16 : 47] Or will be when the time comes. And sure enough, as the story progresses, Bilbo more and more becomes an adventurer, and a co-conspirator, an expert treasure hunter, a burglar, in the best sense of the term.

He becomes what the wizard has declared him to be. And in the same way, God grants us a new identity in Christ, so that we might become what he wants us to be.

So that we might live for his purposes and his plans. Some of you are wondering this morning when your adventure is going to begin, and what role you're going to have to play in it.

But recognize this morning that your God-given identity has already assigned you an adventure. The very mission of God in the world.

And this adventure is already forming, and it's already underway. And for some of you, the dwarves have already started showing up at the door, and you haven't been recognizing it. Because you haven't recognized who you are.

[18 : 02] He's declared you his child and his beloved. So friends, be what you are. And that means in the face of work, you aren't a cog in the wheel.

You're a child of the king. And God has placed you there to glorify and delight in him. And perhaps you won't stay in that job forever. But regardless, your identity transcends your work, and your dignity and purpose is not defined by your work.

But your identity as God-child instills your work with new purpose. And you're not just pleasing your boss to get your paycheck. You're working under the Lord.

You're working to please him and further his renown in the world. And moreover, you aren't ultimately defined any longer by your past failures or even your past wounds.

You have a whole new status now. You have been given the right to become a child of God.

[19 : 08] And as John says at the end of his life, and so you are. That's the first part of what it means to be a child of God, to have a whole new status. But it also means to have a whole new nature.

In verse 13, John says it's being born of God. And that points us ahead to the passage we read earlier in the service from John 3, where Jesus teaches us about the great truth of regeneration, of being spiritually reborn, or as he puts it there, being born again.

Now, immediately we have to stop and realize that when most people hear the word born again, they actually aren't hearing what the Bible means by the phrase. When your typical person on the street hears or uses the phrase born again, they're probably thinking one of two things.

And many of you who've had conversations with people who aren't believers have probably experienced this. On the one hand, they're thinking of a certain kind or type of Christianity. You know, they're thinking that born again means that those are the kinds of Christians, the born agains, they're the ones that are really overzealous and overbearing and unintellectual and unreflective in their faith and pretty culturally conservative and narrow.

Right? Am I the only one who's had that conversation with someone? Of course not. On the other hand, some people think that being born again is just a particular kind of religious experience that some people happen to have.

[20 : 31] It's this experience for sort of emotionally unstable or really morally messed up people that they sort of need to kind of put them back on track. It's not something for put-together, responsible, you know, people like us.

Now, the problem with both of these ideas is that it isn't at all what Jesus means. On the one hand, if you followed the sort of narrative in John chapter 3, Jesus says, you actually can't be a Christian at all without being born again.

You can't enter the kingdom of God and you can't even see the kingdom of God without being born again. So born again Christianity isn't just a certain type of class or type of Christianity.

To be a Christian at all requires it. And on the other hand, as far as being an experience for the morally or emotionally unstable, look at who Jesus is talking to in John 3.

Nicodemus is the picture-perfect person of having it all together. He's a Pharisee, which means he's morally upright. He's a ruler of the people, which means he's capable and respectable. He's even pretty open-minded.

[21 : 42] I mean, he's actually coming to talk to Jesus as opposed to just writing him off. What about that guy suggests that he needs to be spiritually reborn? And yet, Jesus says, even Nicodemus has to be born again.

So what does it mean to be born of God? In short, it means to be given a whole new spiritual nature. To move from death to life spiritually.

To have new awareness and new desires. In fact, when you study what the New Testament has to say as a whole about regeneration, a simply mind-blowing picture emerges.

When you take all the pieces and put them together, you see that to be born again is to have the same sin-conquering, world-healing power that rose Jesus from the dead in the middle of history and that will restore the world at the end of history come crashing right into us.

That same new creation dynamic alive in you. Of course, that doesn't mean it's a riveting emotional experience for everyone.

[23 : 14] For many people, regeneration happens as subtly and almost imperceptibly as a gentle breeze. But for others, it's like a torrential windstorm.

In other words, some people know exactly when God caused them to be born again. And other people look back at a season of life and say, it must have taken place somewhere in there because before that season, I wasn't trusting in Christ and at the end, I most certainly was.

My life had changed. But you see, no matter how God chooses to work, the result is the same across the board. We've been given a whole new nature.

A nature that's alive to God and His glory. A nature that's alive to His word in Scripture. A nature that's longing for His kingdom to come and for His will to be done.

For more of that new creation power to become crashing into the present. I think many of us underestimate the nature that's been given to us as children of God.

[24 : 27] Now, don't get me wrong. Christian living in this life is always going to be a struggle between our new nature and our old nature. Though God has implanted this new nature within us, the old nature still hangs on, and that means spiritual life is a fight from day one.

But with that being said, think about it. God has taken the spiritual dynamic of the new creation and planted it in the center of your being by His Holy Spirit.

To use the Hobbit illustration again, you know, Gandalf called Bilbo a burglar. But basically, he was just sort of making a bet.

He was just sort of hoping that he was going to be right. It was a bit of a risk. Friends, God isn't in the business of taking risks. When God declares us to be His children and we begin the adventure of His mission in the world, He puts the spirit of His Son into our hearts so that from the inside out, we live more and more in line with who He's already declared us to be.

You have a whole new nature, and you can go forth in mission confident that the one who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ.

[25 : 50] So are you timid? And are you fearful this morning? Are you feeling defeated and discouraged? Like there's just not enough left in the tank to make it through another holiday.

Realize the new nature that you have. Live as if God's power is at work in you. Because it is. Take risks for His glory.

Pray prayers that are tantamount to mountains being thrown into the sea. Being a child of God means having a whole new status and a whole new nature.

But to conclude, all this begs the question, how do we get it? How do we enter into this reality? Because one of the assumptions of this text, I'm sure you noticed it, is that being a child of God in the way that John means it here is not something that's true of everyone.

Not everyone has been given this new status and new nature. Now, that doesn't negate some very key truths that the Bible teaches us. All humans are created in the image of God. We all have dignity and value and worth no matter our ability, ethnicity, or even religious belief.

[27 : 04] And all humans are recipients of God's common grace. There's wisdom and skill and beauty and truth to be found among all cultures because the God of the Bible is a compassionate God towards all that He's made.

And moreover, Jesus says that all humans are to be considered our neighbors. Remember the parable of the prodigal son? Or excuse me, the parable of the good Samaritan? Jesus says that we sacrificially serve and seek the good of all we encounter regardless of whether or not we agree with them, even if there are sworn enemies.

But with all that being said, to be a child of God in the sense that John means here is not something that we all have simply by default.

It's not something that we find already on the inside. It's something that we must be given. It's something that we have to receive from the outside.

So how do we get it? John says, to all who receive Christ, who believe in His name, He gives the right to become children of God.

[28 : 12] Now on the one hand, it seems so easy, doesn't it? Receive Him, accept who He says He is, and believe in His name.

Now name in the Bible means someone's nature or their reputation or sometimes both. So believing in His name means to put our trust in Christ Himself and who He is and what He's done. It's fairly simple, isn't it?

It's good news. Receive Him. Believe in His name. It seems simple, but it's actually quite radical.

And many of us have missed what this means altogether. Because you see, much like the phrase born again, when we hear phrases like receive Him or believe in His name, we tend to hear something very different than what's intended.

Despite what's being said, what people hear is that to become a Christian, you've got to go from being an immoral person to being a moral person for God to accept you.

[29 : 18] We basically hear the call to repent of our sins and receive Christ as a call to switch teams. To switch from the pagan team to the moralistic team. To go from the irreligious team to the religious team.

That's what it means to become a Christian. But look at verses 9 through 11 of our passage. Notice that there isn't just one kind, one sort of people who miss out on Christ, who totally miss Him altogether, but two groups of people.

In verse 9, it's the world. They didn't know Him. They didn't acknowledge Him. But in verse 10, it's His own. They didn't receive Him.

And they rejected Him. Have you considered what John is saying here? On the one hand, the world doesn't get it. Okay. They miss Him altogether. Those who are doing their own thing and living by their own rules, following their own gods, the light shines on them and they don't acknowledge Him.

But the shocker is verse 11. When He comes to His own, that is to His fellow Jews, they don't receive Him either. Jesus comes to the morally upright, the good guys, the ones who are living for God, and they reject Him too.

[30 : 41] So you see, it's not just the immoral and the irreligious who need to be rescued, but it's the moral and the religious ones too. So the call to receive Christ, to believe in His name, can't be a call simply to take up religion and moral living in the hopes that God will love you and save you.

This is a call to something else all together. I mean, think about it. These guys had it all.

His own. Jesus' fellow Jews. They were living in all the right ways. But they still weren't accepted by the Father.

They still rejected Christ and remained outside the family of God. And what made them refuse? Well, it's because Jesus was telling them that their human achievements, moral or otherwise, couldn't save them.

Look at what John says in verse 13. It's not your blood that is your ethnic identity or the will of your flesh or the will of man that makes you God's child. No amount of human striving can give you the new status or the new nature.

[32 : 01] Not family, not moral record, not anything you do can make you a part of God's family. And many Jews of Jesus' time were using their Jewish heritage and their law keeping as badges to show that they were acceptable to God.

That they were the true family of God. But it's these very things that they were propping up that kept them from receiving God when he showed up right in their midst.

friends, as some of you this morning, God is showing up right in your midst.

And it's your clinging to your desire to want to save yourself that's causing you to miss him altogether.

They couldn't lay down their moral record and trust in Jesus' record. And they couldn't imagine admitting that their Jewish heritage didn't win them a place in God's favor.

[33 : 10] They couldn't imagine trusting wholly and solely in Jesus' name and not in their own name. But how about us? How about you?

Are you clinging to your name or to his? Have you transferred your trust from your reputation to his reputation?

Now make no mistake, that will mean letting go of your current identity. Your identity as a good person, your identity as a put-together person, your identity as a can-do, capable, successful, world-changer, you'll have to let go your trust trust in that identity and rely on him alone.

And that's a scary thing to do, isn't it? But consider the one you're being asked to put your trust in is the one who took on flesh for you.

The one who gave up his status and his reputation as heaven's king to come among us and to serve and to die on the cross in your place so that you could be made a part of God's family.

[34 : 38] And not just so that certain kinds of people could become God's children, that's the whole point here, so that all who receive him, who believe in his name, would be given this right.

Jesus now defines the people of God. No matter what your past has been, if you have him, then you are God's child, a full member of the family of the king.

So friends, if that's true for you, then let the adventure begin. Go forth into the world with the glorious freedom of the children of God.

Be who you are in Christ. That's the gift that he's come to give. The right to become the children of God. Let's pray.

Lord, we think of John's words in his epistle where he says, Behold, what manner of love the Father has given unto us that we should be called the children of God and so we are.

[35 : 56] Lord, it's a humbling thing to think that you would take us undeserving and ungrateful and make us your children.

Lord, thank you for taking on flesh so that we might be brought into the family of God.

Lord, I pray for those here this morning who are feeling a tug in a pool to be a part and to see in a deeper and richer way what you're doing in their life.

Lord, and what you're calling them to do and to be on mission for you. God, I pray that their identity would give them the courage and the assurance that they need to go forth boldly.

God, may we as a church be a place that truly embodies this truth that we are your children by grace. God, would that shape us and define us in every way.

Lord, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.