



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

John 1: 6-13

Fall 2021

"Homecoming"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning. We're continuing our studies in the Gospel of John, which we began last week. We're at the very beginning of it; this is lesson two. Our text is the second portion of this prologue to the Gospel of John. We're going to look at verses 6 through 13,

⁶There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the Light, but *he came* to testify about the Light.

⁹There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. ¹¹He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. ¹²But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name, ¹³who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

John 1: 6-13

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word and bless our time together as we consider this great text of Scripture.

(Message) Homecoming is normally a happy word and occasion. We think of soldiers returning home in their army fatigues, embraced by wives and children with tears of joy.

But not always. One of the ancient and best-known Greek tragedies is Agamemnon: The story of the homecoming that he, Agamemnon, received on his return from the Trojan war. He was king of Argos, commander of the Greeks. And after ten years of fighting, he came home to a hero's welcome, only to be murdered by his wife in his own home. Treachery, and a tragedy. It's story based in mythology.

What isn't myth, and what is tragic, is the homecoming Christ received—who was not only a king but the “King of kings”; and more, “the Word”—who is God. And yet we read in John chapter 1, verse 11, "He came to His own," (meaning His own home), "and those who were His own," (meaning His own family), "did not receive Him." They rejected Him and slew Him. What greater tragedy in all of history could there be than that?

That's what John writes of in John chapter 1, verses 6 through 13. And yet, he doesn't recount it as a tragedy but as a triumph because the result of the Lord's rejection by “His own” was the reception of Him by others who became His own—and children of God. That's grace, and that's the Gospel. And it's the message of our passage, John 1, verses 6 through 13, which is the second part of the prologue of John's Gospel, which is the first 18 verses of chapter 1. The first five verses we studied last week, and they described Christ in eternity. They described Christ before His incarnation, before He became a man. And now John moves to a description of the incarnation itself and men's response to it.

But John didn't begin at Bethlehem, but with the Baptist, and the Lord's public ministry, "There came a man sent from God, whose name was John." (vs6). It's a simple statement, but one carefully crafted, "There came a man..." is literally, 'a man became'. It's the same word translated *came* or *made* three times in verse 3, “All things came into

being through Him..." John the evangelist, was drawing a contrast here between Jesus, who is the Word always—He always *was*; and John the Baptist who *became*.

John is a *creature* of Christ and secondary to Him; still, he is very significant. He was 'sent of God' and given a divine mission. It was to be a "witness", a witness that he bore to Christ. And that's what John wrote. That's how he describes him. In fact, his mission was prophesied. He is the "voice" of Isaiah chapter 40 in verse 3, "...calling, 'Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness.' "

The last prophet of Israel was Malachi, 400 years earlier. So for centuries, no prophetic voice had been heard in the land; when suddenly the voice of John was heard out in the wilderness preaching repentance—and multitudes went out to hear him. He was an impressive figure: an austere man of the desert dressed like Elijah the prophet; dressed in a garment of camel hair and a leather belt; eating locusts and wild honey. But again, he was just *a witness*. He was sent by God to prepare the way for the Lord and to point people to Him. And he was faithful in doing that, faithful in his mission.

He wasn't the only witness. There are others in this Gospel: the Samaritan woman in chapter 4; the multitude in chapter 12; the Lord's own miracles; not to mention all of the Old Testament. There are multitudes of witnesses to the truth of Christ in the Gospel. If a person wants to put Jesus on trial, the truth is plain enough and there is no lack of witnesses to the truth—and to who He is and what He's done.

But John was the first, the one who introduced our Lord's ministry. His witness was to testify about "the Light", so that all might believe through him. That's the greatest ministry.

Some year ago a friend, a deacon here, recounted a story he had read about J. Vernon McGee; well known to a lot of you from his radio ministry and his books. While he was a student pastor in a church located on a red clay hill near Midway, Georgia, Dr. McGee received what he would call his greatest compliment. It was from a country boy who came up to him after the sermon. He was nervous and he was groping for his words, but he was able to say, "I never knew Jesus was so wonderful."

The boy wanted to say more, but he got choked up and rushed out the door. Dr. McGee remembered saying to himself as he watched the boy walking across a field, "LORD, help me to always preach so that people will say, 'I never knew Jesus was so wonderful.' " Well that's the mark of a person sent from God, and the true mark, the mark of a true witness of Christ. It's about Him. It's about the Lord. It's not about us. It's all about how wonderful the eternal Son of God is.

John was an effective preacher, an effective witness in doing just that. But the Baptist was not the point in all of this. And John the evangelist, the apostle, brings us back to the point, the main point, by writing in verse 8, "He was not the Light, but *he came* to testify about the Light."

The greatness of John's ministry led some to wonder about who he was—about his identity; perhaps he is the Messiah. Great crowds came to hear him. He was a dynamic individual, so they wondered if he might be the Christ—so that John had to deny that. And John was just a reflector of the Light. John was not the Light; Christ is the Light.

And John, the apostle, our writer here, adds to that in verse 9 that He was not only the Light, Jesus, but "the true Light", which means 'the real Light'. Christ is the genuine "...Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man." (vs9b). (Now this word, "*coming* into the world," is different from the word that's used by John in verse 8, 'there *came* a man.')

This is the normal word for *come, arrive*. It is a word that John uses here uniquely to describe the birth of Christ; to describe the Lord's birth as unique. He spoke of it as a "*coming* into the world". No, we don't speak of ourselves as 'coming into the world on a certain date.' We were *born*. We *became*. But here He is described as *coming* into the world: Which suggests His mission and more His heavenly origin; that it was a supernatural birth. He *came*!

John calls Him "the true Light", which suggests there are other lights, or so-called lights in the world—but they're not "the true Light". They may have some truth, they may have some influence, but they're devoid of the truth. Christ alone is the true Light. He reveals God to man. He reveals the way of man, of woman, coming to God. He

reveals the way of the knowledge of God and of relationship with Him. He reveals all of that.

John said He "enlightens every man". (vs9b). Now how does Christ do that? There is a sense in which it's true to say that every person who possesses reason, who has the ability to understand, has been enlightened by Christ, since as verse 3 states, "All things came into being through Him..." He created us all. He created us with a rational mind, and an ability to understand things, to perceive things. And so, in that way, one might say, 'Well, in that way He enlightens every man.'

But also, since He is the creator of all things, He gave this world natural revelation, which *enlightens* all to some degree. That's Psalm 19, verse 1, and "the heavens are declaring the glory of God." We see the evidence of God all around us, and since that can be understood as *enlightening* all men, and He's the creator of that, and so the designer of it.

But that's not John's meaning here, neither one of those two. This is about people being *enlightened* because Christ came into the world. Well certainly He did not *enlighten* every person who has ever lived. John wasn't suggesting that. He and the New Testament writers often used universal terms with a restricted meaning. What this means is, every man, every person in the sense of every person who comes in contact with Christ, or in contact with His word, in contact with the Scriptures, the revelation of God, is *enlightened*. He casts light upon them, upon their lives, and that Light, or truth, brings to light hidden things; deeds of darkness.

The Light exposes the human conditions. It reveals who and what that person is; what we are—that we're sinners, that we're in rebellion against God. And faced with that truth, men and women are faced with a decision: To receive the Lord or to reject Him. The Light of Christ divides men. It forces a separation in the world. And many don't receive it. John wrote in verse 10, "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him."

That's an amazing statement. The world did not know its creator. How can that be? How can the world not know the One who made it and who is the Light; and even

has a witness, John the Baptist, to point Him out to men as the Light? How can they not know Him?

The only answer is that man is blind to the truth in and of himself, in and of herself; blind to the truth, unable to see Christ and how wonderful He is. That's the greatest truth of verse 5, that men are in "darkness", as John wrote. They cannot see the Light.

John later wrote in his first epistle, 1 John 5, verse 19, that "...the whole world lies in *the power of* the evil one." In 2 Corinthians 4, Paul says that "...the god of this world", (the devil), "has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel..." (vs4). It is "foolishness" to the natural man, Paul said. (1Cor 2:14). That's the spiritual state of this world. It is ignorant of the things of God, it's unable to understand them and receive Christ. —Unable. That seems strong. It is strong, but it's true. Man is unable. People cannot see the Light.

But not only that, they choose not to see the Light. They choose the darkness over the Light. John will say that later in John chapter 3, verse 19, after giving this great verse of Scripture in verse 16 about 'the love of God for a lost world and sending His Son into it to save mankind', (Jn 3:16), we read in verse 19, that "...men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil." They love their evil deeds; and they don't want them exposed. They want them covered up, and so they seek the darkness. They love the darkness rather than that exposing Light of the LORD.

So the world is in darkness and willful ignorance toward God: 'It doesn't even know its creator', John says. (vs10). And the tragedy of it is made even more clear by the place where this failure to recognize Him occurred—among God's own chosen nation.

Verse 11, "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him." "His own", means 'His own property', or better, 'His own home'. 'He came home' is one translation. He came to Israel; He came to His own people. Those who in Zechariah, chapter 2, verse 8, the LORD called, "the apple of His eye." They did not receive Him. In spite of the witness of John the Baptist; in spite of the prophecies that had been given of

His coming; in spite of miracles, and hundreds of years of preparation—they rejected and killed Him.

And yet, as tragic as it was, it wasn't surprising. That's the history of Israel's relationship with the LORD. You read it from Moses through the prophets. Isaiah begins his book with an indictment on the nation, "An ox knows its owner and a donkey its master's manger, *but* Israel does not know, My people do not understand." (Is 1:3). From the beginning God told Moses they were a stiff-necked people: They worshiped the golden calf; later they served the *Baals*; and even stoned the prophets. That was the pattern. And it reached its fullness when the greatest prophet, the greatest King, the Son of God came into the world, became flesh, and came to His own family, His own nation, His own people.

In that Greek tragedy that I mentioned, the murder of Agamemnon was an act of vengeance for an evil deed that he had done earlier. But the LORD had done nothing evil. He was pure, without sin; in fact incapable of sinning. He is impeccable. Life and Light were in Him from all eternity. He cared for Israel all through their history, in spite of their unfaithfulness to Him. Exodus chapter 19, in verse 4 the LORD tells Moses that He carried them on the 'wings of eagles'. He bore them up. And yet when He came home, His people, His family did not welcome Him. In spite of all the privileges they had and the centuries of preparation with the Law and the prophets, they did not receive Him. Left at that it would be a grim picture and a great tragedy.

But it's not; it's not left at that. In a world that did not know Him and a nation that did not receive Him, John writes that 'some did'; and they are blessed. Verse 12, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name."

There are two things to notice in John's statement here. First, people are not children of God naturally. That is a privilege bestowed by God. He gives "the right", He gives the authority to become a child of God.

A story is told about Napoleon, that during one of his military campaigns he dropped the reins of his horse in order to read some papers. And when he did, the horse reared up and nearly tossed him off. But at that moment a corporal leaped forward, caught the bridle, and brought the horse under control. Napoleon then turned to the corporal and said, "Thank you, captain." "Of what company?", he asked. "Of my guards," Napoleon answered. And on that authority, on the *authority* of the emperor, the soldier walked across the field toward headquarters. He tore off the corporal stripes, and he took his place among the emperor's officers as 'Captain of the guards.' Well, it's only by the *authority* of Jesus Christ that our position changes from that of 'children of wrath' to that of "children of God."

The second thing to notice here is that those who "*receive*" this privilege—"*believe*". It is for "...as many as received Him", and then John defines what it means to 'receive Him', "...to those who believe in His name." That's why John the Baptist came as a witness "that men might believe through him". (vs7).

And that's why John the apostle wrote this Gospel, we saw that last week. It's interesting: If you want to know the purpose of the Gospel of John, you have to go to the end of the Gospel, all the way to chapter 20, verse 31b, "...that believing, you may have life in His name." That's why John wrote this great book. It's the teaching of John, it's the teaching of God's Word all through the Bible—the importance, the necessity of believing in Him.

Genesis 15:6, a great text that Paul used in the Book of Romans and the Book of Galatians to demonstrate the necessity of faith. We're saved through faith alone: Genesis 15:6, Abraham "believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him for righteousness." Habakkuk 2, verse 4, "The just shall live by faith." Acts 16, verse 31, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved..." Romans chapter 1, verse 16: The Gospel "is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." And on it goes through the Bible. Salvation is through faith alone; apart from the Law; apart from doing good works.

Good works are important. Good works are necessary, but they're the result of salvation by faith, not the cause of salvation. Salvation is a free gift. It was obtained for us at the cross and it is *received* only, (not *achieved*), through faith.

But that raises a flag. Isn't there achievement involved in believing? Consider in this context: 'After all, if the world is in darkness, utter darkness, but man can still believe, does that not indicate that people have some natural ability to see through the darkness? Do they not have the ability to believe? Do they not have free will? That point has been made on the grounds of this very verse—that men do have free will.

One of the great theological debates of history was between the reformer, Martin Luther, and Erasmus, the humanist—the great scholar and humanist of that day. And Erasmus argued from this verse, John chapter 1, verse 12, to prove free will. Luther's response was to deny that. In fact, he called verse 12, "A hammer against free will; as is almost the whole of John's Gospel." "John," he wrote, "is not speaking of any work of man, great or small." True. It's about God. It's about God doing the work in us. It's about God giving the new birth; God causing them to become children of God. It is a verse about God giving—and man receiving. It's that simple. Calvin commented that, "Getting free will out of this verse is like getting fire out of water."

But if that's not clear enough from verse 12, then it certainly is from verse 13, where John explains how a person becomes a child of God. John does that by first eliminating any basis, any basis at all, for human merit; for human pride; either heritage or accomplishment with three negative phrases: "Children of God...", he says are those, "...who were born, not of blood nor the will of the flesh nor the will of man, but of God." Were born of God.

The first negative, "not of blood," is generally understood as a reference to physical birth; and so to a person's heritage or descent. Both the Jew and the Greek took great pride in their heritage with, humanly speaking, some reason as you can see. But when a Jew, for example, read John's statement, "not of blood," he would think not of

human life, not of physical birth. And in the Greek text, the word *blood* is actually plural, so it's literally "not of bloods", which may refer to the father and the mother. It's not from the birth of one's parents. No human agency is or can be responsible for the spiritual birth.

That's what John means here. It would include more than parents. It is all of human ancestry that is involved in this. Later, in chapter 8, during a discussion with Christ, the Pharisees say to Him, "We are Abraham's descendants." (vs39). They took great pride in that and saw that as the ground of some merit for them. And it was a privilege, great privilege to be a descendant of Abraham. But physical ancestry has nothing to do with spiritual birth. John the Baptist told the Pharisees and the Sadducees that "God is able to raise up children to Abraham" from the stones. (Luke 3:8), (and there's stones all around Jerusalem, if you've ever been there; a rocky place!). There's no basis for pride or security in birth or physical descent. Now that's the first point that he's made: 'Our spiritual birth is not of blood,' John said, "nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man." (vs13). In other words, it does not lie within our will or our power to become a child of God—or make one a child of God.

Leon Morris wrote one of the standard commentaries on the Gospel of John. There have been some good ones that have come out since he wrote that but it's a very good commentary. And in it he commented that the piling up of these expressions is to be understood in light of Jewish 'pride of race'. That's probably true, but that wouldn't exclude Greek or Gentile 'pride of race', which was also great. Greeks boasted in their culture, their philosophers, architecture, and the glory of Athens. And even today, if you've been to Athens and maybe stood on Mars Hill and you look at the Acropolis, you are amazed at the glory of it. It's a ruin now, but it still reflects the glory that it once had. It was something for people to take great pride in. All who didn't speak Greek were considered barbarians. Didn't matter how cultured they were. If they didn't speak Greek they were a barbarian. Greeks were the enlightened race of the day.

And John's words apply to all of this. They apply to the Jew, they apply to the Gentile; they apply as much today as they did then. You go different places and you have

this same kind of mentality. You go to India and they have this structured society; the caste system. And the top is the Brahmans—and they're best. Then you go to Boston and you can hear about the 'Brahmans of Boston'; they're the elite—the cultured of that city. You go to England and there is the stratification; and you know who is the elite and who is the common man by the way they talk; by their accent. If it's a Cockney accent, well, they're the common man, the unwashed. It's those with the Public accent who speak like Prince Charles. That's the elite. In every society you have this problem; this idea of merit. But what John is saying here is, nothing human, however great or excellent, can bring about the birth of which he, John, speaks. No human effort, period.

Paul makes the same point in Romans chapter 9, verse 16. "It *does not depend* on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy." Mercy is for the helpless. God makes His children. We don't make our children—not spiritually.

Now that being so, (and I don't know how John or Paul could be clearer than that), nevertheless it does raise the question: Where, then, does faith fit into all of this? Is it even necessary, after everything you've just said and every verse you've quoted? And the answer to that is, of course, 'It does!' Yes, *faith* matters. It wouldn't have been said, it wouldn't have been mentioned here and all through the Bible, if it was not necessary. What John is saying is, 'No one can be a child of God apart from faith.' Verse 12 states that plainly. And faith is what we do: We understand the message of salvation. We have a comprehension of its meaning. We understand the Gospel, and we understand that salvation is in Christ alone—He's the Savior. We *believe* it is true, we *believe* that it is a fact and we put our trust in Him, in Christ, as our personal Savior, the only Savior who died in our place.

Paul appealed to the understanding and the will of each person he talked to, or preached to about Christ. In 2 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 20, you get a sense of the zeal, the fervency he had in doing that. He writes, "...we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." Faith is not the mechanical, mindless, programmed response of a robot. No self-respecting knowledgeable Calvinist believes that.

Faith is an act of the mind and will of each individual. It's a personal act, but it only happens by the sovereign grace of God that makes us alive. After all, as Paul tells the Ephesians, (2:1), 'We were dead in our trespasses and sins.' Naturally, we were spiritually dead. And so this only happens by the sovereign grace of God that makes us alive, that gives us ears to hear and a new will to believe. That's what John says, it is "of God." It is what He produces through the new birth.

That's Scripture and it follows from the very nature of things, doesn't it? Who had anything to do with his or her natural birth? You didn't choose your parents. Your parents met, they married, they produced you. You had nothing to do with it. But when you were born, what's the first thing you did? First thing you did was breathe. It was natural. It was inevitable. You didn't come out of the womb and say, "Now I must breathe." You didn't make that decision, it simply happened because you were born with life; and life breathes. And just so, spiritual life *believes*.

But it's all of grace. And that grace only continues, just as the high priest, Joshua, was snatched like a brand from the burning, so too we were snatched out of the darkness and brought into the life and made children of God. What a privilege. We were rebels, children of the night, when Christ saved us out of that and made us children of God. —Children of Light. No longer enemies of God, but friends of God, children of God, sons of God. We are now that.

We are the sons of God, the children of God. Who has no favorites—He loves each of us equally. He loves each of us infinitely. He made us His family and has given us a glorious, eternal inheritance. He made us different. He made us a new creation. We are now aliens in this world; we have another home, in another land, a heavenly country. We are presently marching toward it, following Christ, our "captain", as He is called in Hebrews chapter 2, verse 10. And as we march along, we oppose the darkness as soldiers of Christ; armed with the Word of God and the love for the lost.

And through it all, Psalm 91, verses six and seven, says we are protected, "You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence

that stalks in the darkness." So we march. And some day we will all have a homecoming, and it will be happy; glorious.

In his book, *I Marched with Patton*, Frank Sisson tells how, as a young man, a boy, he left Oklahoma during World War II, marched through France, Belgium, and into Berlin. He was at Bastogne, at the Battle of the Bulge and had several scrapes with death. But he came through it all and he had what his reviewer called, "A homecoming worthy of Frank Capra.", (and you have to be as old as I am to know who Frank Capra was, but he made some wonderful old movies.)

When his mother asked him about the war, he said, "I think General Sherman once said, 'War is hell.' Well, he was right. You really don't want to know any more than that. Just know that by God's grace, I survived it."

And so we all will, by God's grace. That's a promise. "He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." (Phil 1:6). What a great statement that is by the apostle to the Philippians, "He who *began* a good work...". The "good work" of salvation, of regeneration, was *begun* by Him—not by us. And He always completes His work—perfectly. And He'll do that with each and every one of us. He'll bring us safely home, where we will be forever.

I say "we"; that is, 'We who believe in Jesus Christ.' Are you one of those? Or are you still a child of darkness; disbelieving, fighting against the life of God's truth and His Son. If so, lay down your arms, quit the fight, join the Savior. March with Christ through the shadows of this world to the glorious homeland to come. You do that through faith alone; turning from unbelief to trust in Christ as God's Son. The eternal Word become flesh so that He could suffer death and judgment in our place and redeem His people.

And now, may God help each of us who are redeemed to glorify Him, to live for Him and serve Him, by His grace.

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(Closing prayer) What a glorious truth that is to sing, Father we have the redeemer, the One who bought us out of sin and darkness and washed all those sins away. We are presently, now and forever, clean, forgiven before You. That should move us from the great love You've shown us to love You and serve You faithfully. May we do that, LORD. Thank You for this great text of Scripture that we've studied, and the great truths that are there. You've done it all. You deserve all the glory: May we know that, believe it, and live in light of it.

Now the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you peace. In the name of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

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