

Series: Receiving life by believing in God's Son (a Gospel of John study)

Sermon Text: John 1:6-13

Kids Word: Witness

(*This account is also in Matthew 3:1-12; Mark 1:1-8; Luke 3:1-20)

The Gospel of the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee, provides a clearly stated purpose. *John 20:30-31* says, "**Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**" While some people demand all their questions to be satisfied before bowing to Jesus, John claimed his limited account was sufficient. From its pages, our Savior and friend emerges as a real person in the real world to show us what we could become, if we too would rely on His infinite Father who will gladly supply whatever we need. Our portion today will challenge us to consider this...

BIG IDEA: To what does your life bear witness?

Let's consider some key ideas and applications in our text.

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

John the Baptizer was a witness. (*a witness provides testimony or evidence like in a court)

- We'll mention two John's in this section...*John the Baptist* (or baptizer) and John the Apostle. The *baptizer* lived a short life and had one role in advancing the gospel. The Apostle lived a long life and carried out several gospel-advancing tasks. We'll say more about *the baptizer's* identity, but here the Apostle zeroed in on *the baptizer's* mission...*he came to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.* This *light* is a person (*him*) who existed *in the beginning, the Word* who created everything from a foundation of *light* and *truth*. So, this was not the sun, moon, or stars created on day 4. Speaking of which, Revelation 22:5 tells us God's presence will be the sole source of *light* after He remakes heaven and earth.
- Of course, the Apostle's point wasn't to merely describe *the light*, was it? Always the good storyteller, John was setting up the conflict *the baptizer* came to illuminate. The conflict is that not everyone *believes in* this *light* that was *in the beginning with God (1:2)*, was *the light of men (1:4)*, "*shines in the darkness*", and "*cannot be overcome*" (1:5). Have you ever been on one of those cave tours where they shut off the lights, you can't see your hand, and then the guide turns on a teeny tiny light? You've got to have your eyes closed to miss it, which is what

the Apostle was implying here. Consider this summary from Matthew Henry, who pastored in England during the late 1600s, “*Nothing more fully shows the darkness of men's minds, than that when the Light had appeared, there needed a witness to call attention to it.*” **Verses 9-11** describe the dark and deceptive depths of this conflict.

9 The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to his own, and his own people (Israel, God’s chosen people) did not receive him.

People refuse to recognize the true light.

- Here’s a question, “*if the true light already gives light to everyone, then how can John say it was coming into the world?*” No doubt, he’s referencing the incarnation of *the Word*, when God became human to live among us. Here’s another question, “*How can the true light give light to everyone, yet be unknown to the world and his own people?*” I’ve heard people say, “*I’ll believe when God shows His face!*” We’ll, He did, so what prevented all creation from jumping for joy at their Creator’s physical arrival? Evidence is not the problem, darkness is. Darkness is a biblical metaphor for sin. When we get to **chapter 3 (19-21)** we’ll be told, “*this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.*”
- Our failure to “see the **light**” is sort of a dual conflict...in one sense, our sin makes us fearful of God’s pure light. On the other hand, we search for alternatives when we don’t love the facts. Why might a scientist deny God despite hard evidence or why might people deny facts from an untrusted source? The human heart often chooses what we love (desire) over facts. God made us this way, so it’s not always a problem, however sin distorts this design. Can you see why God must be our #1 love? If I’ve piqued your interest, check out Romans 1:18-32 and James 4:1-12. I’d also recommend a book called “[*You are What you Love*](#)” by James K.A. Smith.
- Ultimately, we fail to “see the **light**” because to agree there’s a Creator is to admit we’re under His authority and don’t get the final say about who we are or what we do. We live in a world that is constantly preaching we can “*be or do anything*”, but here’s the problem with that...our Creator designed us to be specific people for specific purposes. When government, media, or

leadership gurus deny this, they're not just denying Scripture, they're also rewriting the human story it tells. How arrogant to replace God's laws with their laws while claiming their narrative will bring unity, peace, and happiness! If believers accept that narrative or play into it, we are betraying ***the true light and truth, which has come into the world***. Using the same imagery as John, the Prophet Isaiah (5:20-21) said, "*Woe (or 'sorrow') to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight!*"

- Now, can you handle me saying something difficult to hear and highly controversial? All I ask is for you to consider it in light of the Scripture before us. Ready? A blatant example of ***light*** and ***truth*** being rejected in our culture (i.e., people preferring darkness over light) is the cult of "*gender dysphoria*", which is where people feel their gender identity differs from the parts God gave them. God's Word definitively solves this confusion (i.e., He made us male and female, cf. Genesis 1:26-28, 5:2; Matthew 19:4; Mark 10:6). Gender fluidity is a symptom of denying God's existence and/or denying Christianity matters. In fact, sexual sin, all sexual behavior and identity that is outside of God's plan, is idolatry--it is placing your own feelings and desires in the place of God. I'll say one word of hope, then move on...if you're willing to patiently trust God over your feelings, sexual or otherwise, then you'll eventually find peace, healing, and wholeness. I hope you believe that and know we genuinely want to be there for you and help! By the way, I've included a link to 10 lessons on this subject. Okay, since self-identification and self-determination won't lead to happiness, we need to know what will. The answer is in ***verses 12-13***. I'll read it to you, but since we've covered a lot of heavy stuff today, we'll stop here and dive into the details next week. In verses 12-13 John wrote, "***But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 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...Father, whether our life is short like John the Baptizer or long like John the Apostle, it should bear witness to the beauty of Your creative authority. Humans have been reframing the story and trying to rewrite it since the days of Adam and Eve. How sweet it is, oh Lord, when we surrender to your authorship and see ourselves as characters in Your story, not You in ours! May your Spirit challenge our hearts and minds to accept and live by the story you wrote, even if that costs us friends, family, reputation, or whatever. In the end, may we, like the Apostle Paul, be able to say, "*Everything that was a gain to me, I have considered to be a loss because of Christ*" (Philippian 3:7). Amen.

A phrase I've been pondering lately is, "*Wounded healers.*" It reminds me of when Jesus rose, not with a magazine-worthy airbrushed body, but with nail-scared hands and feet. That detail was given, I think, to imply how we should follow Him as wounded healers. Jesus wasn't well received and without enemies, yet He ministered through His pain all the way to the right hand of the Father. Would you ponder that with me as we stand and sing, "*By His Wounds we are Healed*"?

So, what's your NEXT STEP?

- Remember, our next step always begins with faith in Christ. Either placing faith in Him for the first time or exercising faith to repent, change, and grow. Either way, His Spirit will help you.

Quotes/Additional thoughts:

- **Symbolism:** In literature, the word "*green*" can symbolize growth and "*winter*" can represent cold, hard times. Likewise, in the Bible and other ancient writings, "*light*" represents the source of *life* (1:4) and *truth* (1:14, 17).
- **God's Self-revelation:** "This life John sees in terms of light (4), another elemental religious symbol, and another echo of Genesis chapter 1, as the light shines in the darkness (Gn. 1:3) in the act of creation...John says three things about this logos-light. It offers illumination to every person—that life was the light of men (4); it shines in the context of darkness (5); and the darkness has not overcome it (5, NIV fn.)...Traditionally this has been seen as a pointer to God's general revelation...John is alluding here to the Word's participation, in God's revealing himself universally to all people through conscience and in creation; a revelation which leaves them without excuse for their ignorance of God...This is the first occurrence of one of the key themes of this gospel, 'bearing witness'. John the Baptist is particularly identified with this activity. 10 But there are seven others who testify to the truth of God's self-disclosure in the Word made flesh; the Father, 11 the Son himself, 12 the Holy Spirit, 13 the works of Jesus, 14 the Scriptures, 15 assorted human witnesses, 16 and finally the evangelist himself. 17 In John's society witness-bearing was a serious matter and was the means of establishing the truth. It also involved commitment. 'Unless you commit yourself, unless you stake everything on the truth of what you say, you cannot be a witness.' (Ps. 19:1)." Pastor Bruce Milne
- **The need for spiritual enlightenment:** "John declares that the darkness of the world did not "comprehend" the Light...In the end, darkness was not able to suppress the Light even by placing the Light in a tomb. However, the verses that follow appear to stress the mental deficiency of the darkness: its unwillingness to believe and therefore its inability to comprehend...The only hope for humankind was the Source of light, who can illumine every mind because He is more than human...Now that the Source of light has come to earth and has illumined the minds of humanity, no one can legitimately claim ignorance. All who do not believe are without excuse. (John 15:22-25) ...Let me illustrate John's point another way. Every modern house is connected to an electric grid, which provides all the energy necessary to illumine every dark corner. However, the people living in these homes can choose to live in the dark...Now that Christ has come, belief or unbelief is no longer a crisis of the intellect (if it ever was); it is a crisis of the will. When a darkened mind chooses to remain in darkness, no one is to blame but the individual making that choice." Pastor Chuck Swindoll
- **God came into the world:** "We need to note the change from a present tense in verse 9 to a past tense in verse 11, where the historic mission of Jesus is plainly in view. If a universal

witness is intended (general revelation), we are confronted with an implicit claim to deity. Jesus Christ confronts all people within the divine witness through creation and conscience. 3 The one before whom we shall stand on the judgment day (2 Cor. 5:10) will be no stranger; all people will have met him before... World (9) is a major term in John's writings. 4 Almost without exception 'world' has negative overtones; it is the 'world' organized in rebellion against God's rule and claim. 5 It was to this world that Christ came in person, but, in character, his own did not receive him (11)... People regularly exclaim at what they see as God's indifference to human tragedy and pain. If only God would appear and accept some responsibility or give some help, then perhaps they would recognize and follow him. In fact, as this gospel makes clear again and again, he is not indifferent; he does care. Indeed, he could not care more, and it is because of this that he came. But when he came, he was ignored."

Pastor Bruce Milne

- **The identity of "his own":** "His own here are his own people, Israel... There can be no more poignant expression of human folly and perversity than Israel's rejection of Christ (documented in the following chapters). In spite of all the centuries of waiting for their promised Messiah, when at last he appeared they not only dismissed his claim but instigated his destruction... It is a tragedy which brought tears to the eyes of Jesus (Lk. 13:14; 19:41), and to Paul 'unceasing anguish in my heart' (Rom. 9:2). It is a continuing tragedy expressed in Israel's 'hardening' towards Christ (Rom. 11:25). There is no ground here, however, for pointing the finger, for in all of this Israel only typifies the folly of the human heart universally... It is a tragedy which brought tears to the eyes of Jesus (Lk. 13:14; 19:41), and to Paul 'unceasing anguish in my heart' (Rom. 9:2). It is a continuing tragedy expressed in Israel's 'hardening' towards Christ (Rom. 11:25). There is no ground here, however, for pointing the finger, for in all of this Israel only typifies the folly of the human heart universally." Pastor Bruce Milne
- **Source of all truth:** "John directs us to the Word, to Jesus, who is "the true light, which gives light to everyone" (v. 9). This is an interesting phrase because it indicates that Jesus is the source not only of the light of spiritual truth but of the light of all truth. Clearly, this text tells us that all people receive some light and yet not all people receive and rest in Christ for salvation. Thus, the reference must be to Christ's granting truth beyond the truth of salvation. This is how the earliest Christian thinkers understood this text, as pointing to Jesus as the ultimate source of all truth and knowledge. John Calvin echoes this in his comments on today's passage: "Men have this peculiar excellence which raises them above other animals, that they are endued with reason and intelligence, and that they carry the distinction between right and wrong engraven on their conscience. There is no man, therefore, whom some perception of the eternal light does not reach. Dr. R.C. Sproul writes in his commentary John: "All light finds its origin in Jesus Christ, who is the fountain of all truth." Whenever people use reason and come to the knowledge of the truth, they are benefiting from Christ's enlightening work even if they do not realize it. Because Christ is the ultimate source of the light of reason, we can reason with others about our faith, knowing that Jesus may grant them knowledge of saving truth." Ligonier Devotionals
- **Jewish rejection of Jesus:** "The Word "came to his own, and his own people did not receive him." John here refers to the Jewish nation as a whole and its rejection of our Lord. Although many Jews believed in Jesus, the majority did not, and this is especially tragic given that

salvation must come through one born to the Jewish race (4:22). The New Testament tells us forthrightly that as an entity, the Jews have rejected Christ, but it does hold out hope that this rejection will not last forever (Rom. 9–11). One day, the Jews will turn to Jesus, not in the sense that every Jew will believe but in the sense that so many will be converted that we can say that the Jews no longer reject their Messiah.” Ligonier Devotionals

- **The Qur’an:** “Many passages in the Qur’an explicitly deny the fact that God can be Father to those who follow Him. To be Father, many of these passages say, would imply some kind of sexual and physical fatherhood, and thus this idea is rejected in Islam. Muslims consider it blasphemous to call God “Father” and can have difficulty relating to the Christian meaning behind this subject. Even though some Islamic mystical sects like Sufism do speak of having a “personal relationship” with God, orthodox Islam emphasizes the relationship between God and human beings as that of a master and a servant. While orthodox Christianity also teaches that we are servants of God (1 Peter 2:16), it is not an impersonal service. Yes, God is our Lord, but He is also our Father.” Ligonier Devotionals
- **General and specific revelation:** In one sense, *the true light* was already *in the world*, right? It was there before creation. Psalm 19:1-3 says, “*The heavens declare the glory of God, the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.*” This refers to what we call, “General Revelation”, which simply means created things cannot help but to *bear witness* to or evidence their Creator because, after all, they are His creation. If you put two smartphones in front of me and don’t tell me what type they are, I could quickly tell you which one’s an Apple phone and which one’s an Android phone. The same is true with creation--it always gives off a whiff of its Creator, even if the scent is faint. In this sense, John tells us *the true light gives light to everyone*, which tells us something about *truth*. While people may refuse to believe Jesus is God’s divine Son, He is always the source of all *truth*. Since Jesus is the co-Creator, He is the source of any truth that anyone comprehends. What’s puzzling then is how the Apostle can say, *the world did not know* their Creator’s *light* when *He was in the world*. Years of God revealing Himself through creation should have been enough, yet it was not. So, God provided a more “special” or “specific” revelation by sending His Son as a human to dwell among us (1:14). In Jesus, our Creator let Himself be seen, heard, smelled, and touched (cf. 1 John 1:1-2). At that moment, everyone should have bowed to their Creator; however, the Apostle said *the world* still *did not know* (recognize, comprehend) *him (1:10)*. He even *came to his own people*, which is a reference to Israel, God’s chosen Jewish people who were anticipating this Messiah (Christ) to come; but even *his own people did not receive him (1:11)*.

Articles/Songs/Videos:

- Check out these [10 Sermons on Gender](#) (start with the one on April 5, 2021).

Helpful thoughts for discussion leaders:

1. Go for a single, not a home run...don’t drag the night out; realize more people = less deep sharing.
2. Keep discussion around 30mins. Once you hit the “sweet spot”, spend your time there.

Challenge Questions

Review the BIG IDEA: To what does your life bear witness?

-Simple questions...What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

Preparation questions for John 1:6-13.

- Research and share some differences between John the Baptist and John the Apostle. (1:6)
- What was the role of John the baptizer? (1:7-9)
- What conflict and resolution did John the Apostle present in these verses? (1:10-12)

Application questions from John 1:6-13.

- As people observe your life, what would they say you're about? Does your life clearly bear witness to light and truth or to something else? Please explain your answer.
- What has God said that you disagree with? Model confession for us by sharing a few ways you've rejected truth to pursue your desires.
- Based on John 1:12-13, why do arguments like, "*We're all God's children*" and "*I was born this way*" only affirm our need for repentance and faith in Jesus Christ?
- Why must salvation (belief, faith) be more than an intellectual decision? What does our lifestyle have to do with it? How can you and those who know you be certain you've been born again?

Here are some great resources for digging deeper into community group life...

How life together looks <http://austinstone.org/stories/film/item/140-missional-community-lukes-story>

Rethinking what we do https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvWnXYSELF4&feature=player_embedded

Numerous articles to provoke thought <http://tod dengstrom.com/archives/>

What groups of 2-3 might look like <http://tod dengstrom.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/LTG-Overview.pdf>