

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

**Sermon Text:** John 1:12-13

**Kids Word:** Child

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

Last week, we discussed when our Creator took on a human nature and humanity rejected Him.

- *Verse 9* says, “**The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world**”, and *verse 4* says, “**in him was life, and the life was the light of men.**” Our God came to be with us in the person of Jesus Christ! While this is amazing, *verse 10* says, “**He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.**” Sin blinds human minds to God's obvious **light** (truth). Matthew Henry, who pastored in England during the late 1600s wrote, “*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.*” As we've discussed, John the Baptizer was sent to announce and testify about God's rescue plan through His Son, Jesus Christ!
- The problem, however, is more than informational. **Witnesses** alone are insufficient because sin is wholly pervasive and crippling (e.g., physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually). Our human affections are so disordered that God must supernaturally re-order them before we'll confess that it's His **light** shining in our faces. Romans 1 puts it this way, “*what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them...so that they are without excuse and have exchanged the truth about God for a lie which led them to worship and serve the creature instead of the Creator.*” God created us to love and need Him, but sin messes with our desires, causing us to love ourselves more than God and consequently misuse everything He made. Our prior message explained how that looks in the modern world, so today I'll focus on the sole solution to the fallen human condition and float this...

**BIG IDEA: Have you become God's child and witness?**

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

***12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,***

***Humanity's only hope is to become children of God.***

- You might be thinking, “*Wait, aren't we all God's children?*” No, the Bible shockingly reveals not every creation of God is a **child of God**. So, as we just read, we must be **given the right to become a child of God**. A few weeks ago, I told you humanity was represented by a guy named Adam who broke covenant with God and led his offspring astray. And since God had

tasked humans to care for creation, Adam's sin impacted everything. Romans 5:12 (NLT) says, "When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. His sin brought death, which spread to everyone, for everyone sinned." Ephesians 2:1-3 vividly describes humanity's lost condition as, "dead and walking in trespasses and sins...following the course of this world...and the prince of the power of the air...living in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind...children of wrath by nature." It's sad how we put all our effort into pursuing created things while remaining willfully ignorant of the One who made everything.

- Again, the problem is more than informational. Like cancer or heart disease, our sin problem can't be remedied by a brochure. God must deal with our sin nature and offer a new covenant arrangement, the terms of which we then must accept and follow. Romans 5:18 tells us how God reversed the effects of Adam's fall. It says, "As one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men." Just as Adam ruined creation, Jesus can restore it! Let's be clear...Jesus alone is God's true Son, and God only claims to be "Father" of those united with His Son by grace through faith. So, Jesus was appointed by God to be the mediator of our new covenant and of our adoption into His family. The question is, "How does one get to enter and receive all the benefits of this new covenant with God?" **Verse 13** tells us.

***13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.***

***We need God's help to become His children.***

- If we briefly remove the middle words, **verse 13** declares only those "**who were born of God**" can join His family. The answer is simple but not easy. As Jesus will tell a guy in chapter 3, "You must be born again by God's Spirit." An historically influential North African Bishop named Augustine lived from 354-430 AD. He said, "We were not born of God in the manner in which the Only-begotten was born of Him but were adopted by His grace." Ephesians 2:8-9 puts it another way, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." If we add back the middle words, **verse 13** concurs that no one can "**will**" or "**work**" themselves out of darkness and into God's family. Becoming a **child of God**, is **not** a result of human **bloodlines**, **nor** the human desire for sex (**will of the flesh**), **nor** the human desire to build a family (**will of man**). The gospel is God's supernatural and almost unbelievable plan to create a new family--a new

*bloodline*, a new race--based on *belief* and trust (a faith that God provides cf. Hebrews 12:2). Did you catch that? Our world is admirably trying to solve big issues like race and injustice, but the gospel alone is the sole solution to reconciling relationships ruined by sin. We're told in 2 Corinthians 5:16-17, "*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*" It also says this radical rebirth reverses our tendency to evaluate creation from a human perspective. Pastor Gary often paraphrases this passage by saying, "*we struggle when we view life from a 'man-up' perspective instead of a 'God-down' perspective.*"

- We need God to help us see how joining His family changes earthly relationships. Often, I hear Christians wrongly referring to the lost world as our "*brothers and sisters.*" Jesus taught us to start our prayers with the words "*Our Father*", which means every prayer is a confession that some people are God's children and others are not. God's saving love for His chosen people differs from His general love for His broken, wayward creation (cf. John 3:16-18). Likewise, we should love everyone like "*neighbors*", but our love for our spiritual "*siblings*" should be exclusive and special. Galatians 6:10 says, "*As we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone (our unbelieving neighbors), especially to those who are of the household of faith (our believing brothers and sisters).*" You may think this is just semantics (word play), but it's not. Realizing not everybody in the world is a Christian will improve how we *witness* and provide the clarity necessary to see through complicated world issues.
- As spiritual realities begin informing earthly and biological realities, they start changing our allegiances, which is another reason we need God's help. Think about it...people who reject God won't like you prioritizing your spiritual family over them. Jesus warned of this in Matthew 10:34-39, "*I have not come to bring peace on earth, but a sword...to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.*" This seems like a good place to mention that the word "*witness*" comes from the same word as "*martyr.*" It's possible that as you begin prioritizing your new family over your old allegiances, that those who used to love you could begin to hate you or even want to kill you. I know that sounds extreme, but I've seen it. My purpose in emphasizing the extreme is simply

to illustrate the drastic nature of being adopted into God's family. As Christians, we often view our faith as just an add on, but it's really a transformation. I realize it's scary, but it saddens me how Christians won't step fully into this new reality. Do you realize nobody can be expected to believe we belong to something new if, when push comes to shove, we fall back into the same old party lines? So far, we've seen *humanity's only hope is to become children of God* and that *we need God's help to become His children*. Now, consider 2 final questions.

***Who can become a child of God?***

- Spiritual ***birth*** is a supernatural miracle only God's Spirit can perform! His Spirit removes our blinders so we will ***receive Jesus*** and ***believe in His name***. Look again at ***verse 12***. Proof of one ***having been given this right*** in the past is ongoing ***reception of Jesus and belief in his name*** (all He represents). That's not a formula (prescription), it's a declaration (description). By the way, the root word for "***believe***" and "***faith***" are the same (pisteuō), and John frequently used it in phrases like "***believe in***" (36 times in John, 3 times in 1 John, 8 times elsewhere in the New Testament). In John's mind, faith was more than acknowledging ***truth***. Faith is being willing to accept the exclusive claims of Jesus and wholly following in His footsteps because, like Jesus, you believe it's worth the reward (cf. Hebrews 11:6). While we'll never grasp the totality of this infinite "***God-man***", we can certainly live like we ***believe*** all His words are ***true***.

***So, if you claim to be God's child, then are you an all-in witness?***

- While we understand salvation to be an exclusive ***right*** given by God, we must also understand it's not limited to one people group as the Jewish people wrongly presumed. For centuries, the prophets told them otherwise, yet Israel held that God only loved ethnic Jews--those who were born like them, looked like them, and acted like them. If that were true, John would've never seen the vision he described in Revelation 7:9-10, "*After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb...*" For this reason, we believe salvation is both an exclusive ***right*** AND available to all who will ***believe***.
- Christians must not repeat the Jewish error of keeping God to ourselves! Every ***child of God***, just like the Baptizer and the Apostle, is called to be a ***child*** AND a ***witness***! We have a God-given duty that reaches beyond those who are born like us, look like us, and act like us. If you have not been ***born*** again, would you at least consider it and speak with us about how God's

adoption process works? If you have been spiritually *reborn*, does your life generally reflect that? Do you approach tough issues from a cultural narrative or God's covenantal perspective? One last question... If you have the solution the world is desperate for, what sense does it make not to be a *witness* (i.e., **Have you become God's child and witness?**)?

Let's pray... Father, we've heard news today that is both joyous and challenging. Becoming part of your family is not only a privilege but also a responsibility. It's totally transforming, not just an add on to our lives. Religion is not a private matter we keep to ourselves, it's something you require us to share... something we should WANT to share. Challenge our hearts today with this matter of becoming your children and your witnesses. Transform this church into the lighthouse it should be for your glory! Amen.

Our next song says there are ten thousand reasons for us to bless the Lord or witness of His magnificent glory. Ponder your reasons while you stand and sing with us.

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:**

- **Context:** 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.
- **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).
- **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

- **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). Romans 1:18-32 elaborates on our blindness.
- **God’s Fatherhood:** “When the Bible calls God Father, it is not teaching that He loves all people without any kind of distinction. As today’s passage tells us, it is those who believe in Jesus who have the right to become children of God. When we think of the fatherhood of God, we must always keep the special love of God for His people in mind. The misunderstanding of the love and fatherhood of God that is so prevalent in our culture makes it hard for us to speak of these concepts and be heard rightly. As we seek to emphasize other biblical concerns like God’s justice and holiness, however, we must make sure that we never lose sight of the personal love, compassion, and tenderness that our Father has for His people.” Ligonier Devotionals
- **Our sonship:** “Fundamentally, the difference between our sonship and Christ’s is a difference in nature. Our Savior is in Himself the Son of God; we are the Father’s children only by adoption. All people are in some sense God’s offspring because He is their Creator (Acts 17:28). In biblical categories, however, there is more to being God’s children than creatureliness. The great church father Athanasius writes, God ‘is in being, not as we are, and yet [He is] in being as God, and creates not as man creates, but yet creates as God, [so] it is plain that He begets also not as men beget, but begets as God’ (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, vol. 4, p. 320)... Even though we are not children of God by nature, we become His sons and daughters when we are united by faith to Christ Jesus. As such, we enjoy the immense privilege of calling God ‘Father’ and understanding the special, providential care He has for each of us. Knowing that the Father has eternally begotten the Son assures us that we are united to One who is God’s Son by nature and, thus, that it is possible to become God’s children in Christ.” Ligonier Devotionals

- 3 features of faith:** “A. Faith’s universal scope: ‘... All who ...’ (12)...John inhabited a world which confined its proffered ‘salvation’ to specific groups. Salvation could be had through philosophy, if one was intelligent; from the mystery cults, if one was among the initiated; by Jewish religion, if one had the right racial pedigree. By contrast, Christianity entered first-century society as a faith for everyone, irrespective of intelligence quotient, age, gender, race or religious background...In our increasingly pluralistic communities, it is one of the glories of Christianity to reaffirm this unqualified universalism—all who would believe may come; B. The incredible status faith offers: He gave the right to become children of God (12)...In a world where rank counted for everything, and the majority of the population were slaves without rights or freedoms (or any prospect of ever acquiring them), the gospel carried immense appeal as a message which promised to all people, irrespective of rank, nothing less than personal membership within the family circle of God. Nobodies were in a moment transformed into somebodies...Even today, with all our vaunted rights and freedoms, so many people suffer from a crippling lack of self-worth, not least within the Christian community. How relevant therefore is a gospel which tells us that as Christians we are nothing less than the personally valued, dearly loved children of God, irrespective of how others may see us or even of how we see ourselves; C. Faith’s sovereign means: John’s recognition of the complexity and mystery of a salvation which is both ‘willed by man, and worked by God’ (Schlatter)...This birth is to be radically distinguished from human birth, with its human initiatives: ‘natural descent’ (lit. ‘bloods’, the notion that the act of procreation involved a mixing of blood); ‘human decision’ (lit. ‘the will of the flesh’, i.e. sexual desire); and ‘a husband’s will’ (on the assumption that the male partner takes the initiative in sexual matters). All these are irrelevant in the case of spiritual rebirth; it is not something we can take into our own hands.” Pastor Bruce Milne
- Exclusivity:** The book, “What is Christianity?” incorrectly defines the essence of the Christian faith as the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man....“To be true to Scripture, we do affirm the universal Creatorhood of God, for all people are made by Him (Acts 17:28). However, He is Father only of those who believe in His only-begotten Son — the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the point of today’s passage. Similarly, the Bible teaches not the universal brotherhood of man, but the universal neighborhood of humanity. Our neighbors consist of all people — men, women, Christians, non-Christians, Africans, Asians, Europeans, and so on. We must treat everyone with love and respect, not just those in our church (Luke 10:25–37). At the same time, our brothers and sisters are only those who believe in Christ. To say otherwise is to deny the unique identity of the church... Jesus commands us to pray ‘Our Father’ (Matt. 6:9). Every time we pray these words, we imply there are others who are not His children and thus testify to His exclusivity. We affirm God’s uniqueness and confess that salvation is found in Jesus alone when we say, ‘our Father.’ ... biblical faith is essentially exclusivistic. There is only one God, and the only way to Him is through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (John 14:6). Our culture hates to hear this, preferring to believe in a god who disregards sin and who makes no demands. If you serve the only true God, then stand firm against those who say all roads lead to heaven.” Ligonier Devotionals

**Articles/Songs/Videos:**

**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: Have you become God's child and 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 1:12-13.**

- Who gets the right to become God's children? (1:12)
- How does God's method of building a family differ from the human way? (1:13)
- List a few implications of John 1:12-13.

### **Application questions from John 1:12-13.**

- How does the sin nature impact our view of God and creation? In what ways have you found yourself misusing stuff God made? Have you repented and sought help?
- Share some practical ways you struggle to prioritize God's family over earthly allegiances. What effect do you think this is having on you and those who know you?
- Do you treat your church family like actual family? What are some things you've done for your biological relatives or close friends that you've never done for other church members?
- When the Apostle Paul became a Christian, hardly anyone could believe it. Who do you struggle to believe could become a Christian? Are you praying for them regularly? Are there things you're doing that keep them from seeing Christ in you?
- 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](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvWnXYSELF4&feature=player_embedded)

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

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