

Rejected and Received

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[0 : 00] to have a seat, and if you have a Bible, please do turn with me to John chapter 1. John chapter 1, that's on page 886 of the church Bibles. We're going to read from verse 1 through to verse 18 together.

John chapter 1, reading from verse 1, let us hear the Word of God together.

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 the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. 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.

[1 : 47] He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us. And we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John bore witness about Him, and cried out, This was He of whom I said, He who comes after me ranks before me, because He was before me.

For from His fullness we have all received grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, the only God, who is at the Father's side. He has made Him known.

Amen. This is the Word of God. Please do keep that passage open in front of you. But let us ask for the Lord's help with it as we turn to it together. Let us pray. The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of our God will stand forever.

Father, we thank you that you have spoken to us through your everlasting words. And we pray now, Lord, that we would receive the Word made flesh, the light of life, that in Jesus Christ we might have everlasting life. In His name we pray. Amen.

[3 : 43] Amen. Well, Christmas is just four days behind us. So the data is not out for this year, but if the previous years are anything to go by, then over the next few days and sort of the two weeks after Christmas, in the UK alone, about one and a half billion pounds worth of unwanted presents are going to be sent back in the post to where they came from.

The Royal Mail actually calls the first working day of the new year, Take Back Tuesday, because of the surge of parcels being processed in post offices across the country at the end of the holiday season.

I don't know if you're part of those statistics. I trust we're all able to be thankful, at least for gifts that we know we'll never use.

But most of us will know, won't we, what it feels like to receive an unwanted present. I wonder if you've ever found yourself, though, wishing, maybe a year or two later, that you'd kept on to something that you thought at the time wasn't worth keeping, because there is a difference, isn't there?

There is a difference between an unwanted presence and a bad presence. Let me just give you an example from a few years ago. I'm not brave enough to give an example of an unwanted gift from this year.

[5 : 19] I used to do a lot of cycling. It was later in life before I learned to drive. So cycling was my primary means of transport.

It's how I got about the place. It was also my favorite hobby. So if I needed to go anywhere, I'd cycle there. If I didn't need to go anywhere, I'd go cycling just for the fun of it. So I spent a lot of time on my bike.

But I spent none of that time wearing a helmet. Don't ask me why. I'm not sure I could give you an answer.

It certainly wouldn't be a wise answer. But it did mean, it's not somewhat unsurprisingly, that for Christmas, and then for my next birthday, and then for Christmas, and then for my next birthday, I'd get helmet after helmet after helmet after helmet.

To the point where I generally, I think, had four or five kind of pristine, still-in-the-box helmets sitting under my bed. Now, they were good gifts, weren't they?

[6 : 28] They were good gifts, but I decided I did not want them. I decided I did not want them, but I did need them.

Thankfully, I'd learned that lesson by the time I really did need it. Not every unwanted gift is a bad gift. Sometimes, unwanted gifts are actually the very best gifts given by the people who care the most about you.

That, I think, is something of what we see happening in the verses of John chapter 1 we're going to be looking at together this morning. This is our third morning, looking at the opening of this gospel together, and we come today to verses 10 to 13, where we see the light of the world rejected by many, but also received by some.

The light of the world sent as the most precious gift from the most loving God to people who desperately needed Him. Some would receive Him, but some chose to turn Him away.

That refusal is what we see, particularly in our first point this morning, where we see the light of the world rejected. Just look down there with me at verse 10 and 11. John writes, He, that is the true light of verse 9, Jesus Christ, was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him.

[8 : 12] He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. The light of the world is rejected, both by the world He made and by His very own.

Those are actually two different categories of people that John draws our attention to, and I think it is worth dwelling for just a moment this morning and why each of these groups rejects Jesus.

So let's think first about the world that did not know Jesus. If you were here last week, Joe kind of helpfully laid the foundation for us here, didn't he?

He tells us that when John, okay, when the author of this gospel, when he is speaking of the world, he's not talking about our kind of, our planet, but about the people, the people who inhabit this planet, and specifically, the people who inhabit this planet and are walking in spiritual darkness.

For John, the world is humanity without God, people living in darkness. Think of maybe the way we use the word worldly. Okay, when we use that word, we're not being positive, are we?

[9 : 36] We're communicating something about the fallenness and brokenness and wickedness of people. That is usually what John has in mind when he speaks of the world.

Why did this world not know Jesus, the light of the world, when he came into the world? Well, John gives us the answer later in the gospel that this prologue, the kind of first 18 verses of John chapter 1, introduces us to all the major themes that John is going to unpack throughout this book.

So if we want to understand more fully what he's saying in these first 18 verses, you just need to go and read on. And we understand why the world did not know the light when we get to those verses that Diane read for us earlier in John chapter 3.

Just turn over the page with me if you have your Bible in front of you. John chapter 3 and listen to what Jesus says in verse 19. Jesus says, and this is the judgment.

The light has come into the world and people love 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.

[11 : 01] People love the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil and the light would expose those works for what they were.

Light exposes, doesn't it, what can be hidden in darkness. Yes. My father-in-law who's here this morning so you need to be careful what I say.

My father-in-law and I were left in charge of cleaning up dinner on Friday night and I think it's probably fair to say it's not either of our strong points. We'd done some work to tidy the place up but

I think it'd be fair to say that the dining table wasn't quite spotless when my father-in-law who I have so much to learn from just kind of flicked the light switch and said, there we go.

You can't see it now. Looks pretty clean to me. Genius. Genius because it kind of works, doesn't it? If you can't see in there, you can't see the mess.

Looks as good as clean from this perspective. At least until half eight in the morning when the sun rises, the light shines through the window and exposes what the darkness was hiding.

[12:20] Now, I'm not recommending that as a method of cleaning but I think it's a pretty good illustration of what every human being does with their own hearts.

Our hearts are full full of uncleanness. They are full, aren't they, of greed, of anger, of lust, of malice, of jealousy, of all manner of wicked thoughts and desires.

It's a well-worn path, isn't it? But think about how you would feel if every thought, even just of this last week, if everything you've done in secret, if every word you've said was going to put up on the screen up here for everyone to see.

How would you feel? Would you be proud of what's on display for everyone to see? I mean, the thought makes us cringe, doesn't it?

We could not bear the shame. And so what do we do? We flick the light switch.

[13:47] Say, I don't want to see in there. I'm going to let the darkness cover it up rather than be exposed by the light to live in the comforting secrecy of darkness.

darkness. When Jesus Christ, the light of the world, comes into the world, the world, us, humanity, living in darkness, does not look at him who lived a perfect life and think, fantastic, what a great example for us.

No, when the true light comes into the world, fallen humanity he thinks, oh no. This is going to show me up for who I really am.

I can hide relatively unnoticed in the wickedness of this world, but compared to the perfect purity of the Son of God, I'm not going to look too good.

And I don't want that. So even when the light of the world comes, the world squeezes shut its eyes so that we in our pride can go on pretending that maybe we're not really that bad.

[15:11] That is, verse 10, I think, of chapter 1, that this state of humanity outside of Christ, it's not, is it? It's not that God has not made himself known.

It's not that this world is wicked because God has hidden himself. It's that people have refused to see what had been made known to them because they don't want the extent of their wickedness exposed by the light.

It's no shortcoming on the part of God to make himself known. It is a failure of the human race to open their eyes to the truth. truth. But that is what people do because when we embrace the light, we quickly find out just how utterly filthy we are.

And so, the world which was created through the light did not know him. Verse 9 describes one of the greatest events in history.

verse 10 describes one of the most tragic, doesn't it? But certainly not the most tragic because it is immediately trumped by what we read in verse 11.

[16:27] Not only did the light come into the world, he also came to his own. And his own people did not receive him.

The world did not know Jesus. His own people did not receive him. The nation of Israel had been prepared for the arrival of the Messiah. Their need of a Savior had been made known to them.

They knew that they needed a great high priest who would atone for their sins. And yet, when he came, they did not receive him.

The implication is that his own people, while they did recognize something of who he was, but they then chose not to receive him.

And again, as you go through John's gospel, you start to understand why. Read in John chapter 11, just after Jesus has raised Lazarus from the dead, some of his own, that is the nation of Israel, they report back to the Pharisees, the kind of religious leaders of the day, they report back to the Pharisees what Jesus had been doing, and listen to their response.

[17:50] In response to the miracles that Jesus is performing, the Pharisees counsel together and they say, what are we to do? For this man performs many signs.

If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.

But they do not say, do they, this guy's making it all up. No, they recognize what Jesus is doing. And again, they think, oh no. They realize what it is going to cost them.

The Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation. And so, a few verses later, what do they say? From that day on, they made plans to put him to death.

There are those who refuse to recognize Jesus because they do not want their wickedness exposed. And there are those who refuse to believe in Jesus even though they recognize something of who he is because they know what it will cost them.

[19 : 12] they will have to give up what they hold dear and submit to another king for them, although they see something of who Jesus is, they reject him because they fear what it will cost them.

And so, Jesus came to his own, his own people, and yet, when he came, they chose not to receive. And they said, no thank you, God. what we're thinking about the children, God coming and handing the most precious gift into their hands and they're chucking it straight in the bin.

The world did not know him, his own did not receive him, and ultimately, his own people and the wicked world together would reject him to the point of hanging him on a cross.

They didn't just want nothing to do with him, they wanted him dead because of how much the true light exposes the darkness of our hearts and because of how the Son of God threatens to overthrow the dark world we have made for ourselves.

Brothers and sisters, that is what humanity does with Jesus apart from God's grace. That is what we all would do with Jesus.

[20 : 35] apart from God's grace. Because we are, and we were a prideful people who hate having our sins exposed.

We are a prideful people who desperately cling on to the ways of the world that we have made for ourselves. That is who we are, that is who we were outside of Christ, rejecting the light of the world so we can carry on living in darkness.

But by God's grace, there is another response to the light. Let's just look down now at verse 12 and 13 where wonderfully we see the light of the world received.

John continues, but to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

In 1866, there was a missionary called Robert J. Thomas. He was in China, but he wanted to take the gospel to Korea.

[22 : 01] Korea was a very hostile country at the time, but Robert Thomas nevertheless boarded an American ship setting sail for Pyongyang, and in his luggage, Robert carried a load of Chinese Bibles, hoping, hoping to reach out to the Korean people with the light of the world.

But Korea was, was a very hostile place, especially to uninvited visitors, and so the ship that was carrying Robert as it approached Pyongyang was attacked by the Korean coast guards.

The boat eventually ran aground where it was set upon by locals, and the story goes that as the stranded ship was, was being attacked, Robert leapt out, knowing these were last moments, with as many Bibles in hand as he could carry, and started handing them, forcing them, into the hands of the people who were attacking his ship, before in the final act of his life, he held out a Bible to the man who would kill him, crying out in Korean, Jesus, Jesus.

Robert J. Thomas loved the Korean people, and so longed for them to know Jesus, but he was, well, he was rejected, wasn't he? and ultimately killed by the people he longed to see saved.

And at that time, it might have seemed like nothing more than a cruel rejection. But if you were to look at Korea now, 150 years later, the light first shined as Robert Thomas died on that beach holding out a Bible at Pyongyang, it was a dark day.

[24 : 03] But from that beginning, rejected by everyone he reached out to, that mission reinforced by a host of missionaries who followed, the light of the gospel shines so brightly that Christ was made known and received by hundreds and then thousands and then tens of thousands and then hundreds of thousands and then millions of the people of that nation.

In South Korea today, Christianity is the majority of religion and the country is now the second only to the United States in leading world missions.

shining the light of the knowledge of Christ to others in the world. We see, don't we, in John chapter 1, the light of the world rejected in verse 10 and 11, but by God's grace, the word rejected is not the

end of the story.

For there are those who will and do receive the light of the world, who find life in Jesus. And they do that, don't they, verse 12, by believing in him?

What does it mean to receive Jesus Christ? What does it mean to receive the greatest gift ever offered to people? It means believing in Jesus.

[25 : 36] And those two things together, receiving and believing, they help us, don't they, understand what John in the Bible means by the word believing.

Because receiving is an act of taking in and accepting accepting for oneself. And so, so to believe in the name of Jesus is more, isn't it? It's more than just to acknowledge his existence in history. Because believing is receiving. Believing in Jesus is to accept that he is who he says he is. the eternal son of God equal with the father.

to believe in the name of Jesus is to receive. To receive him as king and lord of your life. Receiving him as the lamb of God come into the world to lay down his life to cover the cost of your sins.

Receiving him as the word of God. the one who speaks truth and life. The one whose teaching is good and authoritative and true and to be listened to and followed in all of life.

[26 : 51] To believe in Jesus is to receive him for yourself. Not just to say that's a nice present for those over there but to say he is mine.

He is my king. He is my lord. He is my savior. And to those who do believe they are granted the highest privilege of all.

To all who did receive and who believed in his name he gave the right to become children of God.

People work all their lives don't they?

to receive all sorts of titles and privileges CEOs vice presidents whatever it might be to be known as someone who matters people long for that but John holds before us doesn't he the highest possible privilege.

Children dream of being princes and princesses. John says have faith in Christ and you become a child of God.

[28 : 07] This is not only the greatest privilege is it? It is our greatest need to be brought into God's family and to become his beloved children.

Sometimes people speak generally of God being the father of everyone but that does not does it line up with what the Bible teaches.

Sinclair Ferguson goes so far as to say that it is a basic assumption of the Christian gospel that we are not by nature children of God.

We need to become his children because by nature we are alienated from God. By nature we are living in darkness and are terrified of the light.

None of us possesses by nature the characteristics of a child of God. Instead we show all the signs of rebelling against him and turning away from his fatherly rule over our lives.

[29 : 16] Children of God is praise the Lord a position that brings with it incredible privileges. But for all the incredible privileges that accompany our new status what the right to become children of God tells us most clearly and wonderfully is the reality isn't it of our new relationship to him.

We who were once not children of God now are. We who once stood alienated from him now stand under his loving care every moment of every day.

We who had once rejected him by rebelling against his rule are warmly welcomed into his home.

Outside of Christ we are all living in darkness and our hearts and minds are dark places full of dark thoughts.

By our nature we cannot be children of God and yet when we believe in Jesus when we receive him who is given to us we who are living in darkness are reconciled to him and so no longer no longer do we need to live in fear of our darkness being exposed because we have been made clean.

If you are in Jesus Christ and we ran that same experiment earlier on about putting all your worst thoughts there would be nothing. It would be clean it would be empty because Christ has paid the price for them all.

[31 : 09] Healed restored and forgiven. As children of God we stand in a right and loving relationship with the one who would have been just to condemn us.

But praise God. Praise God that he did not send the light of the world to condemn us but to save us. And so no longer brothers and sisters no longer do we need to fear God but rather we rejoice. We rejoice in what Jesus has done for us and it is it is God who has done it for us for we are verse 13

born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but of God.
there will always be many who reject Jesus but there are those who receive the lights not because they are better not because we are better but because God is gracious.
you need to be born again. Those were Jesus worse and Nicodemus we read earlier in the service. You need to be born into a new family and you can today be born again by receiving the light of the world held out to you by believing in the name of Jesus and by being given the greatest honor there is to become a child of God.

[32 : 43] God's but if that is you this morning and I hope it is true of many of us and remember it is it is not an act of human will is it?

It is an act of God's glorious grace. So give him all the glory give him all the glory for what he has done for you in giving you the greatest gift of all.

apart from him we would continue rejecting the light and hiding in the darkness for all eternity condemned perishing in the darkness where we would justly remain but we worship a God of mercy and of grace who has sent his one and only son into the world so that whoever believes in him would not perish but have everlasting life.

Let's praise God now for that wonderful truth as we pray together. Father we thank you and praise you that you sent your son Jesus Christ into the world and that even though he was rejected even though the world did not know him who they had been created by even though he was rejected by his own he willingly gave his life up so that all who would receive him would be made children of God.

Father we praise you for Jesus and we praise you for giving us new life in him. Help us to give you all the glory in all that we do for all that we are.

[34 : 42] in Jesus name we pray. Amen. Amen.