

## **Who is Jesus? Part 2 (John 1:6-13)**

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The canon of Scripture consists of 66 books written by a host of authors over thousands of years. I know of no publisher today who recommends that sort of approach to writing anything. Why not? Because it seems to be a recipe for creating a disjointed and contradictory whole. Yet that is not at all what we discover in the Bible. It is remarkably unified from beginning to end.

As Christians, we're not surprised. We know that behind the multitude of human authors stands one divine author – God himself. "All Scripture," 2 Timothy 3:16, "is breathed out by God." As the Apostle Peter declares in 2 Peter 1:21, "No prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

Because God is the ultimate author of Scripture, the Bible isn't a fallible, random collection of man's thoughts about God. It's an infallible, unified revelation of God's thoughts about himself. And the story it tells has a theme. It's focused on God's pursuit of relationship with his people.

In Genesis 3:9, we hear the cry of relationship lost, "Adam, where are you?" In Revelation 21:3, we hear the cry of relationship restored, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man." Everything between those two points centers on the work God has done, is doing, and will do, to bring the joy of relationship with him to pass for his eternal glory and our eternal good.

How does he get that done? How does he restore our relationship with him? He does it through the person and work of Jesus, the Son of God incarnate. Ephesians 1:9-10, "[God's] purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time," was "to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth." Why? So that for all eternity, we could gladly declare with the multitude in Revelation 5:12, "Worth is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"

From beginning to end, the whole Bible is a unified story about Jesus. That includes the Gospel of John! John 20:30-31, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

**A right knowledge of Jesus leading to an abiding faith in Jesus resulting in an abundant life through Jesus is the divinely-intended effect of the Gospel of John.**

And since the prologue in chapter one functions as a sneak preview of the rest of the book – introducing themes John will circle back to again and again – we’re not surprised to discover in the first 18 verses a veritable resume for the Son of God. It’s basically one gloriously mind-shattering answer after another to the all-important question, “Who is Jesus?”

At first, John simply refers to him as the Word. It’s a title drawn from the Old Testament where the Word of God is connected to God’s self-expression in creation, revelation, and salvation. And John calls Jesus “the Word” because he is the climactic and definitive revelation of the person and glory of God in creation, revelation, and salvation. If you want to know God, you must deal with the Word of God. You must look to Jesus.

When we looked at verses 1-5 last Sunday, we learned the Word is eternal, the Word is one with God, the Word is God, the Word is the agent of creation, the Word is the source of life, and the Word is the light of men. Those are the first 6 answers in John to the question, “Who is Jesus?” In verses 6-13, we discover at least 3 more.

**1) THE WORD WAS AUTHENTICATED BY GOD’S APPOINTED WITNESS**

Look at verse 6. “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.” The author of the fourth gospel, John the Apostle, isn’t talking about himself. He’s talking about John the Baptist. He was the greatest of the Old Testament prophets because he was the final prophet to speak on God’s behalf prior to the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry. Matthew 3:1–2, “In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”

His mission was to prepare God’s people for Jesus’ arrival. “Turn away from your sins. Turn back to God. Because the Lord’s Messiah, our long-awaited Savior, is about to arrive and bring the redemptive rule of God to pass on the earth.” But it’s not the details of his message that’s in view in verses 6-8. It’s his identity, function, and purpose.

What’s his identity? He’s a man “sent from God.” God doesn’t abandon us in the darkness of trouble within and trouble without. He doesn’t sit idly by as sin ravages the perfect world he created. He acts. He intervenes. He takes initiative in creation and he takes initiative in redemption. It’s who he is, friends. The fact that God himself “sent” John says as much about God as it does about John.

So what was John's function? Verse 7, "He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light..." We already know from verses 5-6 that "the light" in John is the Word, which verse 17 confirms is Jesus. So when verse 7 says John came to bear witness about "the light" he means John came to bear witness to "Jesus." He came to herald, authenticate, and confirm that Jesus was who he said he was. Why was that important? Because according to Jewish law, a matter could only be established by the testimony of at least two witnesses. It's why Jesus says in John 5:31-34:

"If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not deemed true. There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true. You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved."

What's Jesus saying? "I'm not ultimately accountable to the court of public opinion. I don't need the testimony of a man like John to know who I am. You shouldn't need the testimony of a man like John to know who I am. But I know your weakness. I know your frailty. I know your tendency to privilege what men say is true over what God says is true. So I sent John to bear witness about me, to testify for your sake that you might know I am who I say I am and believe me accordingly."

That was the ultimate goal of John's ministry. He bore witness, he testified to the truth about Jesus (verse 7) "that all might believe through him." Strengthening our faith in Jesus was the entire goal of John's ministry. Why? Because knowledge about Jesus is insufficient. Knowledge about Jesus doesn't change anyone. Faith is necessary. Personal trust is essential. And eyewitness testimony about Jesus a gift from God designed to strengthen our faith in Jesus.

Sometimes Christians talk as if genuine faith is utterly blind – "I know Jesus doesn't make any sense. I know it's not rational. But you just have to believe anyway." Are there parts of the Christian faith that defy human understanding? Absolutely. Are there things Jesus does and says that shatter the borders of our finite minds? Yes. Is that ultimately an exceedingly good thing? Yes!

But does that mean Christianity is irrational? Not at all. Biblical faith is not a leap into the unknown or a kind of head-in-the-sand-self-talk where you "convince" yourself something is true even though you don't have a single good reason to believe it's actually true.

Acts 26:25–26, "But Paul said, 'I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. For the king knows about these things, and to him I

speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner.”

What’s Paul saying? Christianity isn’t built on a spiritual vision that some random guy says he had in some random place. It could be true. It could be false. Who knows? No. Christianity is built on real, historical events confirmed by a multitude of eyewitnesses, John the Baptist included. And having witnessed his life, death, and resurrection, what do they say? What do divine messengers like John the Baptist along with every other author of the New Testament confirm? Jesus is who he says he is. He’s the light of the world, God the Son incarnate.

There’s more than a little chronological snobbery in play when we assign greater authority to who we think Jesus is, as those who live two-thousand years after he walked the earth, than we do to the eyewitnesses who observed his life and ministry firsthand. Witness is a key theme in the gospel of John. Over and over again, John points to unmistakable signs of the reliability and utter truthfulness of the claims Jesus makes about himself.

Take comfort in that friends. God isn’t just interested that you believe in Jesus – check box: yes or no. He wants to strengthen your faith in Jesus. He wants to increase your faith in Jesus. He wants you to become less confident in what you are able to do for yourself or other people are able to do and more confident in what he is able to do for you and will be faithful to do for you.

John the Baptist was a witness. But in many ways, this entire gospel is a witness. So don’t read it or listen to these sermons looking merely to learn something new. Force yourself to slow down and ask, “What good and satisfying reason does this verse or this chapter give me to trust Jesus?” It is good and necessary for us to rest and delight in the utter credibility of our faith. We have good reason to believe Jesus.

## **2) THE WORD WAS REJECTED BY THOSE WHO SHOULD HAVE RECEIVED HIM**

In verse 9, John doubles down on his earlier description of the Word as “the light of men” that shines in the darkness of our sin and suffering. “The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.” Let’s face it. Plenty of people agree we need enlightenment. You don’t have to be a Christian to recognize all is not well within us or around us. The disagreement arises over what sort of enlightenment we need and from whence it will come.

Some say education is the answer. If we can just get everyone to understand themselves and the world around them, everything will turn out ok. Some say self-esteem is the answer. If we can just all feel good about ourselves and get rid of all the negativity, everything will turn out ok. Some say sexual freedom is the answer. If everyone is able to love whoever they want in whatever way they want, everything will be ok.

When John speaks of Jesus in verse 9 as “the true light, which enlightens everyone,” he’s not referring to a subjective experience of discovering the secret to the life you’ve always wanted. Sex works for some people. Jesus works for others. No! He’s describing the objective fact, the immovable reality, that Jesus is and remains the spiritual light we all need regardless of what we perceive or believe about him.

Apart from him there is no enduring joy or peace. There is no deliverance from sin and guilt. There is no possibility of relationship with the God who created us and to whom we are accountable. Cling to him and you will live. Reject or dismiss him and you will die.

J.C. Ryle, “Christ is to the souls of men what the sun is the world. He is the center and source of all spiritual light, warmth, life, health, growth, beauty, and fertility. Like the sun, he shines for the common benefit of all mankind – for high and for low, for rich and for poor, for Jew and for Greek. Like the sun, he is free to all. All may look at him, and drink health out of his light.”

It would make sense for us to do as much. After all (verse 10), “the world was made through him.” We’re part of his creation. He knows what we really need far better than we do. Yet when Jesus began his public ministry, what happened? Verse 10, “the world did not know him.” We’re part of his domain. We’re accountable to him because he created us. Yet (verse 11) when “he came to his own” even “his own people did not receive him.” Why not? Why is Jesus misunderstood and rejected again and again in the gospel of John, even by the Jews?

Because the sin and rebellion in our hearts affects our spiritual perception of reality. We like to think we’re objective. We flatter ourselves that we’re discerning, that we have the moral faculties to distinguish truth from falsehood, good from evil. We convince ourselves that we really do want to know what is true, including the truth about Jesus, and live according.

But therein lies the great deception. Our hearts are not neutral. The world, Jews included, didn’t recognize Jesus as God or receive Jesus as God because they didn’t want Jesus to be God. Why not? Because in our sinful nature, we prefer to think of ourselves and other created things as God.



Romans 1:21–23, “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.” Edward Klink says it well. “It was not that the world failed to perceive his existence but that the world failed to relate with humble obedience and trust.”

The Jews had everything going for them. They possessed God’s Word. They knew all the stories. They prided themselves on keeping God’s law. But when God himself showed upon the scene, they accused him of being in cahoots with the Devil. They refused to “receive him,” to choose the path of humble obedience and trust.

Take heed, my friend, lest you fall into the same trap. You come to church. You even bring your Bible. People respect you as an upstanding Christian man or woman. But do you really believe Jesus? Or are you just presuming that because you like him, feel close to him, know a lot of things about him, or have done some things for him, that it’s well with your soul?

Receiving Jesus isn’t thinking he’s cool or acknowledging he has some good things to say. Nor is it about asking him into your heart like he’s some sort of lonely neighborhood kid looking for a place to stay. He’s your Creator. He’s your King. He’s your Master. You will be judged by him on the day you die. What will you say then?

Will you point to your good works? They’re nothing in comparison to the splendor of his holiness. Will you point to all the things you didn’t do? Well enough. But what about the things you actually did? Do you think the Judge of All the Earth will ignore them? You won’t be able to hide them. Every word, every deed, every thought was not in perfect and total alignment with his awesome majesty will be exposed for the wicked treason it is. There is no curve. God and God alone is the standard.

Don’t ignore Jesus. Don’t assume you’re good with Jesus. Run to Jesus. Receiving him means (verse 12) believing “in his name.” It means leaning wholly on him as your only hope for salvation from sin and death, your only hope for favor with God, your only hope for life in this world and in the world to come. It means focusing your highest thoughts on him. It means investing your deepest affections in him. It means surrendering all that you are and have for the sake of magnifying his renown.

Be honest. Who or what besides Jesus are you trusting or tempted to trust to give you life or protect your life? If you could only have \_\_\_\_\_, then everything would be all right.

How would you answer that question? Jesus was rejected by many people who should have known better. Take heed, my friend, lest you unknowingly do the same.

### **3) THE WORD GRANTS THE GIFT OF ADOPTION TO ALL WHO BELIEVE IN HIM**

When you choose to believe in Jesus, friend, something remarkable happens. Verse 12, "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God..."

There are some who speak as if to be a living, breathing human being is to be a child of God. That is not the perspective of Scripture. We are all dependent on him and owe our continued existence to him. Colossians 1:17, "In him, all things hold together." Every one of us also bears his image. Genesis 1:27, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him..." But there is a tremendous chasm between bearing God's image, depending on him for our very life, and calling him our Father.

As sinners, we are alienated from God. The Almighty One is our Creator, our King, our Judge, but he is not our Father and we dare not consider ourselves his children. Why not? Because our sin separates us from him. In the book of Hosea, the Lord compares his relationship with Israel to the relationship between the prophet Hosea and his wife Gomer, who was persistently unfaithful to him. It's a picture of our collective spiritual adultery, forsaking the Lord to run after other gods.

In Hosea 1:8, Gomer conceives and bears a son, only it's not Hosea's son. In verse 9 the Lord says, "'Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God.' Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' it shall be said to them, 'Children of the living God.'"

We are not children of God by right. By nature, we are children of wrath. Yet the moment we choose to believe in Jesus, that is precisely what we become – children of the living God, members of his very own family and co-heirs with Christ Jesus, our older brother. You are not merely called, sanctified, justified, and glorified, Christian. You have been adopted!

To be welcome, loved, and accepted by God would be wonder enough and cause for eternal praise. To become his very own child is unspeakable grace. It speaks of an intimacy of relationship, a privileged status, unlimited provision, supreme protection. You become an insider, not an outsider. The most precious reward, privilege, and



inheritance of our faith is the gift of adoption. It is the great relational end all the other benefits of the gospel make possible. The King of the Universe becomes your Father.

1 John 3:1, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are."

The world holds out an unlimited menu of options for creating our own identity. Who am I? I'm a rule-keeper, a rule-breaker, a competent manager, a skilled artist, a savvy businesswoman, a respected professional, a good student, or an exemplary child. Who am I? I'm the person who needs help. I'm the person who gives help. I'm a straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning. I'm rich, I'm poor, or I'm middle class. I'm powerful. I'm oppressed. I'm sick. I'm healthy. I'm white. I'm black. I'm a success. I'm a failure.

Friend, when you choose to follow Jesus, the answer to the "Who am I?" question is no longer a yawning blank beckoning you to spend and be spent in futile pursuit of the real you. Jesus fills in the blank for you by giving you an entirely new identity that no suffering, sorrow, or sin can ever take away from you – child of God. That means the life we experience through Jesus isn't a state of generic spiritual blessedness. It's a life filled with the particular blessings of having God as your Father – affection, protection, provision, belonging, access, guidance, counsel, correction, and the list goes on. For unlike our earthly fathers, this father is perfect in all his ways.

If you want to know where you might be arrogantly trying to forge your own identity instead of resting and rejoicing in the identity God, in Christ, as already given you as his child, pay attention to your fears. If you fear failure, you're most likely finding your identity in your performance. If you fear poverty, you're most likely finding your identity in your wealth. If you fear disapproval, you're most likely finding your identity in the praise of men. Fears are often nothing more than an inverted desire. Give careful attention to your anxieties and you will likely discover a false identity.

In verse 13, John takes great pains to teach us that our identity as children of God isn't something we create for ourselves. Children of God are born "not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." It's a spiritual transformation and assurance only the Lord can accomplish and provide. In fact, it's so decisive, so life-altering, that John compares it to being born again – a concept he'll dive into more deeply in chapter 3.

For now, however, he's content to make one thing crystal clear. You can't make it happen. You can't save yourself. The will of the flesh, the will of man, is wholly inept. As





John says later in John 6:63 – “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all.” So what’s our responsibility? To abandon all confidence in ourselves and cling by faith to Jesus.

For Jesus and Jesus alone gives us the right to become children of God. God the Son brings us into the familial relationship he himself has enjoyed with God the Father for all eternity. You don’t become a child of God by growing up in a Christian family or going to a Christian church. You become part of the family of God by believing in Jesus. His work in our lives is our only hope for our own relationship with God.

It’s also our only hope for your spouse, your kids, your parents, and all your other friends. And because Jesus delights to shine his light into the darkest of hearts, that’s good news! Jesus loves to grant the gift of adoption to all who believe in him.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Word of God, authenticated by God’s appointed witness, confronts every man and woman with a choice. Will you join the multitude who rejected Jesus and be judged accordingly? Or will you believe in him and become a child of God? Will you receive him or not? The choice is yours, Friend.

It’s a choice the Gospel of John lays before us again and again and again. Because every day, in every situation, no matter what else is going on, the most important question you will answer is, “Who is Jesus?” Get the answer right, trust him accordingly, and you will discover to your great joy that your Father in Heaven has already answered the question, “Who are you?”