

John 1:9-13 "Spiritual Rebirth"

In coming to our text this morning it's important to keep in mind that the apostle John is dealing with an aspect of Jesus Christ which the other writers of the other gospels do not concentrate on, and that is the divinity of Jesus Christ.

Now of course, as I've said before, all of the gospels recognize and teach the divinity of Jesus, but this gospel is unique in its approach to the man Christ Jesus as John continually demonstrates that this is none other than the God who created the universe and who now dwells among men.

And as such, this very God has now chosen to be part of His own creation by becoming a man; by being born of a woman. In theological terms this is often referred to as the state of humiliation of Jesus Christ.

And believe me, there is nothing more humble than the Almighty Creator God, who simply spoke creation into existence, now assuming humanity as He takes on flesh. And yet, for God, He did not view this act of humiliation as something which was demeaning, but as the opportunity to express the love He has for man.

And of course, the reason He chose to come into this world was because of man's sin which needed to be paid for. Since man was condemned by God because of his sin, it had to be a man who would take his place to redeem him. This is why I've said on many other occasions, that Jesus Christ could not be anything less than a true man.

An animal cannot redeem a man. An angel cannot redeem a man. By God's very standards He cannot redeem a man outside of Him becoming a man as He comes into this world. Well, someone might say, of course God can redeem a man without becoming a man. He made the rules and He can alter them any way He wants to. After all He's God.

No. It's because He is God that He must be true to His Holy and perfect nature so that sin must be dealt with according to His own word, which states that the wages of sin is death. Though we might think God can, in one stroke of a pen, create amnesty for the human population, this simply does not take into account the heinousness of sin and God's holiness.

God is just, and as such there must be a holy judicial process in forgiving man of his penalty for sin. A man must die. And this is the reason the Son of God Himself chose to come into this world to die in man's place; to take man's penalty as He took our sin and gave us His righteousness.

The cross of Jesus Christ fully expresses the love and justice of God in one event as He became our sacrifice for sin. For this He came into the world because He loved us that much. And so, we pick up with our text as John expresses this light of the world as He took on flesh to take our place.

JOH 1:9-13 "The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God - 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."

In verse nine of our text John once again uses an expression describing this Word, this logos, who was in the beginning with God. He refers to Him as the true light, which, by the way, is not meant to be taken as a contrast to some false light, but rather explains that He is the source of all light. He is the source of life.

And so, just as in the creation account in Genesis, there were lights of degree for specific purposes.

GEN 1:16 "God made two great lights - the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night."

Here He refers to the sun to govern the day, and the moon to govern the night. One light isn't true, while the other light is false, but rather one light is the source for the other, thus making it true.

And we have the same thing in our text. Jesus Christ is the source of light for men in the sense that He illuminates men with His very presence. He shines upon them with His very life as He came into this world.

But here's the irony in all of this. Though Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the very Creator, is the light, men chose to remain in darkness. And John points this out in verse 10 of our text.

JOH 1:10 "He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him."

The word world as used here in our text is the Greek word *Kosmos* and it is where we get our English word cosmos. It simply means the created order, which includes the entire universe and everything in it.

But here in our text John uses the word to refer to mankind and his system of thought. Jesus came to man. Jesus walked among men so as to be the light they should seek so as to come out of their darkness.

And here is the amazing truth about all of this. This Jesus didn't simply come into a world which was foreign to Him. He didn't come into a world of which He had no understanding and compassion.

The world He came into is the very world He created. Now, as we just said, the world which is referred to here in our text is describing mankind. And though it doesn't exclude the planet on which man lives, John is making the point that the very people the Son of God created are the very same creation the Son of God became.

And what this shows us is the intimacy God has for mankind at this point. It doesn't mean that God wasn't intimate or involved with mankind up to this point, or that He wasn't in the world in the sense that He was not pursuing mankind with His love.

But from all of eternity God had made plans to take on flesh and literally be a part of this world in a way He had not in the past, by becoming a human being. In fact, the apostle Peter makes this perfectly clear in his first epistle.

1PE 1:18-20 "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. 20 He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake."

Man's sin didn't take God by surprise. Before the world was created, and therefore before man was created, Jesus was chosen to be our Savior. And some 2,000 years ago He fulfilled that promise

that He would come into this world, born of a virgin in Bethlehem. And in this way He was not only fully God, but now fully man.

And so, in this sense we can speak of Jesus as a man and yet also as the Creator, as John does here and as Paul does when writing to the Colossians.

COL 1:15-16 "He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him."

Now, you would think that mankind would be jumping up and down at the chance to meet this Savior. You would think that the world would be ecstatic over the truth that their very Creator had come to them. But this simply isn't the case as John tells us that the world did not recognize him, or know Him as other translations put it.

The psalmist points out what man's response should be to his creator.

PSA 33:6-8 "By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. 7 He gathers the waters of the sea into jars; he puts the deep into storehouses. 8 Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the people of the world revere him."

There was very little reverence for God the Son when He was born into this world. The exception would of course be that of Mary and Joseph along with the Magi and the shepherds in the field that night in Bethlehem.

But the attitude of the world-at-large was closer to Herod's who wanted the Christ child put to death.

Now, we might understand that the Gentile world didn't recognize Christ. After all, the world for the most part had not even heard of this Messiah. They had their own gods, and their own way of doing things when it came to worship and philosophy of life as it involved these gods.

But what is really sad is the attitude of the very people through whom this Messiah came into the world.

JOH 1:11 "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him."

This is a tragic commentary on the nation of Israel as it relates to the rejection of their Messiah. You'll remember, that it was Israel who was given the promises by God. It was Israel who was given the prophets. It was Israel who was in a special relationship to God as He brought them out of Egypt and guided and protected them, as He ultimately delivered them to the Promised Land.

It was God who revealed Himself to Israel as their Father, and they His children. And yet, when He finally shows up to Israel, they don't recognize Him for who He is.

And so, not only does the Gentile world reject our Lord Jesus, but also His very people whom He called out for the special purpose of bringing the Messiah into the world. But again, this did not take our Lord God and Savior by surprise, which makes His coming into this world all the more amazing.

He knew mankind in general and Israel specifically, would hate Him and despise Him and yet He still chose to love the world so much that He came and died for us even while we were His enemies. This is why our salvation is often referred to as amazing grace.

This grace amazed even Paul. On one occasion Paul was speaking to a group of Jews in a Synagogue in Antioch. And he basically recounted the redemptive history of Israel as he was given the opportunity to give a word of encouragement to the people of this Synagogue.

ACT 13:26-33,38-39 "Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. 27 The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. 28 Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. 29 When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. 30 But God raised him from the dead, 31 and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people. 32 "We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers 33 he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: "'You are my Son; today I have become your

Father.' 38 "Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. 39 Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses."

Paul was part of this very group of people in Israel who did not recognize Jesus. Paul was part of the fabric of Judaism which condemned Jesus as a heretic, which is why Paul initially spent his life trying to destroy the church of Jesus Christ.

But when the Lord opened Paul's eyes as He shined the light of truth on him, Paul now realized that this Jesus was the same Jesus spoken of through Abraham and the prophets. It was all there in the Scriptures, the very Scriptures Paul used in this Synagogue to encourage the hearts of these people as he pointed them to Messiah Jesus.

Some of them hated Paul for this message, especially the rulers of this Synagogue. But some of them were excited to hear this good news.

ACT 13:42-43 "As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. 43 When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God."

Most of these people were Jews and yet they wanted to know more. Many of these people would come to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. It is these John refers to in our text.

JOH 1:12 "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God..."

In this one statement we have the very will of God concerning his creation as it relates to mankind. From the beginning this is what God wanted for mankind. He wanted man to know Him and believe on Him and to be His children and He be their God. This is precisely what He told Abraham..

GEN 17:7 "I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you."

The Lord would later express this same love toward Israel, who was the beneficiary of Abraham's blessing from God.

LEV 26:12-13 "I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people. 13 I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves to the Egyptians; I broke the bars of your yoke and enabled you to walk with heads held high."

And now today, we who have believed in Christ have the same promise and hope that our Lord Jesus is our God and we are His people. This is what Peter expressed in his first epistle.

1PE 2:9-10 "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

We belong to the Lord. He has purchased us back with His very life. But simply because He came to die for us does not automatically make us a part of His forever family. Notice what John says.

JOH 1:12 "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God..."

Many people in this world believe that if they're not Jewish or Muslim, or anything else, they must be Christian by default. But to be Christian means to belong to Christ. And John makes it clear how that happens.

He talks about receiving and believing in the name of Christ. Let's look a little closer at this. It's not uncommon for people to say they believe in God, or even in Jesus and yet not be a Christian.

Many polls taken in this country would lead us to believe that a majority of Americans are Christian. And yet, many of these same people who are polled don't believe in the bible as the infallible word of God. They don't believe that Jesus is none other than God in the flesh.

They don't believe in the miracles mentioned in the bible. And yet, what is even more disturbing is that many people who claim to be

Pastors and leaders in the church-at-large today are the ones trumpeting these very heresies.

Simply because someone is part of a church, or simply because someone has made a declaration that they believe in God does not necessarily make them a Christian.

What makes them a Christian is to receive and believe in the name of Jesus Christ. Two words are used here in our text which are related to being a Christian: receive and believe. The word receive in the Greek means to take by the hand, to embrace, to lay hold of something entirely.

The word believe means to place confidence in something or someone. The point is that to receive and believe is not some passive approach to accepting Christ. It's not a faith which is obtained through osmosis, despite the fact that it is a gift from God.

Ephesians 2:8 ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God;

To receive and believe actively and intellectually means to accept the truth of who Jesus Christ is and what He has done in dying for our sins, and then personally believes that to be true, personally accepts the work of Christ on our behalf as we turn from trying to get to heaven on our own, and turns to the One who purchased us on the cross.

Just look at the way Jesus called His disciples. He didn't suggest that they skirt around the edges of His ministry and drop in once in a while to get an update on their salvation. He said, follow Me. And in essence, to follow is to receive and believe.

When we embrace Jesus Christ we have essentially said that we cannot get to heaven on our own. The natural reaction is to follow and obey the One who can and will take us there to be with Him forever. To be a follower of Jesus is to be a believer and receiver of Jesus.

LUK 14:27 "And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."

So, that means if I ever find myself not following Christ in my life, I'm not His disciple? No. What Jesus is talking about is that if you have embraced Him you will follow. And if we get off of the path,

we will find our way back, even if our Lord has to come get us, like He does with that lamb He has to carry on His shoulders.

But to suggest that we can call ourselves Christians and not have any intention of following and obeying our Lord is to simply pay lip service to Christ, which unfortunately, is what most of the world is doing if they name the name of Christ.

I mean if every person in the United States is what they say they are; that is a Christian, I guarantee you this country would be a much different place.

To receive and believe is to follow and trust in the One who gives life and then walk in that life by the power of the Holy Spirit. We must believe in the name of Jesus. And by that we don't mean five letters on a piece of paper which designate the identity of a person.

To believe in the name of Jesus is to believe in who that person is. That person, as John has described Him, is God, Creator, Savior and the one who extends mercy and compassion to a world who hates Him, and yet wants to be our God and we His people.

This is why for people to simply say they are identified with a name and yet not follow that person is indicative that they have not really received and believed in that name of Jesus Christ.

And we don't want to deceive ourselves or the world with the idea that simply because we are identified with the name of Jesus Christ that that automatically makes us Christians. If that were the case then Jesus would be very cruel when describing people who call Him Lord.

MAT 7:20-23 "Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. 21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

To name the name of Christ is not necessarily the same thing as receiving and believing in the one whose name that is. To be born again is to not only name the name of Christ, as we accept Him by faith as Lord and Savior, but to know Him personally and then live in that personal relationship as we love Him and trust Him for our eternal life.

But even this new birth is by the grace of God.

JOH 1:12-13 "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God - 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."

When John describes the children of God as ones who were not born of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God, he is describing how man cannot create this relationship with God because of his sin.

When John speaks of children not born of natural descent he means that being physically descended from someone does not make you part of this spiritual family. This was the problem with the Jews of Jesus' day. They felt that since they were descendants of Abraham that they automatically had a place in heaven reserved for them.

JOH 8:31-34,37,39-41,44 "... Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." 33 They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" 34 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. 37 I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word. 39 "Abraham is our father," they answered. "If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do the things Abraham did. 40 As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. 41 You are doing the things your own father does." "We are not illegitimate children," they protested. "The only Father we have is God himself." 44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

Being descendants of Abraham did not then, nor does it today, guarantee anyone eternal life.

But so as not to exclude the Gentile world from thinking they can obtain eternal life through their own means John goes on to say

that no one is a child of God because of a human decision or a husband's will.

By this John simply means that human beings don't make the ground rules for a relationship with God. We can't be born into Christ, humanly speaking, and we can't will ourselves into the Kingdom of God. In fact, a human being will not choose to seek God on his own, is John's point.

And Paul bears this out when writing to the Romans and which we touched on last week.

ROM 3:10-12 As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; 11 there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. 12 All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

If this is the case how can there be any hope for mankind? Well, here's the answer. We become children of God as we are born, not of human will, or of our ancestry, but being born of God. When God gives birth, or gives us life, we are truly alive. And that birth comes through the Son of God who was born into this world to redeem us as the Holy Spirit initiates this life in His people.

Titus 3:5-7 ⁵ He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life.

That's what it means to be born again. To have God Himself give us life. And this life is found only in Jesus Christ. Not just a name, but a person.

JOH 3:16-18 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."