

The World and the Light

John 1:9-13

The movie *October Sky* based on the book *Rocket Boys* is about four West Virginia boys from a coal mining town who develop a rocket. One of the boys, Homer Hickam, whose hero is scientist and rocket developer for NASA Werner Von Braun, is sent by his high school to Indianapolis to the National Science Fair. Homer wins first place at the competition. As people gather around him after the ceremony, admiring his trophy and congratulating him, an older man speaks to him, "Well done, Son. Great work," he says. Homer thinks nothing of it. He is caught up in the moment.

Then, a flurry of reporters descends on Homer. They ask, "What did he say?"

"What did who say," asks Homer.

"Von Braun, Werner Von Braun," they replied. "He just shook your hand."

And, in that moment Homer realizes that his hero in science, Werner Von Braun, had just shook his hand and spoken to him and he didn't realize it.

As we will see from today's scripture, most of the people in Jesus' day missed Him. He came among them and they either ignored Him or openly rejected Him. They were in the presence of God, divine royalty, and they didn't even recognize Him.

As we have seen, the first 18 verses of the Gospel of John are his prologue where he summarizes who Jesus is and highlights many of the themes of the Gospel. We have seen that Jesus is the eternal Word who in the beginning was with God and was God. He is the very expression of the mind and thought of God. We have seen that Jesus is the Creator of the world in which we live and of we ourselves. From Him there flows life to every creature, including ourselves, and that life is the light which illuminates all spiritual reality.

The Son of God comes to earth, God in human flesh. He is the one who has created the world, the one who is light and life. And most of the world could care less. Why? Probably they were not looking for Him to appear in the way that He did, as a servant, teacher and healer. Perhaps they were too busy with the routine of their lives. Maybe, like many people today, they didn't want to see Jesus because they preferred the darkness of sin rather than the light of God.

Our text for today is John 1:9-13. Listen to how John writes about Jesus, the light:

John 1:9-13

9 That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.

10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.

11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.

12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

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

Our lesson today is: *When God reveals His light in Jesus Christ, people will either resist Him or receive Him.*

1. The Light Revealed (John 1:9)

Verse 9 says, **"That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world."**

The apostle has already given us a hint of this in verses 4-5 where he wrote,

4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

And we saw in verses 6-8 that God sent John the Baptist to bear witness of the light so that people might believe. Now in verse 9 we see the light revealed. He says **"That was the true Light."**

When John refers to Jesus as the **"true Light,"** he is saying that He is the genuine Light, the real Light, that He is the ultimate Light that Israel has been looking for throughout the Old Testament. Using this same word, true, Jesus will testify of Himself that He is the **"True Bread from heaven"** (John 6:32) and the **"True Vine"** (John 15:1). The manna (Ex 16:4) in Exodus was simply a foreshadowing of the ultimate Bread of Life who is Jesus Christ. As Jesus explained, **"For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world,"** (John 6:33). In Isaiah, Jeremiah and Hosea Israel is depicted as God's vineyard (Isa. 5:1-7, Jer. 2:21, 12:10, Hos. 10:1) but Jesus is the true Vine that bears the fruit of righteousness.

We have created virtually every kind of artificial light possible for lighting our homes and streets, for lighting televisions and phones and producing special effects of all kinds. But nothing can compare with the brightness of the sun that drives out the darkness of the night. No special lighting effects can compare with God's sunrise or sunset (Holman New Testament Commentary).

In the same way Jesus is the true spiritual Light of which all other lights are merely sparks or reflections. So what John is saying is that Jesus is the *real light* which has come to illumine men. Before Jesus came there were other lights which men followed. Some were flickers of the truth; some were faint glimpses of

reality; some were false lights which led men out into the dark and left them there. It is still the case. There are still the partial lights; and there are still the false lights; and men still follow them. Jesus is the only *genuine light*. ([John 1 Commentary - William Barclay's Daily Study Bible](#)).

And the verse says the light was “**coming into the world.**” Now the NKJV connects this phrase to “**every man.**” Other versions connect it with the Light. The NSAB reads, “**There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.**” The Greek grammar allows for either one. But in this gospel, coming into the world or being sent into the world is repeatedly said with reference to Jesus (John 6:14; 11:27; 16:28; 18:37). And, the following verses (John 1:10-11) talk about Jesus being in the world and coming unto His own. So it makes more sense to read it that Jesus, the Light, is coming into the world and enlightens every man.

What does the light do? Verse 9 says the true Light, “**gives light to every man,**” He gives light and continues to give light to all people. In what way? How does Jesus enlighten every man?

This phrase has been interpreted a variety of ways ...

(1) Some argue that this refers to the light of general (natural) revelation that God gives through creation. This would fit with the context of verse 10, “**He was in the world, and the world was made through Him.**” Certainly God has given light through the creation. Paul says in Romans 1:19-20, “**19 because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.**” Included in this may be the light of conscience that bears witness of God (Calvin’s view; Ro 2:14-16).

It is true that all the light that we have both in general revelation (through the creation) and in special revelation (through God’s revealed word)—all of it is found in Christ. He created the world. He spoke through scriptures of the Old Testament. It all is light from Christ.

(2) The Quakers say that this refers to an “inner light” that God gives to all people.

(3) Some (Augustine) say that “every man” only refers to those who have been born again and that this is the light of the gospel that saves.

(4) Wesleyans argue that this verse teaches that God has given all people “prevenient grace,” which gives them to ability to choose or reject salvation. But that seems to me to be reading into the text.

(5) The best view I think is that John 1:9 refers to the exposure that light brings when it shines on something. The Greek verb (*photizo*) means to shed light upon

or to make visible. Light in this gospel comes as judgment into the world and causes people either to approach or reject. His light shines on every man, and divides the race between those who resist the light and those who receive the light (Steven Cole, [John 1:6-13 God's Witness, Your Verdict](#)).

This clearly fits the context. Verses 10-11 show what happens when the light shines on the world and on Israel. The world does not know the light and His own people do not receive Him. Verses 12-13 show what happens with the light shines on those who are being saved. They receive the Light and believe, having been born again.

In John's Gospel it is repeatedly the case that the light shines on all, and forces a response. Look at what Jesus says in John 3:19-21:

19 "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 "For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 "But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

The point here is that the Light (Jesus) demands a response. When the Light exposes the corruption and sin that is in the human heart, some will react like cockroaches when the light is flipped on: they run for cover to hide their evil deeds. But others welcome the light, knowing that it's for their healing and good.

That brings us to the first of the responses to the light in verses 10-11:

2. The Light Resisted (John 1:10-11)

In these verses John shows two resistant responses that people make when Jesus comes. Honestly, we would rather not admit to them, but they are present in every generation, every society, every community, and even in every church.

First, in verse 10,

- a. He was in the world, but was not known (John 1:10)

10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.

The word for world is *kosmos*, meaning the realm where human beings live. John uses it three times in this verse. In the first two uses, world means the place where humans live. So the Light, Jesus Christ, was in the world that He had created. God walked on this planet for thirty-three years. He was a flesh and blood man, born of a woman, with a human nature just like ours. He was born as we are born, and grew up through all the stages of childhood-infancy, toddler, young child, teenager, and young adult. He wasn't a robot or an angel or some kind of strange alien from a distant galaxy. He was one of us and walked among

us. He was in the world. But as Jesus will say in John 8:23, **"You are of this world; I am not of this world."** The Lord stood in complete contrast to this world of men. He shone as a blazing light in this dark world of sin. You would think that everyone would easily recognize and be drawn to such a bright light.

But here is the tragedy of verse 10, **"and the world did not know Him."** The sinful, blinded world in darkness did not know Him. The word "know" implies an intimate knowledge, a personal relationship. In His prayer in John 17 Jesus describes the knowledge the world did not possess but which He came to offer - **"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent,"** (John 17:3).

Why didn't the world know its Creator and Savior? One reason is that they love their sin as we saw in John 3:19, **"men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."** Another reason is that people are spiritually blind:

John 9:39-41 - **39 And Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind." 40 Then some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, "Are we blind also?" 41 Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, 'We see.' Therefore your sin remains.**

2 Cor. 4:4 - **4 whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.**

In many cases, the cause is just indifference. People are immersed in their own things and don't have the time or desire to know Jesus in a personal, saving way. (Cole, John 1:6-13 God's Witness, Your Verdict).

The world's ignorance is not the worst of it. The tragedy deepens. Not only was Jesus ignored; Jesus was rejected by his own people.

b. He came to His own people, but they rejected Him (John 1:11)

11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.

"We might translate the opening words, 'He came home'. It is the exact expression used of the beloved disciple when, in response to Jesus' word from the cross, he took Mary 'unto his own home' (John 19:27; cf. Jn 16:32). When the Word came to this world He did not come as an alien. He came home." (Vincent).

Jesus, the Light, came to the Jews lost in sin and they did not receive Him. There was no "welcome mat" put out for Him, the nation as a whole rejecting His claim as their long expected Messiah! But this rejection did not come as a shock to God or His Son, for over 200 years earlier Isaiah prophesied about Him saying, **"He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted**

with grief. And we hid, as it were, **our** faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him," (Isa 53:3 NKJV).

John used Isaiah's prophecy later in his Gospel commenting,

37 But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, 38 that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?" (John 12:37-38).

These verses show the tragedy of sin and the terrible wickedness of the human heart. That these two verses show is that this rejection of the Light of Jesus Christ was not just a mistake, it was a willful ignorance and a deliberate rejection. They made a specific choice to not recognize or receive Jesus! He was the one who created them ([Jn. 1:3](#)), yet He gave up heaven's glory to be born a human being. He came to His own people to be their Savior and King. He reached out to them and gave them every reason to love Him. But they turned Him away and crucified Him.

Sin is utterly irrational. If God loves sinners enough to send His own Son to pay for their sin and offer them eternal life as a free gift, it is insane for them to scream, "Get out of here! Turn off that light! I love my sin so much that I'm willing to face eternal judgment rather than to receive the right to become God's child!"

So we have seen the light revealed and the light rejected, finally we see the good news:

3. The Light Received (John 1:12-13)

Aren't you glad that verse 11 is not the end of the story! Verse 12 shows a dramatic shift as it begins with the word, "but." Revelation did bring rejection, but praise God that through His Spirit it also brought reception! And so while the majority of Jews rejected their Messiah, there was a remnant, a small group who entered through the small gate and walked the narrow way (Mt 7:14), by grace through faith, to become children of God!

a. How did they receive Him? By believing (John 1:12)

12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

I love how that verse says it, "**as many as**" - This pronoun means "Any one without exception; any person whatever." It is equivalent to the pronouns whoever or whosoever. This flings open the door of salvation to both Jews and Gentiles to anyone who would believe in Him.

The Word "**received**" implies not merely intellectual agreement with some facts about Jesus. It means to welcome Him into your life. John further defines it as believing in His name. "**His name**" refers to all that Jesus is in His person as the

eternal Word made flesh. It refers to all that He did by dying on the cross as the substitute for your sins.

“Believe” is in the present tense (meaning you continues believing) and in the active voice, which signifies that the person has made a choice of their will. To say it another way, God's revelation of the Light, calls for a personal response to the Light.

J. Vernon McGee gave this illustration about what it means to believe in Jesus Christ:

I am standing beside a chair and I believe it will hold me up, but it is not holding me up. Why? Because I have only a head knowledge. I just say, “Yes, it will hold me up.” Now suppose I believe into the chair by sitting in it. See what I mean? I am committing my entire weight to it and it is holding me up. Is Christ holding you up? Is He your Savior? It is not a question of standing to the side and saying, “Oh, yes, I believe Jesus is the Son of God.” The question is have you trusted Him, have you believed into Him, are you resting in Him? This chair is holding me up completely. And at this moment Christ is my complete Savior. I am depending on Him; I am resting in Him.

b. What was the result? Became children of God (John 1:12)

Look at the result of receiving Jesus by believing in His Name: **“to them He gave the right to become children of God.”**

Once we take the simple step of receiving Jesus as Lord by believing in Him completely and solely for our salvation, then we are given the wonderful result of becoming like Him. **“He gave”** is the expression of God's grace. **“The right”** means that God has given us an honor or a privilege or an authority. But for what? The answer is: **“To become children of God.”**

The key word is become. This word says something about the status of believers. Because people have received Jesus and believed on His name, they now are raised to a new position. They become children of God. While all people are created by God, not everyone is a child of God. Sometimes people carelessly say, “We're all God's children,” but the Bible says no such thing. We are not naturally children of God. God only gives the privilege of being His children to those who by personal faith receive Jesus as Lord and believe in who He is.

When you do that you're adopted into God's family. That means you're accepted. To be adopted means not just that your sins are pardoned, but that you're brought into a permanent relationship of love and acceptance. What a tremendous privilege! John writes in his first epistle, **“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!”** (1 John 3:1). And that is what we are!

But John is very clear that this right as children of God is not something we merit. It is a supernatural work of God. How is it possible that rebellious, sin-darkened, dead sinners can become children of God?

c. How is it possible? A new birth (John 1:13)

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

1) Was not of man (John 1:13a)

They **were born**, but it was not a natural birth. "**Blood**" refers to human ancestry. We are children of God just because both of our parents are believers. Your grandfather may have been an awesome Christian, and you may have fourteen preachers in your family tree. But according to this verse, none of that makes a bit of difference because birth into God's family is not passed on genetically. It has nothing to do with blood

"**The will of the flesh**" refers to the decision of human parents to have a child. We cannot "**will**" ourselves into the family of God. No amount of wishful thinking makes me a child of God. I might wish I were the child of a millionaire but that does not make me one. Personal effort is of absolutely no avail in bringing about our supernatural birth!

"**The will of man**" refers to man-made systems. My parents may have me baptized as a baby, but that does not make me a child of God; that is only "the will of man." I may use all my strength of character to live a good life, perform religious duties, achieve spiritual goals, but those things will not impart new life.

John piles up these phrases to show that we could never bring about our own salvation. We could never become children of God through any work or will of man.

Instead we must be born "**of God.**"

2) Was of God (John 1:13b)

John will say to the very religious leader Nicodemus in John 3, "**You must be born again.**" The birth of a child of God is not a natural birth; it is a supernatural work of God in regeneration. A person welcomes Jesus and responds in faith and obedience to Him, but the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit is 'the cause' of regeneration. Just as we had nothing to do with our physical birth, so we had nothing to do with our spiritual birth. We can't take credit for it. We can't boast in our wise decision to believe in Christ. All glory must go to God.

The right to become children of God is a gift from God. Our spiritual birth as children of God is done completely by God through His Holy Spirit. That is a work of God that He does in us. That is God's sovereignty in salvation. We need to be

born. We need to have spiritual life. That is what God does according to John 1:13 without any help from us. Our responsibility is to believe in Christ.

Let me summarize this point. People are Christians not because of who they are, but because of whose they are. People are Christians not because they are born into a Christian family, but because they are born again into God's family. People are not Christians because they are members of a church, but because they are servants in God's kingdom. People are not Christians because they follow a few rules, but because they have entered into a relationship with Jesus Christ.

This scripture calls for a response. Will you ignore Him as you pursue your own agenda? Will you flat out reject Him because He confronts your pride? Or, will you receive Him by believing in His name so that you become His child, born of God?