

The Incarnate Word that Enlightens

By David Harrell

Bible Text: John 1:6-13

Preached on: Sunday, September 1, 2013

Once again it is with great joy that I'm able to come before you this morning and minister the Word of God to you, so will you take your Bibles and turn to John's Gospel, John Chapter 1. This morning we will examine verses 6 through 13. And I've entitled my discourse to you this morning "The Incarnate Word that Enlightens."

The Scottish preacher James Stewart said the aims of all genuine preaching are "to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, and to devote the will to the purpose of God." And by the power of the Spirit, I humbly strive to these ends this morning as I exposit this text before you. Now here in John's Gospel we are once again transported into the realm of the eternal, lifted high into the mysteries and majesties of our Savior the Lord Jesus Christ. We're overwhelmed as we look at his glory, as we see Christ the Son of God.

You will recall last week we looked at the first five verses where we examined the glory of the Son, the divine Word. There we learned that he had preexisted with God, he coexisted with God, and he self existed with God. And today we will examine verses 6-13, The Incarnate Word that Enlightens. So let me read this text to you. Beginning in verse 6 of John 1:

"There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John. He came for a witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came that he might bear witness of the light. There was the true light, which coming into the world enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world did not know him. He came to his own, and those who were his own did not receive him. But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

The purpose of all of this ultimately is to help us glorify our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. You know as you think about it, we are such debtors to his grace and this should grieve us because so often we glorify him so little. We too often come to praise him on Sunday, yet the rest of the week we seldom think about him. It's easy for us to give him praise with our lips, but not with our lives. And as we come to these great texts, we want to examine our heart and learn more of who he is, that we might give him more glory. Think about it, though we have been bought with his precious blood, too often we act as though we owe him nothing, rather than all we have.

And I believe that this kind of apathy is really attributed by three things: 1. a love of self; our flesh is so self centered by nature. Secondly, we love the world far more than we should. We're drawn to the temptations of the world, the wicked things of the world like

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a moth is drawn to a flame. But thirdly, I believe that our apathy at times is because we are really ignorant of who the Lord Jesus is. And certainly it is Satan's great strategy to distort the character of God. As we look at Scripture we learn that by nature man resists God's character and his will rebels against the will of God. He also, therefore, rebels against God's Word, and down through the years, Satan has infiltrated the Church with many false teachers who in many cases unwittingly distort and discredit the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You may not realize it, but I would submit to you that each of us are victims of this type of wickedness. I was raised in the 1960s and '70s as well as many of you. And you will recall in those days there was a thing called the Jesus Movement. They were kind of the anti-establishment, pot smoking, hippies we called them and a lot of them were the Jesus people. They were all about peace and love and yet they resented the Biblical warnings about divine judgment and hell. Many of them gradually began to worship the false god of the Eastern religions, Buddhism, Hinduism, and like all youth, the Jesus people were obsessed by the music of the culture and they incorporated it into their brand of religion and their idea of who Jesus was, a blend of folk songs and blues and rock, with lyrics as superficial and as spiritually impotent as the new Jesus that they created. Gradually, almost imperceptibly, the evangelical culture created a Christ that would suit them. Kind of a hippie, flower child, Jesus that would wink at sin, and subject his will to the will of man. A Jesus that loves everybody and takes all God's children to heaven, no matter what they believe or who they serve.

And then, in similar fashion, we saw the prosperity gospel come on the scene, taught by many in the charismatic movement, the word faith movement, that continues to have such power over so many people across the world. And this movement invented what the apostle Paul called "another gospel, another Jesus," a Santa Clause Jesus, that can be easily manipulated so that he will pass out the goodies. According to them the divine Son of God is reduced to a born-again man who had to die in hell to pay the price for our sins while on earth he had to use the word and the laws of faith to do his miracles. They would argue that his atoning work on the cross was not sufficient a but that he had to take upon himself the very sin nature of the devil, causing his spirit to die and he had to suffer three days and nights in the tortures of hell as a man before the Father would command for him to be recreated and be reborn as a man. And thus they say that Jesus was the first of many sons, the pattern for all of us to follow, so unfortunately, what they do is they elevate man to be equal with Jesus, making us little Gods. They teach that all who are born-again have the same power and the same authority as Jesus had. As long as we are spirit filled, therefore, we have within us the ability to enact certain spiritual laws by faith to manipulate our world, to manipulate our circumstances, and even perform miracles.

And then, on the scene came another error, the one of the no-lordship doctrine that seems to still be very pervasive in many evangelical circles. Here people teach that obedience and submission to the Lordship of Christ are extraneous to saving faith, that a man can receive Christ as Savior but reject him as Lord, and therefore every profession of faith is

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considered to be genuine and they will even tell people that if you ever doubt your salvation, rebuke the devil, because that is of the devil. Certainly this is an unbiblical position in my opinion that, once again, distorts the person and work of Christ, a position that basically makes a distinction between salvation and discipleship.

James M. Boyce in his book “Christ’s Call to Discipleship” addresses this false dichotomy and describes it as a “defective theology.” He said this, “This theology separates faith from discipleship and grace from obedience. It teaches that Jesus can be received as one’s Savior without being received as one’s Lord. This is a common defect,” he goes on to say, “in times of prosperity. In days of hardship, particularly persecution, those who are in the process of becoming Christians, count the cost of discipleship carefully before taking up the cross of the Nazarene. Preachers do not beguile them with false promises of an easy life or indulgence of sin. But in good times, the cost does not seem so high, and people take the name of Christ without undergoing the radical transformation of life that true conversion implies.”

Beloved, we do not make Christ Lord, he is Lord. You must remember that. Though he was the suffering Savior, though he remains the gentle Savior, he nevertheless is the sovereign King and he saves and serves those who receive him in faith. He is the uncreated Creator, the absolute Monarch who reigns in unrivaled power over all that he has created. Remember when the terrified Philippian jailer cried out to Paul and Silas saying, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They answered, “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved.” Paul tells us in 2nd Corinthians 4:5, “for we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.” Romans 10:9, Paul says, “if you confess with your mouth, Jesus as Lord,” in other words, your master, your sovereign King, “and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you shall be saved.”

Also, when Peter closed his sermon at Pentecost, he said in Acts 2 in verse 36, “Let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ this Jesus whom you crucified.” You’re Christian if Jesus is truly your Savior; you will freely and joyfully serve him as Lord and thus give him the glory he deserves. And I’m thankful that Jesus doesn’t need us to give him glory, he is intrinsically glorious, the Father has glorified the Son, we know that. He has exalted him even this day; he has given him a name above all names; he’s placed him at his right hand; he’s given him all authority and he will reign until he has put all of his enemies under his feet. Indeed, “he is the judge of the living and the dead, and one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is,” what? That Jesus is Lord.

So let’s look closely at the Spirit’s revelation of the Son of God to us here in this text. And let’s hopefully set aside our apathy and replace it with the passion for our Savior and Lord. First, verse 6 begins by really introducing the second section of the prologue which as we know began by focusing on the eternity and the nature of the divine Logos, the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, focusing on things about him before he even came

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into the world. But now, it's very interesting, in the second part of John's prologue, there is a dramatic shift in subject from the self-existent eternal Word to a mere man who bears witness to the incarnation of the internal Word, from the uncreated Creator to a mere creature, a plunge from the eternal down to the temporal, from heaven down to earth.

And what we want to look at first is the witness of the light. Notice Verse 6, "There came a man sent from God whose name was John." Again notice the stark contrast. The man came, but you will recall but the Word was. The divine Logos was continuously existing in the beginning when everything else came into existence, but it says, "there came" or literally "there appeared a man sent from God." The term "sent" in the original language is a term that could be translated "apostle," it's rooted in that same verb, and an apostle is one that is an envoy, a messenger sent on a mission to speak of or on behalf of the one sending him, also having that sender's own authority and in this case, we see his name was John. John was a Hellenized form of Jonathan which means "gift of God," referring to John the Baptist.

Now, why did God send him? What was his purpose here? Verse 7, "He came for a witness that he might bear witness that the light that all might believe through him." A witness. Some translations add the word "testify." They're both legal terms. They were terms that the Greeks would use in a court of law. So, John will introduce here not only John the Baptist as a witness of Jesus as the Son of God, but we are going to see a number of others; the Samaritan woman is a witness in chapter 4; Jesus' own words and his works are a witness; the Old Testament is a witness; the crowds are a witness; God himself is a witness; the Holy Spirit is a witness; as well as those whom our Lord will choose, his own disciples. They will all be witnesses of him. And again, remember the purpose of this Gospel is summarized in chapter 20 verse 31, "These have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name."

Now, John the Evangelist goes on and says in verse 8 that he was not the light, John the Baptist was not the light, but came that he might bear witness of the light. So, John the Baptist comes to bear witness of the light. You will recall that this refers to the very essence of light that appeared in the divine Logos, the Lord Jesus Christ, verses 4 and 5. It's an amazing thing, isn't it, to think that not only did Jesus speak light into existence in the beginning when he said, "let there be light," but he himself is the source, he is the embodiment of spiritual life that emanates from the fullness of his essence as we learned at the end of verse 4, where it says, "And the life was," in other words, continuously and eternally, "the life was the light of men." When life is manifested, it shines forth as light.

Now, it's fair to ask, how did John the Baptist know about the preexistent Logos who is both light and life? And the answer is right here for us in verse 6, "He was sent from God." In other words, he knew by divine revelation. He didn't make this up. If we look over in verse 15 of chapter 1, we see John saying, "This was he of whom I said," speaking of John the Baptist here, "he who comes after me," John the Baptist says, "has a

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higher rank than I for he existed before me.” Verse 30 says a similar thing, “After me comes a man who has a higher rank than I for he existed before me.”

As I meditated upon this it dawned on me again, you know, we wouldn't know anything about God or how to live for him unless God had revealed to us these glorious truths. In Proverbs chapter 30, verses 2-4, there's an unnamed sage by the name of Agur who was probably a student of Solomon. This is what he wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, “Surely I am more stupid than any man.” I can identify with that. “And I do not have the understanding of a man. Neither have I learned wisdom nor do I have the knowledge of the Holy one. Who has ascended into heaven and descended? Who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has wrapped the waters in his garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name or his son's name?” The point here is none of these things, none of these things can be learned apart from divine revelation. If God had not revealed himself and his plan to us and his Son to us we would never know. But the wonderful new is he has, he's revealed these things and many more. My friends, we are the undeserved recipients of divine revelation. Never underestimate what God has given to us in this Word. It is for this reason that there shouldn't be a page that is left stuck together.

So, John confirms the fact that God sent John the Baptist to be the appointed witness to testify of the incarnation of the Son of God, the eternal Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. As we look at scripture we learn that John the Baptist was greater than all of the Old Testament prophets because he actually knew the Messiah and he was even one that personally shared in the fulfillment of his prophecies concerning him. For this reason Jesus said in Matthew 11:11, “Truly I say to you among those born of women, there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist.” We know Biblically that he was the forerunner of the Messiah predicted in the prophecies. For example, Isaiah tells us in chapter 40:3 of, “a voice calling, Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness, make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.” This reflects, by the way, an ancient custom whereby Eastern monarchs would send heralds before them to clear away obstacles, to make appropriate causeways and straighten crooked roads and valleys, and level hills and so forth for the king to come into the presence of the people and that is what John the Baptist did metaphorically to the remnant of Israel in the first century. He came to help them remove the obstacles of hardened hearts and self-righteous law keeping and prepare a smooth way for the coming Messiah to come and reign in their hearts and even upon the earth. Malachi predicted the same thing in 3, verse 1, “Behold I'm going to send my messenger,” the Lord says through his prophet, “and he will clear the way before me.” So this is the one also that the Angel of the Lord referred to when he spoke to John the Baptist's earthly father, Zacharias. You will recall in Luke, chapter 1, verse 7. He says, “And it is he who will go as a forerunner before him,” referring to the Lord Jesus, “in the spirit and power of Elijah.”

Now, you must also understand that it had been four hundred years since Israel had seen a prophet from God and all of a sudden here comes a prophet speaking for God. One

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preaching in the wilderness of Judea according to Matthew 3:1, saying, “Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” We know that his preaching was very confronted and it seriously rattled the cages of the Jews. In fact, in Mark 1, verse 5, we read that “all the country of Judea was going out to him and all the people of Jerusalem and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River confessing their sins.” Well, obviously this caught the attention of the Jewish leaders, and so they sent some of their key men to interrogate him and find out what was going on. We will learn more about this in verses 19-36 in chapter 1.

And ultimately we see that John the Baptist when he saw Jesus coming to him pointed and said, “Behold! The Lamb of God!” Unfortunately, some of John’s followers became a little more devoted to him than they should have and became somewhat of almost a cultic type of following, an issue Paul had to address even when he was in Ephesus, according to Acts 19 and so forth. The point is, John the Evangelist tells us this is who John the Baptist was. He was a, 1. witness of the light, but secondly he tells us about the enlightenment of the light. Notice verse 9, “There was the true light which coming into the world enlightens every man.” Now the term “world” in the original language is the word *cosmos* and it refers to orderly systems of evil in opposition to God that is basically controlled by Satan. In fact, the word “cosmetic” comes from this word that means “to make order out of chaos,” a ritual that some ladies undergo in the morning.

But this is the mindset here; this is what the world is. It is an orderly system, ultimately in opposition to God and the light is coming in to this orderly system controlled by Satan. By the way, just parenthetically you might want to remember, that if you want to see where Satan works, look for orderly systems: governments, political parties, seminaries, churches, media and entertainment organizations. Every time you turn on your television, there’s an orderly system designed by Satan to distract you from the purposes and glory of God and ruin your life. Our educational system, editorial offices, courts of law, and on and on it goes. We know that Satan fills prominent pulpits with false teachers. This is why Paul says in 2nd Corinthians 11:14, “No wonder Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.”

We know biblically that Satan and his demonic horde function in the context of the *cosmos*. John even tells us in 1 John 5, verse 19 that “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.” In Revelation 12:9 he calls him “the deceiver of the whole world.” And we also know according to what Paul tells us, for example in Colossian chapter 1 and verse 13 that this world system is “the domain of darkness.” He tells us in 2 Corinthians 4 beginning in verse 3 and verse 4 that “the gospel is veiled to those who are perishing in whose case the God of this world,” referring to Satan, “has blinded the minds of the unbelieving that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God.”

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Scripture is filled with the idea of the world's darkness. And the darkness also is part of those who are apart from Christ. In Ephesians chapter 2, verses 1-3, we read that man is "spiritually dead," and certainly death is that realm of darkness for the unsaved. In Ephesians 4 beginning in verse 17, we read that "the unregenerate will walk in the futility of their mind being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart, and they having become callous have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness." My friends, there is a description of the United States of America.

So, John the Evangelist bears great news. The great news is this: that the true light has come into the world to enlighten every man, not save every man, but enlighten every man. Remember, every man is aware that God exists and that he is responsible to him because we are made in his image. Romans, chapter 1, we learn much about this. May I remind you of a few passages there. In verse 18, Paul says, "for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." They know the truth, but they're trying to suppress it, they don't want to deal with it. Then in verse 19 he says, "because that which is known about God is evident within them for God made it evident to them." There's no man that is totally ignorant of God. All men know that he exists, even the most ardent atheist. But the unsaved man will rebel against it. He will do anything and everything he can to suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Remember this when you witness to a person who denies the existence of God: he is suppressing the truth. He's working to somehow get you out of his life. He does not want to see the light of truth.

The fool is forever trying to convince himself that there is no God. Remember Psalm 14, verse 1, "The fool has said in heart there is no God." In fact, according to Romans 2, in verse 14, we learn that the unsaved who reject God will "do instinctively the things of the law." In verse 15, we learn that "they show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately excusing or else defending them on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus."

So, every man has some innate knowledge of God yet he tries to suppress that truth, he tries to silence his conscience and for this reason God is justified in his wrath against every man. Romans 1 teaches that God has revealed himself and made himself evident to man in three ways: 1. through the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and in Romans 1 verses 16-17, he deals with that more specifically. And then secondly, he reveals himself through creation and finally through conscience. Verse 20 he speaks of that revelation through creation, "For since the creation of the world his invisible attributes, his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made so they that they are without excuse."

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But man also is responsible to God because of his conscience that he's constantly trying to silence. Again in Romans 1 in verse 21, we read, "For even though they knew God," in other words, they know him in their conscience, that law is written in their hearts, their conscience is bearing witness, as we learn in Romans 2:15, "Even though they knew God, they did not honor him as God." Or give thanks that they came futile in their speculations and their foolish heart was darkened. Can you say evolutionary theory? What a great example of that.

So this is how man suppresses the truth and unrighteousness and why he is, therefore, without excuse. And sadly, people will reject the light of the Gospel of Christ when they hear it even though it is enlightening them. We're aware of this; we see this all the time. In fact, Jesus will tell us later in John 3 beginning in verse 19, "This is the judgment." Here it is, "that the light has come into world, and men love the darkness rather than the light." Why? "For their deeds are evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed." And when that happens, Paul tells us, "their foolish heart is darkened." Jesus said in John 12 verse 35, "Walk while you have the light that darkness may not overtake you. He who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes."

My friends, when men and women, boys and girls, young people, prefer darkness rather than light their whole life becomes gothic. Their whole life becomes that way. They prefer vampires over the Lord Jesus Christ. Absolute insanity! Why? Because they hate the light. Therefore they run to the darkness. That's what a sin nature will cause a person to do. And ultimately it will lead them into eternal darkness. This is the darkness of those who are spiritually blind and then they're doubly blinded by Satan, they're therefore spiritual cadavers. They're like corpses incarcerated in a tomb that is pitch black. They are utterly bereft of the light.

My friends, this is a foretaste of hell. In fact, Jesus called outer darkness in Matthew 22:13, a place where there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth." These are like the ones Jesus described in Matthew 6 verse 23, "Those whose whole nature is corrupt." People without Christ, their whole nature is corrupt, therefore, darkness actually emanates from within them, and therefore, characterizes the whole of their being. Jesus says "if the light that is within you is darkness, how great is the darkness?"

Now go back to John's gospel to verse 10. He expands upon this idea. He says. "He was in the world and the world was made through him and the world did not know him." Again, this speaks of the world order which is alienated from God in rebellion against God, the one that is ruled by Satan and condemned by nature, by Godless deeds and unbelief and so forth. And he says, "And the world did not know him." The term "know" here carries the idea in the original language of having insight, in this context, into the revealed truth of who Jesus really is. Contrary to his appearance, he was and he is the eternal Word of God, the second member of the Trinity, the incarnate uncreated Creator, the Son of God and Savior of all who will believe. So, the incarnate Word truly

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enlightens man. My friends, the problem today and the problem throughout history has not been a lack of light, the problem is willful blindness, willful unbelief, willful rebellion.

John moves from here and he speaks thirdly of the rejection of the light. Verse 11, “He came to his own and those who were his own did not receive him.” Here John describes the heartbreak of Israel’s rejection of their Messiah, a theme by the way, that John will advance throughout his Gospel. In the Gospel records, the announcement of God’s Kingdom on earth was inseparably connected with the Messiah King, the Lord Jesus, the incarnate Word. We know that it was promised to Abram through faith and it was established in history at Mt. Sinai subject to Israel’s willingness to obey, but because of Israel’s rejection of Jesus that Kingdom on earth was terminated and postponed until the day of Israel’s repentance as foretold by the prophets. In the original mission of the twelve apostles, they were expressly forbidden by the Lord to go to the Gentiles or the Samaritans, but to go only to, according to Matthew 10, 5-6, the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Later we even see that the scope of the seventy that Jesus sent out was limited primarily to Israel. You see, to Israel alone belonged the special covenantal rights of the Davidic Kingdom.

But the ministry of Christ and his message of the Kingdom we know was met with opposition from the very beginning. All through his ministry we see this. And eventually they rejected their King even in the face of unparalleled light. They shouted, “Crucify him! We will not have this man reign over us.” Of course, Jesus knew this would be their response and this led him to the announcement of a new thing, his church. The church that he would build, that he would bless. A body of believers that would include both Jew and Gentile invested with special authority in the future Kingdom of Heaven, but the Messiah King made it clear that the establishment of the long promised earthly Kingdom will now be connected to a second coming of the King. So we long to see that day, don’t we? We long to see that day. We await that day with great anticipation and excitement.

So, even though John here describes the painful reality of Israel’s rejection of their Messiah King, the rejection of the light, he also describes the hope for all who believe. This brings to me to my fourth and final point. Here we see the reception of the light. Verse 12, “But as many as received him, to them he gave them the right to become children of God, even to those who believed in his name.” Notice, there are, he says, “as many and to them,” in other words whether to Jew or Gentile without regard to nationality or ethnicity, which by the way was a concept foreign to the Jewish people and highly offensive. But it also speaks of individuals. You see friends, we do not go to heaven in a crowd. We do not go to heaven because we’re part of a family or some denomination. That is the broad way that leads to destruction. Instead, we separate ourselves from the crowd and individually we take the narrow gate, we go through that narrow gate, we squeeze through that and we traverse the narrow way, the one that few can even find, certainly no one can find, apart from God’s grace.

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And he tells us here that we must receive, the term means “to take hold,” we have to grasp. By the way, in John’s gospel, the terms “receive” and “believe” are basically synonymous when it comes to the Gospel. It’s the idea of embracing all that Jesus is, all that he provides. Often I hear people say, “I have accepted Jesus into my heart,” or, “I gave my heart to Jesus.” Well, I hope that’s true, and I understand what you’re saying, but you must be careful. You must understand the good news of the Gospel is that he accepted you.

It reminds me of when I was a little boy. Actually, we even did this through Junior high and high school, probably even into college. Remember how we used to pick up teams? When you’d play keep away, or kick ball or whatever, you know, you’d pick up teams. And I remember, because I was good athletically, I’d either be the captain or the first one picked. Alright? But you remember, you know, poor little Eduardo that never gets picked? You know, he’s in the back. There he is. And sometimes I remember, you know, you would be the pack captain and you’d want to pick your friends or the most athletic people and then if all of a sudden you picked Eduardo, the rest of team would go, “Oh, no, don’t pick him.” You remember that. But you know, sometimes I think we see ourselves as being a first round draft pick, you know, that the Lord comes along and says, “Boy, I want you on my team.” No, friends, you and me, all of us were spiritual cadavers laying over in a ditch. There is nothing about us that would make him want to pick us. So, it’s not like you accepted him, he accepted you.

So, remember that when you use that language. Rejoice, because you didn’t deserve to be picked at all, and remember he’s the Captain, not you. He’s the Captain, and had he not accepted you first, you would’ve never accepted him. Likewise before you give your heart to Christ, you want to be deeply humbled over the reality that Christ has given so much for you. That’s the real issue. The important thing is not what you give him, but what he gives you.

So, John’s point with all of this is that those who receive, those who grasp the Logos, the Lord Jesus Christ, those who believe all that he is and all that he promises and all that he requires, repentance, faith, love, submission, obedience, and praise, all of those things, to them he gives the right, literally the authority, to be translated, a term that includes the idea even of the power to become children of God. Again, never forget: this right, this power, had to be a sovereign act of God, because we are unable to raise ourselves from the spiritual death, from being a spiritual corpse, we are unable to give ourselves spiritual life.

Now, it’s also important for you to recognize as we continue our study in John that he emphasizes that salvation is the impartation of life, so that one becomes his child. He speaks much about the idea of being born of God. I love that phrase. You realize that’s what we are? We are born of God. But I want you to look at this. Why does he say, “to them he gave the right to become children of God?” I mean, after all, at the moment of the new birth, aren’t we instantly God’s children? So why didn’t he say “to them he gave

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The Incarnate Word that Enlightens

By David Harrell

Bible Text: John 1:6-13

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the right to be children of God?” Well, maybe I can answer that this way: indeed, at the moment we are born again, we experience the instantaneous, supernatural impartation of spiritual life. We are made to be new creatures in Christ. Truly, we are instantly a child of God, we are born of God. But, at the moment of our new birth, we are not fully developed children of God. The highest realization of who we are as a child is going to await future development. In fact, in John’s gospel, and even in his epistles, he underscores the fact that when a man is truly born of God, he is transformed to into the likeness of God manifested primarily in loving the brethren. Self sacrificial love is the mark of the Christian. In fact, in 1 John 4:7 we read, “Beloved, let us love one another for love is from God and everyone who loves is,” what? “Born of God and knows God.” The one who does not love does not know God for God is love. The point here is it takes time for a newborn Christian to develop this. It’s not going to be perfectly developed even over the course of our life until ultimately we are glorified. So we are becoming more of who we really are. Think about it. Even as a physical child is formed at the moment of conception, making him at that moment a legitimate child of his parents, there is a gradual process that is going to take place over the course of that child’s life to become the full expression of his genetic makeup, to fully resemble his father or his mother.

I want to be kind here, but frankly babies are ugly little creatures. They are smelly, they are nasty in so many ways and we all hope that they will grow out of that, right? Amen. And the same is true of us as new believers. Little babies are self-centered, they can’t help it and we are that way as newborn believers, and over time we become more of an expression of who our Father really is. When divine life enters the soul, at that moment we are a child of God. However, the ultimate realization of our life in him, in other words the pure expressions of holiness and self sacrificial love that will accurately and perfectly manifest our spiritual DNA, that’s going to take a process, that’s going to take time, and thus we have the right, the power, to become children of God. And of course, without this, we would never become this. We are his workmanship truly.

By the way, John expressed this a little bit more fully in first John 3:2, “Beloved, now we are children of God.” Then he says something interesting, “and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be.” We know that when he appears, we shall be like him because we shall see him just as he is. Now, this happens to whom? Well to those who believe in his name. And the question is, do you believe in his name? Do you believe all that he is? And if the answer is yes, then your profession of faith will be validated by your love for him, your submission to him, and your love for the brethren, even your love for the lost.

And then John closes this amazing section with a statement that describes those who believe. He says in verse 13 “they’re the ones who were born not of blood,” in other words nothing physical, nothing biological, has nothing to do with race or ethnicity. Then he says, “nor of the will of the flesh.” In other words, not some desire that arises from within a man, “nor,” he says, “of the will of man.” This is a more specific reference to the procreative urge of a male who in ancient days was considered to be the principal agent of generation and the woman was merely a vessel for the embryo. So he says, “Those

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who were born not of blood, nor the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” The point is simply this, regeneration is from God alone. Salvation is all of grace from beginning to end.

I want to close by reminding you to be careful, my friends. Don't be confused by our well meaning Arminian brothers who will argue that human faith precedes and then causes the new birth. You do not see that in scripture, certainly this text refutes that notion. How can a person act spiritually before he exists spiritually? How can a person behave before he is born? Beloved, we can no more contribute to our spiritual new birth than we can contribute to our physical birth. And herein lies the great and humbling mystery of sovereign grace. John MacArthur said it well, “Receiving and believing in the Lord Jesus Christ is impossible for any sinner. God must grant the power supernaturally and with it the divine life and light to the lifeless, darkened sinner.” What a magnificent truth. Be born of God. I hope you've been born of God. That work of grace that causes you to see your sin and the Savior and if you haven't, I pray that today will be the day that you will take an honest look at yourself based upon the Word of God and run to the light, not run away from it.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for these eternal truths. I pray that you will cause them to bear much fruit in the life of each one of us, certainly for those of us who know and love you and are such debtors to your grace, but, Lord, also for those who have been living in darkness. Lord, today, I pray will be the day that they will experience the miracle of what it means to be born of God. We pray all of this in the precious name of Jesus who makes it all possible. Amen.

We pray you've been edified by this presentation. You've been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at otcr.org.

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