

Christ the Life Giver

John 1:10-13

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I've mentioned before that fellow pastors are some of my favorite people. It's a joy to partner in gospel ministry with our pastors at Edgewood and with other pastors in the community. One of my favorite shepherds is Ed Hedding, the senior pastor at Pleasant View Baptist Church in Bettendorf. He's a man on mission with a genuine love for the lost in our community.

One of the ways Ed serves the QCA is by teaching a World Religions class at Scott Community College. This week, he sent me an extra credit paper written by one of his students, who recently watched one of our worship services online. I have his permission to share some of it but will not use her name, though I hope she comes in person some time.

After describing some bad experiences with the church, she grew up in, she mentions her desire to get closer to God, *"It is something that deep down I really care about. I have been struggling a little to get back in touch with my faith, but I still carry it in my heart."*

Listen to how she summarized her encouraging experience at Edgewood.

From the start of the service everyone that spoke or performed songs seemed very kind. They genuinely seemed happy to be there, and it made me a little more intrigued. It started off with such a positive atmosphere. Even though I wasn't physically there, I could just tell that space was warm and welcoming.

They all sang so beautifully, and the music was very...heartfelt. I feel like with them opening up, playing these beautiful songs just sets the tone for the worship and it was so welcoming. They had all the church members rise and join them in singing.

*From my perspective, I've always just felt like sometimes main worship leaders (she's referring to the preacher) tend to make themselves look like they are perfect. When [he] was speaking, I believed everything he said. He appeared to be very honest and open and by using his own life as an example, the things he was preaching made more sense. **He made you feel***

like Jesus still loves you even if you have messed up in the past. He did this with so much expression and energy. It just made the service so much more interesting to watch. [He] talked for around an hour (!) and then the service was done.

I really liked what they did. It made me feel welcome and almost sad. I miss attending church, and this seemed like such an upbeat and kind one. I feel this experience gave me a new perspective of what church can be like.

After watching this, I wouldn't mind attending church again. It just gave me a taste of the comforting and happy atmosphere, and I truly miss it. Even through a screen I felt closer to God.

One thing that I really took away from this service was that going to church can be a positive experience. Most of the experiences I've had going to church were so much less uplifting of my spirit. I want to be able to have a positive experience and...feel closer to God. I would definitely attend this church in person.

While many today don't seem interested in God, or even have animosity toward Him, it's refreshing to know others, like this student, are being drawn to Him, longing to feel closer to God.

We see these different kinds of reactions in John 1:10-13: ***“He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive Him. But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”***

We're continuing in our series called, “Before Bethlehem” from the opening verses of the Gospel of John. Two weeks ago, we learned how *Jesus had His birth in Bethlehem, but not His beginning, because He has always been.* Last weekend, we celebrated how *Jesus brings life into our deadness and light into our darkness.*

Here's our main idea for today: *When you receive and believe in Christ, you become a child of God.* Let's walk through this passage verse-by-verse.

1. Jesus is not recognized by most. Verse 10 may be one of the saddest verses in the Bible: ***“He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the***

world did not know Him.” The majority of people simply ignored the incarnation of Immanuel, not recognizing that **“He was in the world.”** As we learned in verse 3, Jesus created the world, and yet the world just seems to yawn at Yeshua. When the Creator condescended and came into our world, His creation was not captivated: **“...the world did not know Him.”** The KJV reads, **“...the world knew Him not.”** To **“know”** means, *“to apprehend, recognize, or know relationally.”*

One paraphrase renders verse 10 like this: *“He was in the world, the world was there through Him, and yet the world didn’t even notice.”* We hear God’s heart in Isaiah 1:2-3: **“Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master’s crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.”** John 12:37 says this about Jesus, **“Though He had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in Him.”**

An illustration of this took place at McDonald’s this week while I was working on this sermon. I was thrilled to hear a Christ-centered carol come through the loudspeakers. I don’t remember what song it was, but I think it was “Joy to the World” [which our choir just sang]. After the song was over, I overheard this statement from a booth about ten feet away, *“This whole Christmas thing is just bah-humbug to me.”* The coming of Jesus is just background noise for many today. There was no joy about Jesus coming into our world from my fellow compatriots drinking our senior coffees.

There has always been a great divide among people. When Jesus came the first time, Herod hated Him, the scribes ignored Him, and there was no room for Him in the inn. Only the shepherds and the wise men, the poor, the foreigners, the meek and marginalized, welcomed Him to earth. Not much has changed as we see the birth of Jesus slipping from our cultural discourse. He came to the world He created, and the **“the world did not know him.”**

In 1932, Robert MacGimsey attended a Christmas Eve service in New York City and then headed back to his one-room apartment. As he walked the final blocks, he passed by the open doors of private clubs where people were partying. They didn’t seem to have a clue that it was Christmas Eve, and if they did, they didn’t seem to care. As he stepped over people who had passed out on the sidewalk, he thought to himself, *“What a strange way to celebrate the birth of the most perfect Person who ever lived on this earth. People are missing the whole significance of His life.”*

When he arrived home, he scribbled some words on the back of an envelope:

“Sweet little Jesus Boy, they made you be born in a manger. Sweet little holy Child didn’t know who you was. Didn’t know you’d come to save us, Lord, to take our sins away. Our eyes was blind, we couldn’t see, we didn’t know who you was.”

Have you been ignoring Jesus this year? Don’t let this Christmas pass by without recognizing why He came.

2. Jesus is rejected by His own. If verse 10 is sad, verse 11 is outright sorrowful: ***“He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him.”*** Not only did the planet not apprehend the Light as a principle, but also God’s people did not receive Him as a person. The word ***“came”*** captures the essence of Christmas – Jesus came to His own people, but they rejected Him and even killed Him. Again, the KJV is quite strong: ***“...His own received Him not.”***

Let’s consider the phrase, ***“His own people.”*** In short, God’s people are the Jewish people according to Deuteronomy 7:6: ***“For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.”***

The word ***“receive”*** is full of meaning. It means, *“to receive with favor, to welcome into one’s home.”* It also has the idea of *“accepting and taking with.”* This same word is used in Matthew 17:1: ***“After six days, Jesus took with Him Peter, James, and John.”***

While many are not interested in Jesus, others are incensed by Him and still others reject Him because they find Him to be repugnant. This was prophesied in Isaiah 53:2-3: ***“...He had no form or majesty that we should look at Him, and no beauty that we should desire Him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces.”***

Jesus came to the people who should have known Him best, but they wanted nothing to do with Him. The idiom ***“came to his own”*** means *“to come home.”* Jesus came “home” to His own people who lived in the land promised to them, and they wouldn’t take Him in.

Frankly, many don't believe in God because they don't want anyone telling them what to do. While some seem to be sincere seekers of Christ, the Bible says most are looking to be rid of Him.

Later, Jesus told a parable against His own people in Matthew 21:38-39 and concluded it pointedly: ***“But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.’ And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.”***

On Tuesday night, Beth and I were watching the news and were saddened to hear how a manger scene was removed from the front of the fire station in Toledo, Iowa. This nativity scene had been set up there during the holiday season for the past 15 years. The town moved it because one person complained to the Freedom from Religion Foundation, which threatened a lawsuit. On Thursday, this scene was moved back after the city agreed to add a secular Santa Claus to the display to make it legal. They should have had Santa bow to the newborn king and bring gifts to him!

During the same newscast on Tuesday, another story reported on the grotesque satanic display set up by the Satanic Temple in the Iowa State Capitol. This is the same group that put up a display in the Illinois State Capitol last year and started a Satanic Club in a Moline elementary school a year ago.

We shouldn't be surprised that Jesus is still rejected today.

3. Received by some. While the world did not recognize Him and His own people rejected Him, there have always been some who will receive Him. Listen to verse 12: ***“But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.”*** The word ***“but”*** introduces a contrast from those who don't recognize Christ and from those who reject Him. The word ***“all”*** reminds us that Jesus came for everyone, not just for Jews.

It doesn't matter what you've done or how long you've been doing it, you can still receive Jesus. No one is too far gone or too far away. I think of the news last month that Ayaan Hirsi Alli, a former Muslim and now a former atheist, has declared she has just converted to Christianity.

The word ***“believe”*** is quite rich. Many years ago, Bible translators in the New Hebrides islands were struggling to find an appropriate word for *believe*. They came upon a solution accidentally while hunting with a tribesman. After bagging a

large deer and carrying it on a pole along a steep mountain path, they returned home and plopped into some porch chairs. As they did so, the native exclaimed in his language, *“My, it’s good to stretch yourself out here and rest.”*

The translator immediately wrote down that phrase which ended up in the translation of John 3:16: *“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever stretcheth himself out on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”* When we lean on the Lord, He gives us life. Stretch out on the Savior and find satisfaction for your soul.

Salvation is more than just saying “yes” to Jesus. We must yield ourselves fully to Him by leaning on Him totally. Let’s use this chair as an illustration. I can believe intellectually that this chair will support me but it’s not until I sit in it and trust that it will hold me up, that I actually believe it will do what it claims to do.

While it’s important to acknowledge who Christ is in your head and even be affected emotionally in your heart, the key is to engage your will and commit yourself unreservedly and wholeheartedly to Him. To believe means to, *“trust in, rely on and lean into.”* The idea is to fully surrender to the Savior, to give yourself up to Him, to take yourself out of your own keeping and entrust yourself into His keeping.

Have you ever done a “trust fall” when you stand with your back to another person and fall backwards, trusting the other person to catch you? That takes an act of faith, doesn’t it? We trust Jesus will catch us when we fall by faith into His arms.

Don’t miss how we’re called to ***“believe in His name.”*** This is in the present tense, which means we’re called to continuously believe. Some today say all you have to do is believe, but the Bible says we must believe *in* Jesus. In John 6:29, Jesus said: ***“This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”*** John 8:30 says, ***“...many believed in Him.”*** Acts 10:43 says, ***“Everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name.”*** The word ***“name”*** stands for the sum total of His character and is often used synonymously with believing in Jesus.

Let’s consider the phrase, ***“He gave the right...”*** This means God *“gave of His own good will by bestowing on us that which we don’t deserve.”* The word ***“right”*** refers to *“permission, privilege, and power.”* Being a child of God is not a benefit we’re automatically born with, rather, it’s a right granted to us by a higher authority. The idea is those who receive and believe are given the right and the

might to ***“become children of God.”*** Born again believers are granted full permission, privilege, and power as God’s children because we have been adopted into the forever family of God. Amazingly, we are now authorized to lay claim to our inheritance as children of God.

When Martin Luther translated the Bible into German, the printer carelessly allowed sections to fall on the floor of his shop. One day the printer’s daughter came in and picked up a piece of paper on which she found just these words: *“God so loved the world that He gave...”* She treasured these words because she had been told that God was to be feared and could only be approached through acts of penance.

As she repeated these words, she became more joyful, and her whole countenance changed. Her mother asked what was going on, so the little girl handed her the crumpled piece of paper. The mom read it and was perplexed: *“He gave...what was it He gave?”* For a moment the girl hesitated and then perceptively replied, *“I don’t know, but if He loved us well enough to give us anything, we need not be afraid of Him!”*

When you receive and believe in Christ, you become a child of God.

4. You can be regenerated by God. Verse 13 makes it clear salvation doesn’t run automatically from one generation to another: ***“Who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”*** In the words of Charles Spurgeon, *“You will never go to heaven in a crowd.”*

- **We are not saved by our heritage.** We are not saved because of who we’re naturally related to: ***“not of blood.”*** This is a shocker to Jewish people because they’ve been told for thousands of years that it’s all about having the blood of Abraham coursing through their veins.
- **We are not saved by our holiness.** We are not regenerated by following a list of rules and regulations: ***“nor of the will of the flesh.”*** Making a resolution doesn’t lead to regeneration.
- **We are not saved by our hard work.** We don’t become Christians by human effort: ***“nor of the will of man.”*** Salvation is a gift to be received not a reward achieved by individual effort or through the influence of another.

Paul Washer writes, *“The only thing I have contributed to my salvation is my sin.”*

Jesus used this same birth metaphor when a man named Nicodemus approached Him at night in John 3. Nicodemus had a stellar spiritual resume.

- **Impressive heredity.** Tradition says he belonged to a distinguished and wealthy Jerusalem family.
- **Overwhelming holiness.** He was a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin. His life was all about doing the right things.
- **Extremely hard worker.** He exhibited deep scholarship and devoted his life to the study of the Torah. He had taken an oath to work hard at keeping all of God's commands.

And yet, he had a hole in his soul, so he came to Jesus at night and wanted to know how to get to Heaven. In verse 3, Jesus told him it was not about heredity, holiness, or hard work: ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”*** Jesus used the same word John used in 1:13. Nicodemus needed to be born again from above. In John 3:7, Jesus said it even stronger: ***“Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’”*** He doesn't recommend or suggest the new birth, He uses the urgent language of a forceful command: ***“You must be born again.”***

We must receive and believe in order to become a child of God.

A Sunday School class performed an unforgettable Christmas pageant one year. As Mary and Joseph made their way slowly up to the inn, Joseph knocked on the door. Wally the innkeeper [I know the innkeeper is not mentioned in the Bible] came to the door and bellowed, *“Who's there?”* Joseph softly said, *“I am looking for shelter for me and my wife.”* Wally opened the door and said, *“You'll have to look elsewhere. There is no room in the inn for you.”* Joseph tried another approach, *“But you don't understand. We have traveled so far, and my wife is great with child, and she needs to rest.”*

At that point, Wally just stood there intently staring at Mary. During this long pause, the audience became restless and embarrassed for Wally. The prompter off stage began to whisper loudly, *“Wally, say ‘no be gone!’ ‘No, be gone!’”* Finally, Wally looked at the young couple, took a deep breath and said, *“No, be gone!”* Joseph put his arm around Mary as she put her head on his shoulder, and they shuffled off. The innkeeper was supposed to shut the door and go back into the inn. But Wally didn't do that. He just stood there and watched the forlorn couple walk away.

Then, the pageant took an unexpected turn. Wally's mouth dropped open. His brow creased and his eyes began to fill with tears as he blurted out, "*Joseph, wait a minute. Come back. Bring Mary with you!*" A smile beamed across Wally's face as he blurted out, "*You can have my room.*" The actors playing Mary and Joseph didn't know what to do and the audience became anxious again. This boy had ruined the whole story line. How can you have Christmas without a stable? The quick-thinking Joseph saved the program by replying, "*Oh no, the barn would be just fine, really.*"

Actually, the Savior is still looking for space today. Will you open the door of your life and give room to Him? Will you give Him your heart as His home?

The world did not receive Him because most did not recognize Him. And they did not recognize Him because they were not willing to relinquish control of their lives to Him. How about you? What's keeping you from fully receiving Christ right now? Matt Smethurst nails it when he writes: "*Jesus was born once so you could be born twice.*"

Let's go back to a sentence written by the student at Scott Community College: "*He made you feel like Jesus still loves you even if you have messed up in the past.*"

That's why Jesus came to our world! Will you receive the gift of salvation right now?

[Hold up gift]. Christmas is all about God giving the greatest gift ever. If you think about it, there are really only two responses to a gift – you can receive it or you can reject it. If you don't receive the gift of God, you've actually rejected it and you will spend eternity in a place called Hell. Let me be clear. You don't have to do something really bad to go to Hell. If you do nothing, you'll end up there.

The good news is you don't have to go there, and you don't have to do any work to go to Heaven because it's all been done for you. God is not looking for penance or our performance. Steven Lawson put it like this: "*Salvation is not a reward for the righteous, but a gift for the guilty.*"

One of the things that make a gift special is the realization that the person who gave the gift spent some time thinking about what to give you. It involved thought and action. And there's often a cost involved.

Imagine this present has your name on it. It's been selected for you and personally wrapped for you. What do you have to do to make it yours? Do you have to perform or make a bunch of promises to the giver? No. You just have to receive it and open it.

If you're ready to receive the gift of salvation, you could pray this prayer silently.

Lord Jesus, for too long I've kept You out of my life. I confess that I am a sinner and I cannot save myself. I now recognize You and will no longer reject You. By faith I gratefully receive Your gift of salvation. Thank You, Lord Jesus, for coming to earth. With all my heart I believe You are the Son of God who died on the cross for my sins and rose from the dead on the third day. Thank You for bearing my sins and giving me the gift of eternal life. I believe and now I receive, so that I can be born again and become Your child. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus, and be my Savior. In Jesus' Name. Amen.