



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

John 1:6-18

“The Johannine Prologue: The Silence Broken - II”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the open access that we have to Thee through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who is our great high priest and who ever lives to make intercession for us. And we thank Thee that we can come to Thee through him and offer Thee the intercession of our hearts. And we thank Thee for the privilege of opening the holy Scriptures and rejoice in the fact that we do have a divine revelation. And we thank Thee that this revelation, the word of God, is sufficient for us. And we especially praise Thee for the one of whom that revelation speaks, the Lord Jesus Christ. May our study of him and of the things that concern him tonight be especially fruitful for us. And may our time together glorify Thee. We ask in the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.

[Message] This is the second in our series of studies in the Johannine Prologue: The Silence Broken. And the reason for the concentration upon the Johannine prologue is that it is one of the great sections on the deity of Christ. And in our study of the doctrine of Christ as taught in the Scriptures, we are in that section of our course which has to do with the deity of Christ. So tonight we turn again to John chapter 1, verse 1 through verse 18.

I think it would be good if we read again these verses, the eighteen verses as part of our introduction. So will you listen as I read from the New American Standard Bible?

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. And the Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for a witness (The Greek text says simply "for witness," stress resting upon the activity that John carried out.) He came for witness, that he might bear witness of the Light, that all might believe through him (Now that him is John the Baptist, through him, that is, John the Baptist). He was not the Light, but came that he might bear witness of the Light. There was the true Light (or that 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. (Now you'll notice from verse 11 and the marginal readings in your Bible that the words "to His own" are literally "to His own things" and then "those who were His Own," that's masculine. So notice that difference.) He came to His own (that is, His own things), 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. And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'"

" For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God (Now that may be translated just as well probably,

we'll talk about this next week, "the only begotten Son) who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him."

Some of the manuscripts have "the only begotten God." And many of the manuscripts have "the only begotten Son." I'll just say a word about it next week, but there are good grounds for reading either one of those readings, at least according to most of the New Testament scholars.

The Johannine Prologue: The Silence Broken. We said last week that John the apostle makes the profound and prodigious claim that the knowledge of Jesus Christ is the knowledge of God. We have, for example, in the 8th chapter in the 19th verse, these words; they are very significant I think. "And so they were saying to Him, "Where is Your Father?" Jesus answered, "Ye neither know Me nor My Father; if you knew Me, you would know My Father also.'"

It's very interesting that they say to him, "Where is Your Father?" To ask a question like that of our Lord Jesus Christ is to disclose an incapacity to receive the answer because the light is shining right in their presence and they cannot see it. So when a man who stands in the presence of the Light, the one who perfectly reveals the Father, and says "Where is the Father?", it's obvious that he doesn't have the capacity to receive the knowledge of the Father, for there he is standing right before them. "Where is your Father?" That's why our Lord's statements often seem very harsh.

Later Philip says, "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." And the Lord Jesus said, "Have I been so longtime with you, Philip, and yet hast thou not known me? He that hath seen me has seen the Father."

You might think from this that there would arise in Christianity a kind of Jesus cult. And many have criticized Christianity for just that reason. They sense among the believers a tendency to exalt the name of the Lord Jesus but to de-emphasize God the Father. But there is no Jesus cult in Christianity.

Augustine once said, [Latin] that is, "Through the man Christ you proceed to the God Christ." So that, the idea back of the New Testament is that through the Lord Jesus Christ you move to a full understanding of our God who is the Lord Jesus Christ and he in turn reveals to us the Father.

One of the things that John seems to try to stress here is that he wants to emphasize the fact that Christianity is not an independent cult of Jesus. But through the Lord Jesus, we have the revelation of the Father and the worship of God. That's one of the great lines of truth that is found in the Gospel of John. All that he does, the Father reveals to him. He also speaks the words that the Father gives to him. And the desire of the Son is that men come through him to the worship of the Father. So we worship the Father through the Son in the Spirit. This is the divine picture. We worship the Father through the Son in the Spirit. And thus, Christianity is a trinitarian worship.

Now in our last study we looked at the first five verses, and we saw that the Lord Jesus is the Word and that he is God. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." And if we have any question about who the Word is before we get to verse 14, we notice the 5th verse, "And the Light shines in darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it." "In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men." He is the Light. He is the Word. He's the one whom God speaks fully and finally.

This prologue, we also said, is a kind of preface in which practically all the central ideas of the Gospel of John appear. It is concentric in its structure. That is, in the opening five verses, we look at what I have called in the outline "The Word in Eternity and Among Men." And then second, in the section beginning at verse 6 through verse 13, "The Word in History and Among the Jews." And finally, in the last of the sections, in Roman III: "The Word in History and Among Believers." And so you can see how we have the Word in eternity and among men, then in history and among the Jews, and in history and among believers. So that, it's just like three concentric circles, which I drew for you last time.

(And I'm just looking here at this overhead projector and watching the smoke come up from it, which I don't know exactly what it means. But do you have the outline good? [Laughter] If you haven't got it, the fan is not working. I don't hear any fan. That's right. It's the fault of the deacons. [Laughter] Alright, I'll give you the outline as I go along.)

We're turning now for our study tonight to the second division which is Roman II: The Word in History and Among the Jews. We notice in verse 6 that the apostle in his prologue writes, "There came a man sent from God, whose name was John."

Some of the commentators find it to be what they call a rather curious thing that John the Baptist should be mentioned in the prologue, and suggests, and they suggest that the reason for the mention of John the Baptist in the prologue is that some of the disciples of John the Baptist had reacted rather negatively to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ upon the scene. And consequently, it was necessary in John's mind to say something about this so that they would fully realize the place of John and his ministry in the light of the Lord Jesus. So it is a way of suggesting that there may have been a kind of improper prominence given to John the Baptist by some of his followers.

In the first section, we have Capital A: The Representative of the Word, verses 6 through 8 and the reference is to John.

Now I want you to notice the very first word of verse 6. "There came a man sent from God." That word "come" is very emphatic in the Greek text, and there is a definite reason for stress upon it because in the opening verse we read, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

But we do not read in verse 6, there was a man whose name was John, but rather, there came a man whose name was John. Now this word come is a word that means to come into being. And so we have immediately a definite contrast. John became. He came as a man sent from God. The Lord Jesus Christ was. So right here there is a distinct difference between the two. The Lord Jesus is the eternal Word. John is a finite man

who has a specific beginning. "There came a man sent from God, whose name was John."

Now he says in the 7th verse, "He came for witness." John's task was witnessing. Now he doesn't say he came to be a witness, but he came for witness. And I think the lack of the definite article is designed to stress the fact that John's activity is the important thing. Witnessing was his work.

And of course, to witness involves commitment. That's why in the New Testament, witness is regarded as such a natural thing for people to do. When a person witnesses concerning the Lord Jesus, he has made a commitment. One of the reasons that we often do not like to witness is because our commitment is not very deep. And if you don't want to witness at all, the chances are that you don't have any commitment at all to him. Because in the very act of testifying, you have committed yourself.

Incidentally, these words are legal. And you will go through the Gospel of John and notice that there is a series of witnesses that are brought forward. And these witnesses are like legal witnesses in a trial. If you get on the witness stand, and you're asked to swear to something, you are committing yourself to what you are saying on the witness stand. It involves a commitment. That's why witnessing is significant. That's why witnessing is one of the signs of a true Christian. He's the kind of man who does commit himself to the truth to which he witnesses. So John the Baptist is a man who came for witness.

Now, let's look on. We notice in the 7th verse, "He came for witness, that he might bear witness of the Light, that all might believe through Him."

Now when he says "all might believe" what does he mean? Does he mean that John came with the idea that he would be the means of salvation for everybody? No, surely he doesn't mean that. What does the "all" mean then? Well, it means that John came witnessing and that he came with the intention that everyone who heard him might believe, that is, that all who heard John the Baptist, who heard him, might believe.

I confess, when I teach and preach the word, that's what I would like to see, too. I preach in order to obtain a verdict from all. We, of course, have no idea who are the elect, who will respond. It may be that we just have one of those ideal gatherings in which everybody is elect. And it's great to preach in such a situation where there is that response. So he came for testimony to bear witness of the Light that all who heard him might believe through him.

Now it is very interesting, I think, that we have here in the Gospel of John "that all might believe through Him." If you turn over to the records in the Book of Matthew, for example, of the preaching of John the Baptist, what was his message? Why, his message was, "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand." John says, however, he came that men might believe. Isn't that interesting?

Matthew says he preached: Repent for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand. John says he came that men might believe. It is obvious that in the mind of the apostle, true belief must encompass all that is intended by the term repent. Believe is the broader of the two terms. And when repent, which means something like to have an afterthought literally, which is usually a different thought, which means to change one's mind with respect to the object, and also involves the issuance of a life in conformity with it because fruits of repentance should follow repentance. It seems clear that in the comprehension of the term believe, we have both that stress of repent and the positive commitment or trust in a person of a certain character who has done a certain work.

Now what is interesting about this is because John wrote his gospel, we know from John 20:30 and 31 for this reason. He says "Many other signs truly did Jesus which are not written in this book, but these are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that in believing you might have life through His name."

Do you know that John never uses the term repent? He never uses that term. And yet he says that his gospel is a propaganda document designed to bring men to life in Christ.

So, I'm sure that you or I would not want to go against the Apostle John and say, John you didn't give us a complete message. No, John gave us a complete message. And he understands the ministry of the Lord Jesus as the Son of God who offered an atoning sacrifice on the cross with an appeal to men to believe as the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. So John writes that this man who came from God whose name was John bore witness of the Light that all men might believe through him.

Now I'm stressing this because there are occasionally people who think that easy believism is bad. Many, many years ago there were a group of teachers who began to criticize the use of the term belief because they said it's easy believism. They looked out over the Christian church and they rightly saw that people who claim to believe did not produce fruits that suggested that their faith was real. So rather than, this is my interpretation, rather than properly explaining what is involved in biblical faith, they made a very serious error. They said what we need to do is to modify the biblical terms. We should modify the term belief. And we should add things to this.

Now that is always a mistake. The biblical terminology, in my opinion, is always the best terminology. But of course, it must be explained upon occasion.

Now when the Bible speaks about belief, it means the kind of belief that produces good works. The Reformers used to say [Latin] or "Faith alone justifies, but not the faith which is alone." In other words, true belief in Christ will produce good works. But there's no need to abandon belief as a term. No need to abandon faith. In fact, as I say, John never uses the term repentance. Faith is suitable for John. And of course, it's suitable for you, isn't it? If it's suitable for John? So, I think that's very important to remember.

Now then he says, "Through him." And as we were reading, I said the him is John. Of course, as far as grammar is concerned, it could be a reference to the Lord Jesus. "That all men might believe through him." And while it is true that in the New Testament we do have occasional reference, I remember one, in which we are said to

believe through Christ, never does John, so far as I remember, use that expression. So it is much more likely that the "through him" is through him, John the Baptist. "That all men might believe through him," that is, through his testimony.

Now John is one of the great characters of the New Testament. We read, of course, that he is a voice. Isn't it interesting that he is said to be a voice. Dr. Chafer used to tell us at the seminary that John the Baptist was a voice. He was not an echo. And then he went on to point out how so many people who preach the gospel today are echos. But John was a voice that cried, that was crying in the wilderness.

It's great for a man to study the word to the place that the word of God is so much a part of him that he does not just parrot what someone else has said, but he is truly a voice in the truest sense, who gives out the truth of God in power and freshness because it has come from his own experience. John the Baptist, one of the great men of the word of God, a voice, not an echo.

What does a witness do? A witness tells what he thinks? No. A witness tells us what he knows. And that is John's type. John is to Jesus Christ as the moon is to the sun. John is never said to be a light as far as I know. He's said, rather, to be a lamp. If you'll turn over to chapter 5 and verse 35, we read there, "He was the lamp that was burning and was shining and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light." So John is a kind of lamp in which light burns. But the Lord Jesus is the Light himself.

Now, Capital B: The Enlightening Judgment of the Word, verse 9. The Enlightening Judgment of the Word. Listen to the 9th verse, "There was the true Light (or that was the true Light) which, coming into the world, enlightens every man."

This verse, incidentally, is a very awkward one in the Greek text. And it has been taken in several ways. But two views predominate. It could mean every enlightened man is enlightened by him alone. In other words, if a man is enlightened, he's enlightened by the Lord Jesus Christ. "That was the true Light." or "There was the true Light which coming into the world, enlightens every man."

Now we could understand this as meaning that he enlightens every man in the sense that there is some measure of common grace that proceeds to every man as a result of the coming of the Lord Jesus. But that's very difficult really to square with the Gospel of John and the context of the New Testament. It seems much better to take it to mean every enlightened man is enlightened by him alone. In other words, the Lord Jesus is the only source of enlightenment. If a person is enlightened, he's enlightened by the Lord Jesus. "That was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man," that is, every man who is enlightened.

Luther felt that this was the meaning. He said, "There is only one Light that lighteth all men, and no man comes into the world who can possibly be illumined by any other light." Luther also refers to Romans chapter 5 and verse 18 and says, "As through the trespass, the judgment came unto all men to condemnation. Even so, through one act of righteousness, the free gift came unto all men unto justification of life. Although all men are not justified through Christ, he is nevertheless the only man through whom justification comes."

Augustine, when he was expounding this verse, used the illustration of a teacher who was living in a certain city. And he was the only teacher in the city. So that it could be said that every one who goes to be instructed in that city is instructed by this man, and none are instructed except through him. And in that sense, he understood this statement in verse 9, "There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man." He is the only teacher through the Spirit of the truth of God.

Now the other way to understand it is to understand this as meaning simply that Christ's presence reveals the actions of men as either bad or good. And then we take the word enlightened in the sense to throw light upon. And there is some justification for that because in a moment, in the very next verse in fact, he will say, "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him."

And so, he may be thinking of the effect of our Lord's ministry. And in that case, he would mean, That was the true Light which, coming into the world, throws light upon every man and reveals what is there. And John, in the next verse, says what's there was that the world did not know him.

It's very difficult to understand a text like this and so I'll leave it with you. Contrary to my customary pattern of being as dogmatic as possible, tonight you have something different. You can think about it for yourself.

Capital C in the outline: The Rejection of the Word. Verse 10 and verse 11. Now he speaks generally and then specially. Generally, in verse 10, "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him." Did you look at the term world there? Sometimes you hear people treat the New Testament as if words always mean the same thing. Look at the 10th verse.

"He was in the world." What does that mean? Well, that's the physical world, is it not? "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him." He's just said above, "All things came into being through Him." He's talking about the physical world. "And the world did not know Him." But what does the world mean there? Well, the world means there the world of men.

Now if we understand the first two as the world inclusive of the physical world and the human world, we still have a different sense in that last clause, all of which illustrates the fact that words are to be understood in the light of their contexts and they do have different meanings. That might have some, that might throw some light on the use of the term world in other passages through the New Testament. But you can see that it has a different sense right there. Well anyway, he says first, the earth, and men, and then some of those who came into contact with him did not respond.

Now verse 11, and here he speaks specially. He says, "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him." One of the interesting things about this

expression "to His own" is the way it's used in the 19th chapter. So why don't you take your Gospel of John and turn to chapter 19 and verse 27.

John 19:27, "Then He said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" (The Lord Jesus is hanging upon the cross.) And from that hour (we read) the disciple (that is, John, the Apostle John) From that hour the disciple took her into his own household." It is literally "to his own things," the identical expression that is found here in verse 11. "He came to His own things." John took Mary, the mother of our Lord, to his own things, to his own household, to his own home.

Don't you see what John is saying? He's saying the Lord Jesus came to his own home, this universe that he is responsible for, which he has created, and also whose inhabitants are responsible to him, he came to his own home. He was no alien here. He made this world of which we're a part. But he was not welcomed.

He came to his own, and his own did not receive him. And that word is a word that means to receive into fellowship. It's the word that was used of Joseph receiving Mary the virgin into his bosom. And it's the term that is used in chapter 14 when the Lord Jesus says he will come again, "I will come again and I will receive you to myself." That's the word that is found here.

He came to his own home, and those who were his home did not welcome him, did not desire to have fellowship with him, did not welcome him to their bosom. What does that tell us about the attitude of the world to our Lord Jesus?

Now finally in verses 12 through 13, we have Capital D in the outline: The Reception of the Word. You might think, well, the mission was a big failure. But it was not a failure. We read in verse 12, "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."

Arabic 1: The Result of the Reception. "But as many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become the children of God."

Now I want you to notice the important words in verse 12. "As many as received Him, to them He gave." Did you notice that? "He gave." What does "gave" suggest? Why, it suggests the grace of acceptance. He gave; he did not make them earn this right. "He gave the right to become the children of God."

Notice the second important word: "the right", the authority to become the children of God. Now this was authority for a status, that is, the title children of God. There're two words in the New Testament that suggest the relationship that we have to the family of God. One of them is the word that is used here in verse 12. "The right to become children of God." The other is the term "son." Son suggests the legal standing that we have. It suggests that we're adults in the family of God with all the rights that pertain to an adult. But this word, teknon, comes from the word which means to beget. And thus, it suggests those who have been born, born ones. And so we have here the status of children, those who have been born in the family of God.

It's a great thing to be a child of God. It's great to be a son of God, of course. And to have the legal status, but it also is great to be one of God's bairns as the Scots would put it, one of his little born ones.

Some of you are looking at me as if you don't really think that's a blessing at all. But I assure you that it is. The world doesn't recognize it. You can walk down Akard Street and they don't step aside and say look out here comes a son of God. Here comes a child, be careful what you say and what you do. But it's really what we are. We have that great standing in the family of God, a child.

Now another word I think that is tremendously important is the word that we've referred to before which says in verse 12, "Even to those who believe in His name." And notice the equation of receiving him and believing. He says, "But as many as received Him, He gave to them the right to become the children of God, that is those who believe in His name." To receive is to believe. To believe is to receive.

And what is so beautiful about this is that this expression "to believe in His name" is one of those expressions that John specializes in. It's an expression that really means to believe, literally, "to believe into." And it's rather surprising because it's something that the New Testament writers, especially John, seem to have reveled in and actually appear to have coined. You very rarely, if ever, find, I didn't look up the statistics. I have them somewhere in my notes, but I didn't bother to look them up because the statistics are not all that important.

But this is something that is especially characteristic of the Apostle John. In order to express what true faith is, he has used an expression that stresses the activity of faith. And one of the things that highlights this is that John never uses in the Gospel of John the term faith, the abstract noun. It's always the verb which suggests the activity. And so it's activity of believing into, suggesting a movement of a person until he moves toward our Lord. And rests upon him is the idea.

As the old Calvinists used to say, they would speak about true saving faith as a recumbency. We don't use that word everyday, do we? Recumbency on him, that is, to rest in him, to rest upon him in what he has done. So faith is an activity of believing into him. That's the kind of faith that is true saving faith, the kind of faith that moves toward him and rests in him.

Do you have that kind of faith? Is your faith that kind of faith, in which you really rest upon our Lord Jesus Christ as he is according to the Scriptures? And as he is revealed in the Scriptures as the one who has accomplished atonement for you? I think John uses this expression almost forty times in the Gospel of John: "to believe into." It's characteristic of him. So that is important. That's what is involved in true faith. The means then of this reception is belief.

Many years ago I heard a missionary from the African Inland Mission speak. And during the course of his report on what he had done on the mission field, he spoke of an African Negress who at a testimony meeting was explaining what had happened to her.

And she said, "I had heard of the gospel by the hearing of the ear, but one day it went in and sat down in my heart."

Now, that's real recumbency. But that is an expression, certainly a vivid expression, of what it means to believe in Jesus Christ. The gospel is truly received and rested in.

Now finally, in verse 3, we read of, and this is Arabic 3, I said verse 3. It's really verse 13. This is Arabic 3: The Origin of the Reception.

Who is responsible for this faith? Why, we read in verse 13, "Who were born, not of bloods (literally, it's plural) not of bloods nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

Paul puts it this way, we are elect; we are destined to enjoy all of God's blessings according to the good pleasure of his will. That's what John means. He's put it in his own way.

But he says that we were born "not of bloods," plural. Strange expression isn't it? Someone has suggested, perhaps he said bloods because blood is made up of so many drops. And further, if he really said we were born not of blood, someone might say weren't we born of the blood that was shed on the cross? And so perhaps he said born of bloods to stress that he's not denying that we're born of blood in that spiritual sense, but he is saying that we were not born of human parents.

"Who were born not of bloods." It may refer to the action of both parents, that is, father and mother. That's what he's trying to stress. Who were born not of bloods, not of father or mother. And then he says, "Nor of the will of the flesh." Evidently a reference to the sexual impulse, human sexual impulse. We were not born of human sexual impulse. "Nor of the will of man", literally the will of the husband. Now maybe there's just some stress on the husband as taking an active part in the birth physically, but perhaps it means more generally, not of the will of the flesh in the general sense.

What John is really trying to get over is this, that our birth is not the product of any human volition and initiative. Our birth is, as he puts it in the last three words, "of God." The source, the origin of the new birth is God himself.

Now you can see that this text is indirectly a blow to the doctrine of free will. Ambrose Bierce, an American satirist, has said that every time a woman has twins, you have absolute proof that there is no free will. Well, when that happens, and I've seen it happen, and it's going to continue to happen, the mother has to learn, "The mind of man plans his way but the Lord directs his steps." And it is true in the natural life. It is true in the spiritual life. Our life is not the product of human impulse, human will, human flesh. It is the product of God.

Now I close by just saying this, that verse 13 in some of the ancient manuscripts reads, the mainly western type manuscripts read, "Not who were born" as a reference to the believers, but "who was born" singular. And of course the reference in those manuscripts is a reference to Jesus Christ and the virgin birth. "Who was born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." And some think that John alluded to the virgin birth in the way that he wrote this particular verse. He never says that our Lord was born of a virgin specifically. There are certain texts in the gospel that suggest that he not only knew that doctrine, but believed it, felt it not even necessary to say it. But it is possible that the way he worded this was designed to reflect not only the status of the children but also ultimately to remind them of the relationship of the Son who was born in the fullest sense of God.

Next week we will hit the climax of this epistle in the Coming of the Word and also the Fullness of the Revelation that comes through him. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for this wonderful section which so beautifully points to the ministry of the Lord Jesus, the ministry of John and its effects in

our lives. We thank Thee for the testimony that has been born to him through the word and through others. And, Lord, we want to give Thee praise for the faith which has come to us, for the new birth which thou hast wrought in our hearts and lives. And, oh Father, may it have its true fruit in works that glorify Thy name. We pray Thy blessing upon the hours of instruction that follow. For Jesus' sake. Amen.