

The Rejected Word
By Sinclair Ferguson
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Text: John 1: 10-13

PRAYER:

Our Heavenly Father, even as the first coming of our Lord Jesus has prepared us for His coming again in majesty and power, we pray that through your Word, and by the power of your Spirit, and in our fellowship of worship, and mutual love and care, as we look back to all he has done for our salvation, and look forward to the day, when he will transform all things and make everything new, we pray, that living between these two times, times of tension, and trial, and much darkness, we pray, that you would shine the light of your Word into our hearts and minds. And by its glorious power, we pray that our whole beings may be fixed afresh upon our Lord Jesus, and that seeing all things through his presence, we may be enabled to live for His glory in this world. So, we come as your children and as your servants. And again, we make it our prayer, speak to us, Lord, because your servants are listening. And this we pray in Jesus, our Savior's name, Amen.

Please be seated.

INTRODUCTION:

Now, our scripture reading as we continue our series, for these Advent Sunday mornings, in the prologue, the introduction to John's gospel. Our reading today, is John chapter one and verses 10 through 13. You'll find the passage in the pew Bible, page 886. And for our children who have their children's Bible, it's on page 1306 13 06. John chapter one, verses 10 through 13, let us hear God's word.

John is speaking about our Lord Jesus, as he makes clear in verse 17. And he describes him throughout this passage as the Word of God who was with God, and who indeed, was God.

SCRIPTURE READING: 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.

Some of you, I'm sure will share my own view that this may well be the greatest description of our Lord Jesus Christ, to be found anywhere in the scriptures. Certainly, it has the greatest description in any of the four Gospels. It describes our Lord as being the Logos, or Word of God. And he was, indeed says, John, himself, God. Mediator, also of all creation, he was the one through whom all things came into being, and without whom nothing was made, that was made. He is the one John says, who gave life and who is himself, the light of the world. Giving light that shines on every single individual.

We saw last time that one of the things John has in mind is the way in which all things having been created through Christ, ultimately point to Christ. That God is the Creator of all things like an artist of great genius. Leaves the signature of his artistry on everything that has been made. As Herman Bavinck says, as I noted, at least in one of the services last Sunday, "There is nothing in this world that is ultimately atheistic. The whole creation declares the glory of God." And so every man, every woman, every boy, every girl, every teenager, whether loving the Lord or in rebellion against the Lord, lives in a world that presses down upon them, and into their lives, continues to bring intimations of eternity. And it is utterly impossible for any of us to escape.

Those who had the kind of education that Dr. Thomas and I had, where there was poetry that every school boy needed to learn, were encouraged to memorize great chunks of Robert Browning's wonderful poem, *The Bishop Blougram's Apology*. Many of you because you're more romantic than we, Scots and Welsh are, much prefer Robert Browning's wife Sonnets from the Portuguese and they are indeed very lovely sonnets. But her husband in this poem portrays a journalist by the name of Mr. Gigadibs and he comes to the bishop's palace. He is himself an agnostic or an atheist, and it is his intention to, as it were topple the bishop's mitre. But the bishop is his match, and at one point, turns the tables on Mr. Gigadibs, and his defenses against God. And speaks to him about occasions in which, perhaps, a bell sounding or some sunset stretching out before his eyes. Or, they were learned journalists in those days, a chorus ending from Euripides. Or, the universal experience of someone's death invades us with fresh intimations from eternity. And the bishop's whole point is this, "Mr. Gigadibs, you cannot possibly be safe and secure from God as you run from Him, as though there were somewhere in creation, in which you could hide from him. If you were to take the wings of the morning, and fly at the speed of light to the uttermost parts of the earth, as you landed, you would be confronted with the revelation of God". And this, John is saying, as he describes Jesus as the Logos, the one who makes sense of all the apparent senselessness of reality as well as the things that even to us make sense. And the marvelous thing he says, here is this, I think that's highlighted by something Augustine writes in his Confessions, in book seven I think he says, "You know, the Greek philosophers spoke about the Logos. And how the Logos was the great principle of the universe, that held things together, that made some sense of reality". But Augustine says, "There was one thing these Greek philosophers could not teach me. And when I learned it, I learned how utterly wrong was their understanding of the universe. They could not teach me that the Logos was personal. All they left me with was a kind of clockwork orange universe, a kind of deterministic mechanism that sometimes would seem to go wrong, and at other times would seem to come back on even keel. But they could not and they did not tell me of a Logos who came into the world. They could not teach me that the universe in which I live", what a wonderful thought this is, "the universe in which I live is a personal universe. It has been created by the great person of God, through His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit. And the one who has brought everything into being continues daily, in all created things to give us intimation of His presence and power and person, in order that as Paul says to the Athenians, we might seek for him, and perhaps by His grace, even find him".

But now John comes on to say something, on the one hand, that is utterly tragic. And on the other hand, that is absolutely glorious. He tells us how the Logos came into the world. And the tragic thing is this. He says, He came into the world. And yet, the world did not know him. He came to His own, even to his own people, and his own people rejected him. But to all who received Him, He gave the privilege, the authority, of becoming the children of God. The tragic thing, he comes, and he is rejected. The glorious thing he comes, he is received by faith. And he makes believers, the very children of the living God.

We've spoken of this prologue to John's Gospel as the overture to the Gospel. And in fact, these words are particularly key to John's gospel, they describe the whole of its story. The first 12 chapters tell us how the Lord Jesus came to his own, but his own refused to receive him. And from chapter 13, right through to the great confession of Thomas and John telling us the purpose of him writing the gospel. Then so the same thing should happen to us. Chapter 13 and following describes how Jesus came to some, and they believed in him, and received him a great tragedy and a glorious privilege. And he is saying, at the end of the day, all of us fall into one or other of these two categories, the utterly tragic or the absolutely glorious.

What's so tragic about the tragedy? What is this great tragedy of rejecting him? Well, he tells us in the gospels. It's story, after story of how this happens. He comes in chapter five to a man who has been invalided for 38 years, longer than, than many of us in this room have been alive. And at to the pool of Bethesda, he comes and he enables this man to walk. What is the response? The response to what he does, is to begin to criticize him. To despise him. To talk about rules and laws, in connection with the Sabbath day, the day of rest, and not see that what the Lord Jesus has actually done at last, in this man's life, after 38 years, he has entered into that true rest that Jesus Christ gives to his people. Or then he has given some loaves and fish and he feeds a multi 1000 multitude of people, and then speaks about himself as the bread of life. That if you come in faith to Jesus Christ, if you receive Him by faith, the way you would receive the bread and the fish into your life, to nourish your life and to build you up, if you receive the Lord Jesus as Savior and provider, in the same way, he will transform your life, and what do they do? They mutter and they murmur, and they turn away. And they say, this is far too difficult for us. And they do not receive him but reject Him.

And then in chapter eight and nine, that marvelous story of the man who is born blind, and Jesus comes and gives him sight. All he knows, as the leaders, the religious leaders, alas, gather around him and say, explain what has happened to you. Who did this to you? And he says, "All I know is this once I was blind now, I can see". And they're at his parents. What are you letting happen to your son? Of course they know what has happened. Jesus of Nazareth has given this man life and light because he is the life giving light of the world. What do they do? They shun the man. I wonder if that shameful action has ever been characteristic of your life, incidentally. That some poor person has been brought to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And all they've been able to say about their Christian life, it may be in the place where you work, or where you study, all they've been able to say is this. They're not intellectuals, they're not sophisticated. As they stumble and stammer in their wetness, they end up saying, "All I can tell you is that this Jesus changed my life." What goes on in your heart when that happens? Do you demean them? Are you embarrassed by them? Do you cringe at their simplicity, in your own sophisticated, resolute rejection of their Savior, whom we are told, is not ashamed to call them his brother.

And then, of course, the story comes in John's Gospel to that marvelous 10th Chapter and Jesus speaking about Himself as, as the Good Shepherd. What do they do to the Good Shepherd? Do you remember John's Gospel? Oh my friends, if you, if you ever thought that the Christian life has health, wealth and happiness, you need to read John's gospel. You need to know the kind of Savior you're following. Jesus speaks about the good shepherd. And as John chapter 10, goes on, they pick up stones to execute him. And then, of course, there is the absolute climax, this amazing miracle of the resurrection of Lazarus, what do they then do? They plot to kill him. Deed after deed, word after word, showing the grace of God, the restoring love of God, the salvation that he offers to us in Jesus Christ. But they will not have it. It's almost overwhelming. If we didn't live in the world in which we live, we would think the story is utterly incredible. Such a one could not come into the world. So gracious, so loving, So life transforming. Surely everyone would fall at his feet and say, be my savior. But it's not the case.

If we had the time and I had a private jet, I could have jetted in today ministers from all over the world, all over the world. I could have made every single one of them Presbyterian, so we wouldn't have had any strange Congregationalist, Methodist, Baptist, everyone -- kosher, kosher, Presbyterian. And every single one of them could have told you that when they began to preach Jesus in their congregation, then the hostility began. Then the hostility began. Worship, fine. Sermons, okay. Hymns, good. Programs, marvelous. Good things for the teenagers. Fine things for the children. Looking after the elderly. But when it comes to Jesus -- and see this is the real issue, isn't it? This is at the end of the day what everything about church boils down to. It's whether I am resolutely trusting in Jesus. Or, whether the figures that most express where I am spiritually are those shady and shadowy figures. And alas -- and alas -- and alas, they were the leaders of the people socially and religiously, who have set their hearts against trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ. You know, it's as well -- it's as well, we really don't know each other very well. But when this kind of thing is said, from a pulpit in this kind of church, we do begin to know ourselves, don't we? We know whether this is speaking to us. And actually, we begin to know that it doesn't matter who is in the pulpit or what his accent is, or how good or how bad he is. But somehow or another, it's the word of God speaking to us and saying to us, "Now, this is where you are. Do you realize the potential tragedy of your life."

I was conducting a wedding upstate last evening. And as I drove to it, yesterday afternoon, I was going along 385 towards Greenville, a northerly direction, and I saw something that was heart stopping. And the character, the person who was driving behind me, we were both going at 69 miles an hour, I think. And I saw his lights flashing and flashing, and I felt what's happening here. And I looked ahead and coming down the highway, in a southerly direction in the fast lane, heading towards us, was an automobile. And as we were driving along down through the slow lane, I could see in my rearview mirror, he was thinking -- his heart had missed a beat, as my heart had missed a beat, as these people flew past us, apparently, in complete ignorance of what they were doing. I thought, only something in the order of an angelic intervention is going to save the lives of these people. But you know what they thought? They thought they were driving on a single lane highway. I don't imagine they even knew how they got there. I tried to work out how on earth do you get there to do this, this isn't a state that's full of roundabouts that you can do that kind of thing. But I just caught a sight of them as they passed, blissfully unaware of the potential disaster that lay ahead, because they thought they were in the right direction, and in the right lane. And they were in entirely the wrong lane and going in the wrong direction. And by God's grace, I think there was intervention that prevented the tragedy. Now you could be spiritually in just exactly that situation. Couldn't ya? Indeed, if you're heading in the wrong direction, and you're in the wrong lane, you probably have no idea it's true. You just go blissfully along and have no idea whatsoever. But what you're actually doing is rejecting the light that Christ is shining upon you.

So there is this, there is this overwhelming note of tragedy in what John says. But thank God, alongside this great tragedy of rejecting Christ he speaks marvelously about the great privilege of receiving Christ. As many as received Him. That is to say, everyone who received Him. Everybody of whom you read in John's Gospel who received Him who believed in his name -- that has, who believed in Jesus as Savior. That's what the name Jesus means, you remember. Every single one, rich and poor, great and small, old and young. Everyone who believes in Jesus receives Jesus, welcomes Jesus, Jesus, be my savior. Jesus, be my Lord. Jesus, be my friend. Jesus, be everything to me. Take me as I am. Change me from what I am into what you want me to be. Use me in whatever way you want. Anyone who receives the Lord Jesus is given this amazing privilege of becoming one of the children of God. Actually, this is one of the verses in the Bible that underlines we are not by nature, the children of God, isn't it? We need to become the children of God.

But you notice what John also says? He says, we're not capable of doing this. We don't have the resources within ourselves to become the children of God. And he gives us here a little

preview, doesn't he? Of Jesus' conversation in chapter three, with Nicodemus. How Jesus said to Nicodemus, you can never come to faith and see the kingdom of God and enter the kingdom of God unless God Himself does something in your life. Brings you to a new birth, gives you a heavenly birth and opens your eyes and you see, and you understand that you trust and you're able to say, "Nicodemus, you would be able to see with the blind man, I was blind once, but now I see, because God's Spirit has worked in my heart and brought me to faith."

Now, you might say that's utterly ridiculous. Of course, of course, the resources are in me to believe in Jesus Christ. Are they? We can test that here and now, shall we? Let's test it here and now. If you, if you are not utterly, utterly trusting, in Jesus Christ, then put it to the test. Now trust in him. Now let me see you're going to trust in Him now. Just decide you're going to trust in him now. Right now. You're going to trust in him. My dear friends, you could try to do that until you're blue in the face. But you can't trust anybody just by saying, I'm going to start trusting can ya? You can't trust anybody just by deciding, "I'm going to trust him". Something needs to happen. It needs to strike you. This person is worthy of my trust. This person commands my trust. I can't do anything but trust this person. And that's what the Holy Spirit does. When he brings us to this new birth, to this new life. We freely give ourselves to the Lord Jesus saying to him, "I cannot but trust you. I receive you because I can't but receive you. I give myself to you. The only thing I know I can do."

I may have told you before, how, one of the things, one of the saddest things I ever heard, the first minister who was a real spiritual help to me when I was a young teenager; I remember him saying to me, "Sinclair. my experience as a minister is most people die the way they have lived." I was shocked. Surely later on in life? Surely when you put it off, you know, later on, I'll do it. I will come and trust Jesus. Why is it that the vast majority of people who say I'll trust him later on, never do trust him later on? Because the resources are not in ourselves. That is what is both humbling and exhilarating about the gospel, that the resources we lack in ourselves, are all to be found in Jesus Christ, and he graciously gives them to us. And the result? The result is, that we know God as our Heavenly Father. Do you know that?

I'm not asking can you say the words, "Our Father." Do you really know God as your heavenly Father? Could you be living the way you are living if you really knew God as your heavenly Father?

That's the privilege that's offered to us in the gospel. Of knowing that he cares. Of knowing that he's given his only Son. Of knowing that we can trust him. Of knowing that we can come to him in joy and say, "Abba Father, what privileges you've given to me." And that we can come to him in grief and sorrow and cry out, "Oh, Abba Father, I don't know what's going on. I don't understand. But you are with me and you are my father." And this, says John, who knew what he was speaking about, is what is offered to us in the Gospel.

Let me put it very simply, Jesus has come into the world to call you home to the Father. I am the younger of two sons. I was as a youngster by far the more difficult one. Obstinate. Going my own way in the family. And my mother used to send my brother and my older brother along the road where I would be playing football, soccer or, or tennis in Wimbledon season or cricket when it was cricket test matches. And, and my brother would come and summon me home for the dinner hour; and, I I still remember to my deep shame the one day when my friends gathered around me and said, "Don't go with him stay with us, the game's not finished." And I say it to my shame, I sent my brother humiliated home. And listened to the voices of my friends, rather than the voice of my home.

Now, my dear friend, you could be doing exactly that this very morning. This very morning. There is the call of Jesus Christ, come home child. Come home to the Father, trust me. I'll bring

you all the way home. You'll have all the privileges of being a child of God and knowing it. And other voices that say... Some of you know exactly what I'm speaking about. I'm sure you know exactly what I'm speaking about. Your first thought is, what are the people I work with going to say about me if they discover I've given my life over entirely to the Lord Jesus Christ? My dear friend, if you lose them they weren't worth having. But Christ will give you a glorious company of friends in their places. But those are the voices you're hearing, aren't they? What are people going to think about me? Me? An evident, definite, manifest, living Christian speaking about the Lord Jesus the way some of these other people I've despised speak about him? Oh! what would people say about me? My dear friends, do not let what you think people will say about you cause the greatest tragedy of your life! But listen to the voice that really matters. As Jesus has come from heaven, to bring you home, as he gives you the resources to trust in Him. As he embraces you, and says to you, "You're safe with me." Won't you come home this Christmas? Won't you listen to the voice of the elder brother, instead of the voices of the world, and come home.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, make this a reality to us this Christmas we pray, that we may care about the tragedy of the lives of men and women who reject and refuse our Savior. But truly ourselves, know that we have come home to you, our Heavenly Father, we ask this in your name. Amen.