

Rejection or reception (John 1)

Part 1

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[00:00:00] This is a recording of an address given by Mr. John Atkinson at Wildfell Hall, Catford, on the 1st of May, 1965. His subject, Rejection or Reception.

May we read together from the first chapter of John's Gospel. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the light, that all men through him might believe. [00:01:07] He was not that light, but was sent to bear witness of that light.

That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.

He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name, which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

[00:02:04] And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake. He that cometh after me is preferred before me, for he was before me.

And of his fullness of all we received, and grace for grace.

For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

No man hath seen God at any time.

The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

[00:03:09] The Lord bless to us that reading of his own word. One of the most remarkable things to me, in seeking to serve the Lord in this way, is the way in which in his great goodness, he gives just at the moment when it is most needed, that encouragement to go forward.

I am remembering that only a fortnight ago, just like that as to what I was to speak about, we had read to us the first chapter of Colossians, [00:04:04] and it immediately crystallized in my mind just what I should say.

You can imagine something of my feelings this afternoon, when in something of the same kind of mind, once more we had read to us the first chapter of Colossians.

And to have brought before us, so unmistakably, the glories of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our brother spoke to us this afternoon of much that is our responsibility, as his body the church, to respond to him and to walk in a pathway which he has marked for us himself.

[00:05:12] I want to talk to you tonight, perhaps more about the one who is the head of that body.

Not that I would pretend for one moment to be able to say anything to you at all, which you do not already know, possibly far better than I do.

But I would like, if I may, to share with you just a few thoughts that the Lord has very specially laid upon my heart from this gospel from which we have read.

[00:06:01] How well we know it as the gospel of the rejection.

Remarkable, isn't it? That the very gospel which speaks of and proclaims the Lord Jesus Christ as the eternal Son of the Father should be the gospel which we speak of as being the gospel of his rejection. But true it is.

But if it is the gospel of the rejection of our Lord Jesus Christ, thank God that there are those of us here this evening, all of us I trust, who know it to be the gospel which speaks to of the reception of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And it is of that rejection and of that reception that I would like to speak to you.

[00:07:02] My mind works in threes.

I'm sorry about it, I just can't help it. It just works in threes.

And whenever I pick up my Bible and whenever I am looking to the Lord for something to say, invariably it falls into threes.

And I don't know a gospel that has so many threes in it as John's gospel.

And I'm not going to talk to you about them all, I dare not, if I were able.

But I have picked out of this gospel seven of the threes that have been brought to my mind and which I have looked at with great joy and encouragement for my own soul.

Seven of them.

Well, seven times three is twenty-one.

[00:08:04] Maybe we will not have got very far when we've got to the end of these seven threes tonight. But one thing I do trust, and it is that we have at least attained our majority, that we are in the place where we may proceed onward into full growth in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Just on the threshold, shall we say. Because, you know, whatever the young men or the young women who are under twenty-one may think, when you reach the age of twenty-one, you may imagine that you've come to your age of majority and think you know it all. But when you get to twice that, you'll discover that you really knew just a little and no more at that age. But don't be discouraged. [00:09:02] There is every reason for encouragement, not discouragement, in that. So, let us look then at these seven threes.

Keeping in our mind that our subject this evening is rejection or reception.

Well, we must first look at the one who is spoken of in this gospel.

I would like to read to you before I go any further, some words which I noticed the other day, which were recorded of the Lord Jesus Christ as to his deity.

Listen, what do we need in God that we do not find in Christ?

[00:10:06] God is not beyond him, but in him.

He brings God.

In him, God comes, Emmanuel.

In Jesus Christ, we meet God.

He is one with the inmost heart of God.

His life is a personal disclosure of the life of God.

And so we begin by thinking just for a moment of what I want to call the revelation of the word.

The revelation of the word.

As we think of a word, and I am leaving for a moment that glorious wonderful title of the word, [00:11:11] which speaks only of our Lord Jesus Christ. But as we think of a word or of words, surely every one of us understand that this is our means of communicating. This is the way in which we get

over to people.

We must know the language or we can never get near to them.

And you know in a very wonderful way it seems to me that God chose for his son this wonderful glorious title, the word.

Dare I suggest that this was God's way of communicating?

[00:12:03] This was his way of coming down to where we were?

And in his ways of wondrous grace making himself known? We come back to those words that we read. In the beginning was the word.

The very expression of God.

Here was the one who was before time began.

Before time began.

In the beginning was the word. The creator.

In this wonderful title we see the glory of the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The word.

But then it says and the word was with God.

[00:13:06] Why does it say that? I don't know if as you have read this first chapter of John's gospel you have thought to yourself as I used to think when I was a year or two younger than I am now. There's an awful lot of repetition about this. But is there?

I don't think so.

See each one of these short cryptic phrases brings to us a fresh thought of this wonderful and glorious person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Described here as the word.

In the beginning was the word. The creator.

All the glory of his person.

But he was with God.

He was with God.

This is his own personal existence with God.

[00:14:01] With God.

He was with God.

His personal existence.

Then it goes on and it says the word was God. The word was God.

This is not speaking of a creature.

This is speaking of one who was essentially divine.

That's who he was.

What was he about?

This word.

Well the next verse says in the beginning with God.

I believe that in this we have all the thought before us of one whose personality was eternal.

But who was revealing to men all the wonder of that personality.

[00:15:05] Before all creation. In the beginning with God.

And revealing it.

Then it goes on.

All things were made by him.

And not anything was made.

All things were made by him.

And without him was not anything made that was made.

The word was not made.

The word made all.

This is what he was about. The word made all.

Then it says in him was life.

In him was life. There's a wonderful verse you know in the epistle of John which I always thrill to.

It's a word which may seem at times to be far beyond our understanding. [00:16:05] I believe it is in all its fullness. But it's a word which never ceases to thrill my soul.

Speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ. It says this is the true God.

And eternal life.

This is the true God and eternal life.

In him was life.

And the life was the light of men.

The life was the light of men. I want you to notice this. As we think of what he was about.

Who are the objects of this life.

This light that flowed out from the word.

It wasn't the angels of heaven. [00:17:01] Wonderful though they were.

But it was the creatures like you and me. It was men. In him was life it says. And the life was the light of men.

You know.

It says the light of men.

The light of men.

It doesn't say the life of men. The light.

I want to suggest to you tonight.

I want to tell you what it says in the word of God. That the life.

Because I believe there is a distinction in this verse between life and light. That life is for those.

Who by God's wondrous grace.

Have been brought to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. [00:18:02] For those who trust in his name. They have life.

But this verse.

Goes much further than that. It's much broader in its scope. Much wider. It says the life was the light of men.

That it went over all the bounds of that. And went right out.

To where men were. Yes men in all their darkness. Men in all their sinfulness. Men in all their departure from God. It went right out over all the bounds of it.

This life.

Was the light.

Of men.

But it says.

The light.

Shined.

In the darkness.

In the darkness.

And this brings us to our next three really. Because I want to talk to you now for a moment. [00:19:04]
About the rejection.

The rejection.

I don't know whether you have noticed it or not but. It may well be that. Those of you who have studied John's gospel at all. Have seen that.

There is a three fold rejection. Even in the first chapter.

And I want to suggest to you tonight that. First of all.

This light.

That shone in this darkness.

A darkness.

Far more impenetrable. Than the darkness that existed. In the opening verses of Genesis 1. Far more impenetrable than that darkness. For in that darkness.

God said let there be light.

And there was light. [00:20:02] But of this darkness.

Of this darkness it says. And the light shineth in darkness. And the darkness comprehended it. Apprehended it not.

What does it mean?

If we were to come into this hall. On a dark winter's night.

And to press the switches of the electric lights. The light from each of these globes. Would dispel any darkness that was here. Darkness gives way to light.

But this darkness didn't give way to light. This darkness didn't give way to light. Dare I say to you.

That this life.

[00:21:02] That was the light of men.

Shining into this dark world.

Bounced off it.

It literally rebounded.

Say so.

Say so to me anyway. The light shined in the darkness. And the darkness apprehended it not.

Rejected by the darkness.

By all the moral turpitude.

In which men were living in all their sinfulness. This light which went out. In all its aboundingness.

Rejected.

Rejected by the darkness.

Then as we go on down our chapter. We come to that verse. Where it says. He was in the world.

[00:22:01] And the world was made by him. And the world knew him not.

Rejected by the darkness. Yes. Rejected by the world.

Rejected by the world. He came into the world.

What do you understand by the world? Do you understand that the world is. This fair creation in which we live? Or do you understand.

That it's the kind of thing which. That wonderful verse in John 3 speaks to us of. When it says God so loved the world. I think that's something of what it is here. He came into the world.

And the world knew him not.

Rejected.

By the world.

Then it goes on and. To me one of the most tragic verses in the whole of the Bible. [00:23:04] He came unto his own.

And his own received.

Him not.

I want you to notice something about that verse. It doesn't say.

That he came unto his own.

And his own knew him not.

It doesn't say that.

It doesn't say that.

That's where the tragedy comes in. It says that they received him not.

They received him not.

They received him not.

The inference to me you know.

Is that they knew who he was.

They knew who he was.

And knowing it.

[00:24:02] They said no.

No. Rejected.

By the darkness.

Rejected.

By the world.

Rejected.

By the people.

But you know.

We come don't we to that wonderful. Wonderful verse which. So many of us have quoted. With such joy.

But as many as received him.

As many as received him.

There's a very wonderful verse in one of our hymns. It's a lovely hymn.

But to me this.

Is one of the verses in that hymn.

Thy faithful witness.

Holy. True. [00:25:01] He was indeed.

The light.

Though only those.

His glory knew.

To whom thou gavest.

Sight.

But only those.

His glory knew.

To whom.

Thou gavest.

Sight.

But as many as received him.

It's wonderful isn't it. To be able to talk tonight. Of the reception.

Of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As many as received him. To them gave he the power. To become the sons of God. Even to them that believe. On his name.

But who are these people. How do we come into this category. Well it goes on.

And this is probably our next three. Because it says.

In the very next verse. Which were born.

[00:26:01] We need to be born.

We need to be born.

We needed to be born into this world. To be here.

And we need to be born. To come into the family of God. We need to be born.

To be those who have received the Lord Jesus Christ. To know him as saviour. To be born.

It says which were born. Not of blood.

Nor of the will of the flesh. Nor of the will of man. How then?

Not of blood.

Well it's fairly simple to me. We don't inherit it. We don't inherit it. It's not because of. Our godly fathers or mothers. Or our godly grandparents. We don't inherit it. [00:27:01] It's not of blood.

Nor of the will of the flesh. We don't will it.

We don't decide when it's going to happen. No we don't.

And don't you make any mistake about that. You don't decide when it's going to happen. One of the things that. Must have struck you as it struck me. In the days when Billy Graham was preaching in this country. Was one of the things that he used to say repeatedly. He used to say this. It will never be any easier. Than it is at this moment. What did he mean?

He meant this.

That he believed that the moment in which he was speaking. Was a moment in which the spirit of God was working. The gospel was going forth. And the spirit of God was brooding. Over the gathering.

[00:28:02] Listening to the gospel. God was working.

Never be any easier than at that moment. God working.

It's not of the will of the flesh. Not of the will of the flesh. I tell you if there's anyone here tonight. To whom God may be speaking who knows not the saviour. Take heed will you.

If God is speaking to your heart. Then this is the moment. For you to be born again.

Not of the will of the flesh. You don't will it.

Nor of the will of man. What does that mean? It just means this to me. That nobody else can do it for you. [00:29:03] Nobody else can do it for you. Nobody else.

Can will it for you. It's not of blood.

Nor of the will of the flesh. Nor of the will of man. But of God.

Oh this is wonderful. But of God.

We come back don't we. To that wonderful two lines of that hymn which we've already quoted. But only those his glory knew. To whom thou gave us sight. To whom thou gave us sight. Oh beloved.

Those of us who know and love the saviour. Those of us who by his own grace. Have been brought into this family of God. Born of God.

What a privileged people we are. What a privileged people. [00:30:01] That in a world which has rejected the Christ of God. Our hearts have been touched. Despite the fact that he's rejected by the darkness. By the world. By the people. We are numbered in that company. Who by grace.

Have received him into our hearts. And we belong to him. Because we've been born into the family of God. What an inestimable privilege it is. To know this and to be assured of it. But we may go on and. We must get on too.

What we see in chapter one. I want to suggest to you. Carries on through this gospel and it's very wonderful. And I think you could pick nearly every chapter out of John's gospel. And talk.

[00:31:01] A. About the personal glories of the Lord Jesus. B. About the fact that he was rejected. And C. About the wonderful truth that some received him. We're not going to go through the whole gospel. We haven't time. But I want to pick out just. Three.

Of these chapters. Very briefly. Very briefly. I want to come back to. This terrible subject of rejection. Because we find rejection again in chapter five. In chapter five what do we see? We see the Lord Jesus. In all his glory.

Coming and healing a poor man. A poor man who was held captive. We see him healed. And we see the subsequent action. [00:32:01] Of the Pharisees and of religious leaders. And we discover. We discover. That the one who could stand there before them. And tell them in clear unmistakable tones. That what he did. He did because the father was with him. That he did it. He did it. And the father was in full fellowship with him. In all that he did. The father whom they acknowledged as their God. We discover that they. Will not listen to him. They reject. In that chapter. The very person. Of the Lord Jesus Christ. And he has to say to them. He will not come unto me. He will not come unto me. That he might have life. You read that chapter carefully. [00:33:02] If you have not read it carefully before. I trust you have. And you will see just what I mean. That they rejected the person. Of the Lord Jesus Christ. The one who had come to them. If you come to chapter eight. And again you see. The Lord Jesus moving in a world which. Was morally dark.

In a world in which he has to say. Yet again. I am the light of the world. See him as he speaks to that people. Resultant upon. The way in which. He spoke to that poor woman. Who was brought to him. Taken in adultery. And see the way in which. They refused to listen to him. They rejected what? They rejected his words. And he has to say to them. [00:34:02] He that is of God. Hear of God's words. Ye therefore hear them not. Because ye are not of God.

Chapter nine. Chapter nine. Very familiar story to most of us. Story of the healing of that blind man. You know it so well don't you? And again. They reject him. They rejected his person. They rejected the words that he spoke. They rejected the works that he performed. They said we'll have nothing to do with it. He says this fellow they say. We know not. Whence he is. Rejection. Rejection. But our next three is. [00:35:01] Most wonderful. Because God. Comes into the picture. And oh my dear friend. Never be mistaken about this. That the world which rejected and spurned your saviour. Is a world which will surely know. That God has honoured him. That God has exalted him. And ever will exalt him. And as we follow through this gospel. We see him. Glorified even in this world as a man. For in chapter 11. Do we not see him. In the raising of Lazarus. Glorified as the son of God. This is wonderful you know. The son of God gives life. He says as the son of God I give life. And he is all the proof of it. In raising to life again. Lazarus.

[00:36:01] He could stand there before Martha. And say to her. I am the resurrection and the life. He then believeth in me. Though he were dead yet shall he live. Wonderful isn't it. Glorified as the son of God. See him in chapter 12. And I think this is very important. See him.

As he rides into Jerusalem. What do you think of that? What do you think of that? What do you make of it? Shall I tell you what it is? It's God.

It's God coming in.

And seeing to it.

That this one whom he sent into this world. This one who was obedient to him in all his ways. And who had glorified God. That he too should be acknowledged of men. For we see him as he rides in triumph into Jerusalem. [00:37:04] Glorified as the son of David. As the son of God. As the son of David. And in that moment. Those of you who are familiar with the chapter will remember. That it was in that moment. That the Greeks. Came to Philip and said to him. We would see Jesus. We would see Jesus. And the answer. From the lips of the Lord himself. Now is the son of man glorified. It's there again isn't it? A son of God. A son of David. A son of man. May I say to you at this moment. That that was a moment in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. As a man in this world. When he had the world at his feet. The rejected one of God. This was a moment in which the world was at his feet. [00:38:04] Why the Jews. Hailed him as the son of David. The Greeks. Were asking to see him. And a notable exception. In that chapter. Is that we don't get one single word out of the Romans. The Romans were silent. The Romans were the conquerors of that country. The Romans had their heel upon them. And down the street into Jerusalem was riding a man. Who was hailed as the king. The son of David. And they utter not a word in protest. And there must have been hundreds of Roman soldiers there. Silent.

I say the world was at his feet. Beloved.

Beloved.

If you've never loved your savior before. Will you love him as I tell you this. [00:39:01] That with the world at his feet. With his work on earth as a man. As far as his life was concerned. Fully accomplished. In the place. Where in the words of the Hebrew. Servant.

He could have gone out free. In that moment. When he turned to those disciples. Who said to him. The Greeks want to see you. He says now is the son of man glorified. Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground. And die it abideth alone. But if it die it bringeth forth. Much fruit. That was the moment my friend. In which to use the words of that Hebrew servant. He turned his face to his God. And he said. I love my master. My God.

I love my church. I love my wife. The church. [00:40:01] I love my children. Every single. Member of that church. I love them. I will not go out free. And he went out to that cross. And he gave himself. He gave himself. He gave himself. Do you love him? Do you love him? Why have I talked to you about him in this way? Because there is yet one more free. One more.

I'm going to jump about the gospel for it. But it's there. Listen.

Listen.

The last verse of the 20th chapter. These things were written. That ye might believe. That Jesus is the Christ. The son of God. And that believing. [00:41:02] Ye might have life. Through his name. These things are written. These things of which we have been talking. Concerning all the glories of his person. The wonder of who he is. The glory of what he has done. The efficacy of his sacrifice upon the cross. Rejected and despised of men, yes. A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. The one who in love for our souls and in obedience to God. Went out to that cross and died there. That God might be glorified. That you might have life. These things are written. These things are written. That ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ. Do you?

The son of God. And that believing ye might have life. [00:42:01] Through his name. Through his name. Back to chapter 16. These words. Are spoken. Says the Lord Jesus. Spoken.

That in me. Ye might have peace. Isn't that wonderful? You know him as your saviour. You have believed on him. You have the life which he gives. He says these words I speak unto you. That ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation. But be of good cheer he says. I have overcome the world. These words are spoken. That ye might have peace. Peace of heart. Peace of conscience. Peace.

In this world. Riddled with war and strife. Peace.

Life. Peace.

[00:43:02] Isn't it wonderful? Have you ever seen a Christian. Go into the presence of his Lord? I have.

A dear old friend of mine. Died with these words upon his lips. Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory. Through our Lord Jesus Christ. He was in the presence of his Lord. Within minutes. Of uttering the words. Peace.

As I stood by his coffin. The lady who stood with me. I'd never seen her in my life before. And as she

gazed on his face. A face of peace. She looked up at me and she said this. I don't think I shall ever forget it. Kit has been ready for this. [00:44:01] For a long long time. It was true. It was true of him. He moved through this world. Peace.

Shone from his very face. And from his life. And he went into the presence of his Lord. And he went into the presence of his Lord. With those words upon his lips. Thanks be unto God which giveth us the victory. These words are spoken that ye might have peace. Despite a world of tribulation. And finally. These words are given. Chapter 17 that wonderful prayer. Of our Lord. He says I have given them thy word. For what?

Move three verses down and you'll find the reason. That ye might be.

[00:45:01] Sanctified. He says sanctify them through thy truth. Thy word.

Is truth.

Given.

That we might be. That we might be. What we were listening to this afternoon. A separate people. A separate people. A people.

Brought out. From the world. Separated unto God.

Set down in a pathway that he has marked for us. And by his grace.

As we know his word. And as we follow it. So to walk in it. Until that glorious moment. When we see him. Face to face. Written that ye might believe. [00:46:03] Spoken that ye might have peace. Given.

That ye might walk. As separated unto him. Who loved you. Who died to save you. May we have our eyes taken. From ourselves.

From our circumstances. From everything and anything. That would separate us from our Lord. And may we gaze off into that bright glory where he is now. To see him there. To see him there. In all the glory which belongs to him. And with the Lord himself. As the object. Of our faith. Of our hearts. Of our lives. [00:47:01] So to go toward him. Gazing.

Into his face.