

John Pt 3 Sent to Testify, Free to Receive

Isaiah Wilson / General Adult

Gospel of John / John 1:6–13

John 1:6–13 BSB

⁶ There came a man who was sent from God. His name was John.

⁷ He came as a witness to testify about the Light, so that through him everyone might believe.

⁸ He himself was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light.

⁹ The true Light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him.

¹¹ He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.

¹² But to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God—

¹³ children born not of blood, nor of the desire or will of

man, but born of God.

Introduction

Last week we started at the very edge of everything. Before Genesis, before the first morning, John opens his Gospel with five verses that don't describe a beginning so much as they describe what was already there before any beginning happened. In the beginning was the Word. Not "in the beginning God made the Word." Was. Already there. Everything else in existence had a starting line. The Word did not.

We called that the difference between created and uncreated, and we built the whole session around one line: He is underived. Everything else, including every person in this room, is derived. We get our life from somewhere. We got our start from someone. The Word never did. He is the one thing in all of reality that was not given, borrowed, or begun.

And that life He has in Himself became something for us. Verse 4 says in Him was life, and that life was the light of men. Verse 5 says the Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. Present tense. Not "the Light shone once." Still shining. Right now, tonight, while we sit here.

So far, everything we've talked about has been eternal, unseen, before time. Tonight that changes. Verse 6 does something the first five verses never do. A man walks onto the page with a name, a mother, a hometown, and a death that's coming. Eternity is about to meet a calendar.

Historical and Literary Context

The turn at verse 6

For five verses John has been writing about the Word the way you'd describe the ocean or the sky, something too large to fully hold. Then verse 6: "There came a man who was sent from God. His name was John." No poetry. No cosmic sweep. Just a name and a mission. It's the most ordinary sentence in the prologue so far, and that's exactly the point. God announces the eternal Word through a mortal man with a beginning and an end, and that pattern doesn't stop with John the Baptist. It runs through the whole rest of the book, and honestly, through the whole rest of church history. God still speaks through people who had a start date.

Two Different Johns

Before we go further, let's be clear about something simple, because it can genuinely trip people up. There are two

Johns connected to this book, and they are not the same man.

The John in front of us tonight is John the Baptist. His father, Zechariah, was a priest. His mother, Elizabeth, was a relative of Mary. Luke tells the story of his birth in detail: an old couple, an angel, a father struck silent for doubting. John grew up, went into the wilderness, and started preaching repentance and baptizing people in the Jordan River. This wasn't a small following. Mark tells us the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him. It cost him his life. Herod Antipas had him arrested and eventually executed, a story Mark tells in painful detail in chapter 6. The Jewish historian Josephus corroborates this outside the Bible, describing John as a good man who called people to righteousness and baptism, and saying Herod feared his influence over the crowds. I'm not building any doctrine on that source, our Bible stands on its own, but it's worth knowing secular history backs up what the Gospels already told us.

Now here's the man who is not that John. The one holding the pen right now, traditionally understood to be John the son of Zebedee, a Galilean fisherman and one of the Twelve. And he never once puts his own name on the page. Starting in chapter 13, he refers to himself only as "the disciple Jesus loved" (13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20).

So here's a simple rule for the rest of this series. Every time you see "John" by name in this Gospel, it's the Baptist. When you see "the disciple Jesus loved," that's the man writing it.

Why the prologue interrupts itself for him

Here's something easy to miss. John the Baptist doesn't just show up once in this prologue. He interrupts it twice, once here in verses 6 through 8, and again in verse 15, right in the middle of a sentence about grace and truth. We'll deal with verse 15 next week. But notice the pattern now: John (the apostle) can't write for long about the Light without also writing about the man sent to point at it. Witness and testimony are baked into this Gospel from the very first page.

Witness was never a casual word

When John's Gospel calls someone a witness, it's borrowing a legal term with real weight behind it. Under the Law, no single accusation could stand on its own. "A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime... only on the evidence of two or three witnesses shall a charge be established" (Deuteronomy 19:15). A witness wasn't someone offering an opinion. A witness was load-bearing. Their testimony could establish a case or, if they lied, bring real consequences on themselves.

Keep that in mind every time this Gospel uses the word "witness" from here forward, because it's going to use it constantly. Jesus will later stand accused, and the question of whether His testimony can be trusted becomes an actual courtroom argument (5:31-39). John the Baptist is the first name called to the stand. He won't be the last.

A question this passage may be answering

Here's something worth knowing before we read these verses. In Acts, we meet a man named Apollos in Ephesus who knew only the baptism of John, nothing about Jesus. A little later, Paul finds a group of disciples there who are in the same position. That tells us there were people, maybe years after John died, who were still building their whole faith around him instead of around the One he pointed to.

Now watch what this Gospel keeps doing. "He himself was not the Light" (v.8). "I am not the Christ" (1:20). Not Elijah. Not the Prophet (1:21). "John never performed a sign" (10:41). Over and over, the book tells us what John wasn't. That's a strange amount of energy to spend correcting a mistake nobody was making. A reasonable explanation many scholars point to is that some people, maybe especially in Ephesus, had John built up into something bigger than he ever claimed to be, and this Gospel gently, repeatedly, sets the record straight. I want to be honest that this is a strong proposal, not something we can prove

beyond doubt. But it fits the evidence we do have, and it fits something we already noticed in session one about where this Gospel was likely written.

The fork this passage sets up

By the end of these eight verses, we'll already see a pattern that repeats through this entire Gospel. Some people meet Jesus and miss Him completely. Others receive Him.

Reception and rejection, side by side, over and over, all the way to the end of the book. Tonight we watch it happen for the first time.

John 1:6-8, "The Man Who Was Not the Light"

John 1:6-8 BSB

⁶ There came a man who was sent from God. His name was John.

⁷ He came as a witness to testify about the Light, so that through him everyone might believe.

⁸ He himself was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light.

"There came a man" (v.6)

Set this next to verse 1. "In the beginning was the Word." The Word *was*. John *came*. One of those verbs describes something that has always existed. The other describes something that started. That's the whole created and uncreated distinction from last week, and you don't need a word of Greek to see it. It's sitting right there in plain English.

John had a beginning. He had a mother and a father and a birthday. The One he's about to point to did not.

"Who was sent from God" (v.6)

John didn't appoint himself. He didn't wake up one morning and decide the wilderness needed a preacher. He was sent, commissioned, given an assignment by God Himself.

Hold onto that word "sent." It's going to become one of the biggest words in this Gospel. Jesus repeatedly calls Himself the One the Father sent. And at the very end of the book, right after the resurrection, Jesus turns to His disciples and says, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (20:21). John the Baptist is the first sent one in this story, but he won't be the last, and eventually the sending includes you.

"His name was John" (v.6)

The first personal name in this Gospel. Hold onto that too. In

a few verses, another name is going to show up, and it's going to matter a lot more.

"He came as a witness to testify about the Light" (v.7)

Back in Session 1, we talked about this Gospel almost like a courtroom. Evidence gets presented. Witnesses get called. Verdicts get reached. Here's the first witness taking the stand.

"Testify" and "witness" are going to run through this entire book. Other witnesses will step forward later, John's own works, the Scriptures, the Father Himself. We're not going to list them tonight. That's a conversation for session 15. For now, just notice that the very first thing said about John the Baptist is that his job was to testify.

"So that through him everyone might believe" (v.7)

This is the first time the word "believe" shows up anywhere in this Gospel. Hold that next to John 20:31, the verse this entire series is built around: "these are written so that you may believe." John the Baptist's purpose and the purpose of this whole book are the same sentence. He existed so people would believe. This book was written so you would believe.

Notice too, "through him." God chose to bring people to faith through a human witness. Not around one. Through

one. He still works that way. Every person who has ever told you about Jesus was doing exactly what John did here.

And catch the word "everyone." That's the first of three universal words in this passage. We're going to see two more before we're done tonight. Keep count.

"He himself was not the Light" (v.8)

Why does John need to say something this obvious? We already talked about this in the context section. There were people, maybe especially in Ephesus, who had built John up into more than he ever claimed to be. This verse, and several more like it scattered through the book, corrects that.

Later in this Gospel, Jesus Himself describes John this way: "John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you were willing for a season to bask in his light" (5:35). A lamp is real. A lamp gives real light. People really did warm themselves by it. But a lamp doesn't generate its own fire. Something else lights it. That's John. That's every faithful witness who has ever pointed people to Jesus, including every one of us in this room.

John is derived light. He shines because something outside himself set him burning.

Where this lands

There's something freeing in what John says about himself here. He doesn't have to be the Light. He just has to point at it. You don't have to generate the fire either. You only have to be lit by it, and then point.

John 1:9-11, "He Came, and the World Missed Him"

John 1:9-11 BSB

⁹ The true Light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him.

¹¹ He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.

"The true Light" (v.9)

"True" here doesn't mean John is about to correct a lie. It means something closer to real, original, the genuine article that everything else is only a copy of.

John uses this word the same way twice more in this Gospel. Jesus calls Himself the true bread (6:32) and the true vine (15:1). In both places, the contrast isn't between

something honest and something false. It's between the source and the shadow. Manna in the wilderness was real bread. It kept people alive for a day. But Jesus is the bread everything else was pointing to. Israel really was a vine, planted and tended by God. But Jesus is the vine that vine was always meant to picture.

Same idea here. John really was a lamp. He really gave light. But Jesus is the Light everything else was borrowing from.

"Who gives light to everyone" (v.9)

Here's the second universal word. Everyone has an opportunity to believe, back in verse 7. Now everyone gets light.

This Light isn't reaching a chosen few and leaving the rest in the dark. It's public. It's for the whole world. And that means nobody gets to stand outside the reach of it and claim they were never given a chance to see. Every person who has ever lived has been exposed to this Light in some form. That doesn't mean everyone has heard the gospel preached to them by name. It means no one's response to Jesus, in the end, is neutral. Everyone is deciding something.

A quick translation note

The King James Version reads this verse differently: "the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the

world." There, it's the man who is coming into the world, and the verse becomes a general statement about every person ever born, each one lit by this Light simply by entering it.

The BSB reads it differently. "Was coming into the world" describes the Light, not the man. This isn't one translation getting it right and the other getting it wrong. The phrase in the original sits in a spot where it can honestly attach to either word, and careful scholars have read it both ways for a long time.

Here's why the choice actually matters, and it's not just a grammar puzzle. If it's the Light that's coming into the world, verse 9 isn't a stand-alone truth about humanity in general. It's the first step of a story that keeps moving. The Light was coming into the world in verse 9. He was in the world in verse 10. He came to His own in verse 11. Three comings, three verses, one movement: God stepping into history. Read that way, verse 9 isn't a separate thought tacked onto the passage. It's the opening frame of the very scene we're about to watch.

Either reading is defensible, and I'm not telling you the King James got it wrong. But BSB's choice, along with most modern translations, keeps verse 9 moving with the story instead of pulling it out as a general statement about mankind. That's the kind of thing you only catch by holding

two Bibles open side by side.

"He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him" (v.10)

Three short beats. He was in the world. The world was made through Him. The world did not recognize Him. Read it slowly and the middle one is what breaks your heart. He didn't sneak into someone else's house. He walked into the very world His own hands had made, and it looked right past Him.

Watch what "world" is doing in this one verse. It starts out meaning the created order, the physical world He spoke into being. By the end of the sentence it means something closer to humanity turned away from its Maker. Same word, two shades of meaning, back to back.

This is the same discipline we used with "the Jews" back in session one. John uses big words with a range of meaning, and we let the context tell us which one he's reaching for. We're going to need that same discipline again in a minute, and we're going to need it a lot more down the road. "World" itself is going to keep shifting all through this Gospel, most famously in 3:16, where God loves the world enough to give His Son for it.

"He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him" (v.11)

Here's where the two translation habit really pays off. Our Bible reads "His own" twice in this verse, and it sounds like one simple repeated phrase. But look at the ESV: "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him." Two different words in the original text sit behind that one phrase in our Bible. The first points to His own home, His own place, something more like property. The second points to His own people.

Picture a man coming home. He walks up to his own front door, into his own house, and his own family won't let him in.

There's an old picture that runs through Jewish wisdom writing from around this same era, long before Jesus, of Wisdom herself walking the earth, looking for somewhere to settle down and make a home among people, and finding the door shut everywhere she goes. It's not Scripture, and we're not building anything on it directly. But it's worth knowing that picture was already floating in the air by the time John wrote this Gospel, because it makes verse 11 land even heavier. This isn't a stranger showing up somewhere unfamiliar and getting turned away. This is someone who belongs, who has been quietly looked for and longed for in the world's own literature, walking up to His own front door and finding it locked from the inside.

This is exactly why studying from more than one translation

matters. No single English Bible can carry every shade of meaning packed into the original words every single time. Reading two side by side doesn't create confusion. It shows you something you'd have missed with only one in front of you. That's a habit worth building for the rest of your life, not just for this series.

So who is "His own"? Most naturally, this means Israel, His own people and His own homeland. And I want to handle this the same careful way we've been handling "the Jews" since session one. This is not a blanket verdict against an entire people. Turn the page and watch what happens next. Andrew, Peter, Philip, Nathanael. Jewish men, one after another, receiving Him with open arms. The rejection in verse 11 is real. So is the reception that starts in the very next paragraph. Both are true at the same time, inside the same nation.

Where this lands

Jesus knows what it is to be missed by the people who should have known Him best. Sit with that for a moment. We're not going to build the whole closing around it tonight, but don't rush past it either.

John 1:12-13, "The Right to Become"

John 1:12–13 BSB

¹² But to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God—

¹³ children born not of blood, nor of the desire or will of man, but born of God.

"But" (v.12)

One word, and the whole passage turns.

Let's count where we've been. Everyone might believe, back in verse 7. Light to everyone, in verse 9. Then two verses of rejection: the world didn't recognize Him, His own didn't receive Him. If the passage stopped there, it would be nothing but tragedy.

It doesn't stop there. "But" opens the door the rest of the passage walks through. Offered to everyone. Missed by many. Given to whoever actually takes it.

"To all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name" (v.12)

John doesn't leave "receiving" as some vague spiritual idea you have to guess at. He defines it in the very same breath. Receiving Him is believing in His name. That's it. There's no second step hiding behind it, no separate ritual you also

need to perform. Believe in who He is, and you have received Him.

"His name" means everything He has revealed Himself to be, not a phrase you have to get exactly right. And catch what just happened. Back in verse 6, a man had a name. His name was John. Now, in verse 12, we find out whose name actually matters. John's name gets you a witness. This name gets you life.

Hold this verse right next to 20:31: "these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." Both verses share the same two things: believing, and His name. Out of the entire eighteen verses of the prologue, this is the tightest thread back to the verse this whole series exists to serve. We are eight verses past the very edge of eternity, and we've already landed on the reason this book was written.

"He gave the right" (v.12)

A right is something someone else hands you. Think of citizenship papers, or adoption papers. You don't earn your way into a family by proving yourself worthy over time. Someone with the authority to do it simply grants you the standing, and from that point forward, it's yours.

Some of your Bibles may say something different here. The King James Version reads "gave he power to become the

sons of God." Same idea underneath both. Authority given, not ability produced. Nobody works themselves up to becoming a child of God. Somebody has to hand you the right.

"To become children of God" (v.12)

"Become" carries the weight of the verse. Nobody starts out as a child of God in the sense John means here. You become one.

I want to say something plainly, because it's a common idea and it's worth addressing head on. A lot of people assume everyone is already God's child, no matter what they believe. There's a real truth underneath that instinct. Every single person is made by God, carries His image, and is loved by Him. John himself will say a few chapters from now that God so loved the world that He gave His Son (3:16). That love reaches everyone.

But that is not what this verse is describing. In John's language, becoming a child of God is something given specifically to those who receive Christ. It isn't something you're born with. It's something you're given. I don't say that to shut a door. I say it because this verse is the door, and I want you to actually see it rather than assume you're already standing on the other side of it.

Paul picks up this exact picture later and gives it a name:

adoption. "You have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba, Father!'" (Romans 8:15). Again in Galatians: "God sent His Son... to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:5). And in Ephesians, Paul says God "predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 1:5).

Different writer, same truth John is telling us right here. Nobody is born into this family. Somebody has to bring you in and give you a place at the table.

"Born not of blood, nor of the desire or will of man" (v.13)

Two things this new birth is not.

Not blood. Not your family line, your last name, who raised you, what church your grandparents attended. You cannot inherit this the way you inherit your eye color.

Not human desire or will. You cannot want it into existence, and nobody else can decide it for you either. It cannot be arranged on your behalf.

"But born of God" (v.13)

Here's the first time this Gospel uses the language of new birth, four chapters before a religious leader named Nicodemus comes to Jesus in the middle of the night and

asks how a grown man can possibly be born again. Hold onto that phrase tonight. We're going to spend a whole session standing right inside it.

A question you may be wrestling with right now

Some of you are probably already asking this in your head. Does believing cause the new birth, or does the new birth cause you to believe? Which one comes first?

I'll be honest with you. This verse isn't answering that question. It's answering a different one: where does this new birth come from. Not blood. Not human decision. From God. The order of it, how belief and new birth relate to each other in time, is a real question, and it's worth asking. But we're going to let chapters 3 and 6 answer it, because that's where John actually takes it up. Tonight, just take hold of the source. It comes from God.

Where this lands

Think about what we've watched happen across this whole passage. God made humanity in the beginning by His word. Now He remakes people as His own children, by that same will. One is Genesis. One is right here in front of us.

John was a lamp, lit by something outside himself. Tonight, if you believe, you become a child of God, born of something outside yourself too. In this entire passage, only

one thing was ever truly original. Everything else, John included, all of us included, is given.

Core Truths

- Jesus is the original. Every faithful witness before Him and after Him, John the Baptist included, only ever reflects light that was lit somewhere else.
- A true witness is measured by where he points, not by how much attention he draws to himself.
- The Light reaches every person who has ever lived. That means no response to Jesus is neutral. Everyone who meets Him is deciding something.
- It is possible to stand closer to Jesus than almost anyone else on earth, His own home, His own people, and still miss Him completely.
- Receiving Jesus is defined plainly by this passage: believing in His name. There is no separate ritual hiding behind that word.
- Nobody is born a child of God. That status is given, not inherited, and it is given to whoever receives Him.

Closing: "Not Born Into It, Given the Right"

I want to speak plainly for a moment, because some of you have been sitting in a church building since before you can remember.

Verse 13 says something that can be hard to hear at first. Not born of blood. Whatever your last name is, whatever your grandmother prayed over you, whichever pew your family has sat in for two generations, none of that makes you a child of God. Not born of the desire or will of man. Nobody can want this into existence for you. Not a parent, not a spouse, not a pastor.

I know how that can land. If you've been in church your whole life, that might sound like the ground just moved under you. So let me say the other half just as plainly, because it's just as true. If blood cannot get you into this family, blood cannot keep you out of it either. Look again at verse 12. All who received Him. Not all who were raised right. Not all who never missed a Sunday. All who received Him. Your background is not the gate, in either direction.

So what actually gets you in? A right, given to you. Not a ladder you climb by being good enough or consistent

enough or born into the right household. A status handed to you by the only One with the authority to hand it out.

Believe in His name, and you become His child. Believe in His name, and you have life. John wrote his whole Gospel so that you would see who Jesus really is, and then receive the life He offers. That is exactly what is sitting in front of you tonight, four chapters early, right here in verse 12.

So let me ask you directly. Have you actually received Him? Not grown up around Him. Not agreed with things about Him. Received Him, the way this verse means it: believed in His name.

If you have, take a minute tonight to remember that you did not earn a place in this family. It was given to you.

And if you're not sure, if you've been close to this your whole life and have never actually crossed that line, that's what tonight is for. The right is still being offered. All you have to do is receive Him.