

Session 3

THE STORY OF REDEMPTION

John 1:10-13; Romans 3:23-26

Memory Verse

²³ For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. ²⁴ They are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

– ROMANS 3:23-24, CSB




The Story of Redemption

THEOLOGICAL THEME: John 1:10-13 points to several important theological concepts. As we work our way through verses 12 and 13 especially, we will seek to better understand saving faith, Jesus Christ's perfect sacrifice, and God's sovereignty over salvation.

Sometimes, well-meaning people try to alleviate the grief of someone who has lost something very precious by providing a replacement. Their intentions are good, but their effort is lacking because there is simply no way to replace that which has been lost. Instead of providing relief and comfort, these efforts may actually exacerbate the feelings of loss.

Now think about your own soul. Because of the inherited sin of Adam and one's own evil deeds, every person's soul is lost. Can there be anything more precious or valuable to a man than his own soul? "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36, KJV) There are all sorts of diversions that the world offers to soothe the restlessness we feel because of our desperate spiritual condition. Career advancement, money, property, sex, sports, alcohol, power, and more may seemingly dull the edge of grief due to our loss for a time, but they ultimately fall far short.

"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace!" (Ephesians 2:4-5) In Christ, God has replaced spiritual death with spiritual life for all who trust in Him. He has replaced the Christian's sin debt with the righteousness of Christ!

 Have you ever lost something that was very valuable or even irreplaceable to you?



How did you lose it? How did you feel once you knew that it was gone for good?

Session Summary

John's introduction to his Gospel was a birds-eye-view of the many details that he was about to recount. In these first few verses, he worked to give a sweeping overview that would serve us as a type of framework so that his readers might properly understand the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. John stated at the end of his work, "This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true" (21:24). John's purpose in writing was to serve as an eyewitness of Jesus Christ's life and ministry. He desired to give a true testimony of the things that happened. This sentiment was echoed in his first letter when he wrote, "What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—that life was revealed, and we have seen it and we testify and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us" (1 John 1:1-2).

There's the key. At the end of verse 2 of 1 John, John said he testified and declared the eternal life. In John 1:10-13, John had the same goal: that his readers would know the truth about Christ that was revealed to him and that they would receive eternal life.

1. Believers and Receivers (John 1:12)

Jesus Christ, God in flesh, was in the world, and the world was created through Him. This statement made by John in verse 10, is astounding, but the next is even more shocking: "yet the world did not recognize him...his own people did not receive him." Jesus vividly illustrated this in His parable of the vineyard owner in Matthew 21: "Finally, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said" (Matthew 21:37). The picture was a bleak one. Jesus, God the Son, appeared on earth humbly but powerfully. He was rejected by men, but not all men.

Verse 12 begins with that startling conjunction that we find from time to time in passages in desperate need of contrast. John Phillips said, "Oh, those revealing butts of the Bible.

They are small hinges on which great truths and destinies swing.” In verse 12, John introduced a contrast to those who did not recognize Jesus or receive Him.

? What kinds of people were contrasted with those who did not recognize Christ? What two verbs did John use?

John wrote that there were some who received Jesus and believed in His name. This is no small thing. That little word is a fulcrum that signaled a monumental shift. God’s plans and purposes will not be overruled or thwarted, even by the world’s hatred of God and rejection of His Son. God makes even human wrath praise Him (Psalm 76:10). There were (and will be) those who hear the gospel and respond with faith and repentance. Even the wile of the devil cannot stop this, for every one that the Father gives to the Son will come to Him, and every one who comes to Jesus He will certainly not cast out (John 6:37). After all, who can stop what God has planned? (Ephesians 1:4)

? How would you describe the difference between believing and receiving?

These two verbs describe two parts of a whole. They are slightly different, but they can’t be separated from each other. They are two sides of the same coin: believers are receivers. Believing refers to mental assent. It is an acknowledgement of the facts and an admission of their veracity. For example, the demons believe and tremble (James 2:19).

After believing comes receiving, though these happen almost simultaneously in those whose hearts have been opened to the gospel as Lydia’s was (Acts 16:14). Receiving means submitting to Christ’s rule and authority. It means placing one’s life under Jesus’ life. Receiving does not mean simply co-existing with Christ as though He were an acceptable housemate.

Receiving Jesus means that we submit ourselves to His rule in our lives. We accept Him as He is and bend the knee as He does His work His way in our lives. Glen E. Clifton puts it this way:

If he comes to you as Savior, you welcome his salvation.

If he comes to you as Leader, you welcome his leadership.

If he comes to you as Provider, you welcome his provision.

If he comes to you as Counselor, you welcome his counsel.

If he comes to you as Protector, you welcome his protection.

If he comes to you as Authority, you welcome his authority.

If he comes to you as King, you welcome his rule.¹

? Application Question: If someone were able to read your thoughts, hear all your words, review your budget, and look over your calendar, do you think they would deduce that you have both believed and received Christ? Why or why not?

2. He Gave the Right (John 1:12)

John confirmed that those who believed in his name and received him were given the right to become children of God. What an incredible change! A person moves from being a child of the devil (John 8:44) to being a child of God.

? How is God able to adopt His enemies and transgressors of His law into His own family?

Romans 3:23 says that all have sinned and fall short of God's standard. No one hits the mark. There are none who are righteous, not even one. So how could God give anyone the right to sit at His table, even if they believe in Jesus?

Notice that John said they are given the right; they didn't earn it. This was a gift of grace that was made possible by Jesus' good works, not the good works of those that would be given the right to become children of God (you and me).

Jesus was uniquely qualified to earn this right on our behalf. First of all, He was both God and man. He wasn't half man and half God; rather He was fully God and fully man. This is why Isaiah was able to say, "For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6) Jesus, Mighty God, took on flesh, was born of a virgin and truly lived as we live. He is the only kind of Redeemer that could bring people back to God.

? Why was it necessary for Jesus to be fully God and fully man in order to redeem sinful man?

He had to be fully human so that He could perfectly obey the whole law and earn true righteousness. In this way the righteousness He earned as a man could be reckoned to people's accounts. Furthermore, how could Christ suffer the punishment for the sin of man if He weren't fully man? Also, because Jesus was fully man, He is able to sympathize with mankind's weakness (Hebrews 2:7).

But Jesus also had to be fully divine to make atonement for His people. It is impossible for a mere man bear up under the wrath of God against sin. But Jesus was able to endure God's wrath and overcome death because He was not only fully man, but also fully God. Furthermore, because of His divine nature, Jesus' sacrifice was perfect and effective. It is for these reasons that the sacrifice of the divine Messiah was drastically different than the blood of bulls and goats (Hebrews 10:4).

? Why was the shedding of blood required? And, how did this sacrifice actually help us?

The death of the perfectly righteous God-man on behalf of sinners was the only way for sinful man to be redeemed. In other words, if Jesus had not taken on flesh, lived a perfect life, and willingly offered Himself on the cross, then you and I remain without hope.

The Bible is clear that punishment for sin is death (Romans 6:23) and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins (Hebrews 9:22). “For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have appointed it to you to make atonement on the altar for your lives, since it is the lifeblood that makes atonement” (Leviticus 17:11). But not just any blood is sufficient (Hebrews 10:4). Only the blood of the God-man was acceptable and effective to satisfy the wrath of God and make atonement for the sins of others.

Jesus’ death was not an example of how to live a sacrificial life. If that is all we understand of His death on the cross, then we have not understood the gospel. Jesus’ good work on the cross isn’t an inspiration for us to do our own good works. He shed His blood on the cross because of our inability to earn righteousness by our good works. Jesus did two things for us. First, He took on our sin debt and paid the price for it. But He also credited His righteousness to those who trust in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21). This is crucial to understanding the full effect of the gospel. Jesus replaces His followers’ sin-debt with His own righteousness. When God looks at the spiritual account of Christians, He is pleased to see the righteous acts of His own Son credited to us. This is truly an astounding reality.

? Application Question: What does the fact that Christ has not only canceled the Christian’s sin-debt, but has also credited the Christian’s account with His righteousness have to do with how he or she lives before the face of God now?

3. By God’s Will (John 1:13)

? What do Christians contribute to their own salvation? Why is this important to continually remember?

Scripture is clear about our spiritual state. “You were dead in your trespasses and sins,” and “you were dead in trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh.” (Ephesians 2:1; Colossians 2:13) For this reason, Christians have to bow the knee before our great God and give Him all the glory for saving them. Followers of Jesus dare not take any of the credit for the wiping away of their sins or of the crediting of their account with Christ’s righteousness. John wrote, “who were born, not of natural descent, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God.”

? Why do you think John used the language of birth here? In what sense have Christians been “reborn”?

John referred to a supernatural birth—a spiritual birth that marks the transition from death to life. It’s noteworthy that he didn’t describe this change as a renewal or recommitment. John pointed to something profoundly more drastic. This birth, John explained, didn’t take place because any person made it so, but because God wills it. The profound change takes place because of God.

No one gives a baby the credit for its creation or its birth. There are all sorts of external factors that bring a child into existence and to life outside the womb.

? Application Question: How does this reality change the way you view salvation? How should God’s work on a person’s behalf affect the way they approach the Christian life? If you are a Christian, what are some ways you might be guilty of taking credit for your own salvation?

Conclusion

The good news that John summarized in John 1:12-13 is the essence of the Christian faith. It is the gospel message, the power of God unto salvation for all those who hear it and trust in Christ for salvation. Jesus was uniquely qualified

to make a way for people to be given the right to become children of God. This right is given to those who believe in His name and receive Him as he is. It is given, not earned. Christians don't contribute anything to their salvation apart from our need of saving. The reality of salvation for all who are in Christ is astounding and worthy of astonishment and worship of Him.

? How does today's teaching challenge the way you have thought about salvation in the past? How should it impact the way you live in the future?

? How should the reality that people can't take credit for their salvation impact the way we interact with others in the church? Those outside the church?

? How does this reality give hope that anyone can come to know Christ? How does this make it clear that no one is "too far gone"? How should this give us boldness in sharing the gospel with others?

CHRIST CONNECTION: All of the wonderful, life-giving truths found in this passage hinge upon what Christ would finally do on the cross.

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: Because faith in Christ is the only way to be reconciled to the Father, and because Christians are commanded to preach the gospel to the whole world, the born-again Christian is compelled to go and tell, even in the face of great loss and peril.



FOR NEXT WEEK

The Story of Restoration

Main Passages

- John 1:10-13; Revelation 21:1-4

Session Outline

1. The Extent of Jesus' Work (John 1:13; Revelation 21:1-2)
2. God's Dwelling with Man (John 1:10a, 11a; Revelation 21:3)
3. Sins Effects Banished (Revelation 21:4)

Memorize

²³ For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. ²⁴ They are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

- Romans 3:23-24, CSB

Daily Readings

- Monday - John 3:16
- Tuesday - 2 Corinthians 5:21
- Wednesday - Ephesians 2:1-10
- Thursday - Colossians 1:21-22
- Friday - Romans 3:24-26
- Saturday - Galatians 3:13

References

¹Clifton, Glen. Being "In Christ": We Have Victory! Grand Rapids, MI: Westbow Press, 2012.