

John 1:1-18

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[0 : 00] Thank you, Peter. If you were here last week, you'll know that we're starting a new series. We've just started a new series, looking at how the Apostle John paints a picture of genuine Christian faith, of belief in Jesus Christ throughout his gospel.

And today the message is pretty simple, really. It's pretty straightforward. It is that true believing is receiving Jesus Christ.

True believing is receiving Jesus Christ. The section that we've just heard from John's gospel is what's known as the prologue. It's the opening section of the book.

And the climax of the prologue is actually in the middle, in verses 12 and 13. Look at verse 12. To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

Do you see what John does there? He parallels, doesn't he, belief in Jesus with receiving Jesus.

This belief is like a homecoming scene, isn't it, if you can imagine it.

[1 : 22] It's like a reunion scene. Maybe a close member of the family has gone away for a while. And suddenly they reappear at the front door. And there they are, and they come in.

And someone puts the kettle on, and there's a banner in the dining room, Welcome Home. When Jesus comes knocking, when he comes to you, it is not just seeing him through the letterbox and knowing who he is.

This believing is receiving Jesus. It is opening up the door and receiving him into every place of your life, into every room of the house.

And you'd use the word receiving to talk about hospitality, actually. Believing is to receive Jesus as an honoured guest in your life.

Picture the scene of this homecoming, John says. He says it all starts with the arrival of the guest, doesn't it?

[2 : 27] It starts with the arrival, verse 9. The true light comes into the world. The true light comes into the world.

You know, the Bible's idea of true belief, belief of Christian faith, always starts in the same way. It always starts when God appears.

When God comes and visits people. Whether it's Adam, or Abraham, or Moses, or Samuel, or the prophets, or Mary and Joseph.

Belief does not start when we travel our way to God with our thoughts, and our meditations, and our religion, and our imaginations.

But God travels to us and visits us. Belief in Jesus starts in this way, with a move of God into the world.

[3 : 33] John uses another way to describe Jesus, doesn't he? He calls him the true light. This light, he says, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, verse 10. John tells us, doesn't he, earlier in this introduction, that before he makes this journey, he was in another place.

He was with God. He was God, in verse 1. And then he makes this huge leap from this transcendent place, out from and above of this world, if you can imagine such a place, into this world.

It's as if, isn't it, humanity lives in a place that is utterly distinct from where God is, in one sense. It's as if humanity lives in this kind of box.

And it's a beautifully ornate box. It's like a treasure box. And much about the box that we live in, in this creation, tells us that there is a maker of the box.

[4 : 42] The apostle Paul says that God's invisible characteristics, his attributes, namely, his eternal power, his divine nature, are clearly seen, they're clearly perceived, how, in the things that

are made around us, in the creation of the world.

Someone asks you, how do you know God exists? One answer is to say, well, look at creation. Look at the world. Look at this finely tuned, beautiful, ornate world in which we live.

This creation. The stars above us speak of the majesty of their maker. Just as a piece of artwork isn't just there by chance, is it?

It speaks of there being an artist behind it. But for John, that knowledge, whilst it's good, the knowledge that we get of God inside the box, isn't enough for this belief which leads to life.

God must come into the box. The creator must come into the creation. And the little two-letter word in verse 10 is really crucial.

[5 : 54] That little word there, in. He was in the world. John doesn't just say, does he, that he was near the world, or that he hovered above the world, or he glanced the world and touched the world.

He doesn't just pay a quick visit, make a cameo appearance, and then disappear. No, he was in it. He was amongst it. In Jesus, the sun that warms us today, is the same sun that warmed God's face.

He breathed the same air that we breathe. His appearing is an involvement in the world, and he comes to us in such a way so that he is accessible to us.

He doesn't come merely as a vision, or as a messenger. He, himself, the message, comes into the world. So that every human being can come within reach of him.

Not some third party, not merely a prophet of God, but God himself. He comes right to the front door of the world so that we can believe.

[7 : 11] he comes knocking. Life-saving belief, Christian faith, happens when God comes into the box in the arrival. The light comes into the world.

But then, reading along with John in this reunion scene, the light comes into the world, but then there's a cold reception, isn't there? Because, secondly, the world is blind to the light.

The world is blind to the light. The story goes of some tourists, and the story is just better when you know that they were American tourists. No offence if you're American, but you'll get why it's important.

These American tourists, they were on a trip round the British Isles, and they spent a bit of time in the grounds of Balmoral Castle, the Queen's holiday home in Scotland.

And they were walking around hoping to catch a glimpse of her. On that particular day, Her Majesty had gone for a walk dressed in tweeds and a headscarf, and unwittingly these tourists met her on the road and asked, do you live round here?

[8 : 22] Imagine the conversation with Balmoral Castle as the backdrop. She kind of played along with it and said, well, I've got a house nearby. They asked her, have you ever met the Queen?

And she points to her bodyguard and says, well, no, but he has. It's a weird moment where the one they were looking for was hidden from their eyes.

They didn't recognise the one who was right in front of them. They were kept from seeing her. Now, that's a silly story, isn't it? But it illustrates something of what is going on in verse 10.

He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. The light comes into the world in the most accessible way possible.

He comes as a human being, two human beings, yet in some mysterious way the world does not know him. And it's an absolute mystery for John.

[9 : 28] It's unfathomable how you can't recognise royalty when they're right in front of you. He says, even though, even though the world was made through him, the world doesn't know him.

The world is strangely unable to recognise its maker. It is blind to his light. For John, this is an enigma wrapped in a riddle.

He just doesn't get this. That human beings do not recognise Jesus for who he is, as the God of the universe, as the God who made them.

Now we think that's pretty normal, don't we? Thousands and thousands of people don't believe that. They don't believe that Jesus is God. They don't believe that he is the one that they need to receive and receive life from.

That is pretty normal. all. But John is saying here, no, no, that is really weird. It is warped. It is deeply worrying that the world does not recognise this.

[10 : 39] That the world does not know what it should know of Jesus. Just as the Syrian war broke out, you hear stories, don't you, of families separated in the refugee crisis.

Awful. And just recently, there have been more stories of reunifications of families that were split apart. I watched one clip of a video of two children being reunited with their mother and father. And you'd expect, wouldn't you, for it to be a moment of joy and of relief. But something is deeply wrong as they meet together.

Because after the arrival of the parents in the airport foyer, the child does not recognise his own parents.

The father comes to embrace the child, but the child turns away. I don't know you. As a parent, it's deeply disturbing to watch.

[11 : 47] It's quite upsetting. when it should be a moment of great relief for this confused, lost child, but it is spoiled by a deep inability to recognise.

John is saying that happens when the light of the world, the creator, comes into the world. That's where belief starts, but the arrival is not enough in itself.

The appearance of God in Jesus Christ does not guarantee this receiving of him. You can be blind to this light.

You can shield yourself from it. You can stay in the dark. John shows us that actually there's a sinister side to this, because it's not just a case of mistaken identity.

there is something deeply defiant about this blindness. It is a willing blindness. The world doesn't know him and they don't receive him.

[12 : 55] The maker comes into the world and the door is actively slammed in his face. The world willingly chooses not to be able to receive him.

Somebody described it like this, the world is hostile towards the protagonist of creation. Such a helpful line. The world is hostile towards the protagonist of creation.

The protagonist is the main good character in a story, isn't it? It's as if the world is hating the main good character of the story of creation.

If you go and watch a film, if you go and watch Lord of the Rings, imagine you get to the end of it and the hobbits have rescued the world. They've done away with Sauron and they are the heroes. As the credits roll up at the end of the last of the three films, someone next to you turns to you and says, you know what, I can't stand that Frodo. I just cannot stand him. It's just weird, isn't it?

[13 : 58] It's like watching a film and then hating all of the goodies. The weirdness of it is, the tragedy of it is, for John, he makes it out even more, doesn't he?

When John adds in verse 10, he came to his own, came to his own people. He's referring there to God's people, the Israelites.

See how deeply the blindness goes to who Jesus is. It is so deep that it affects even the people who are looking for him to arrive.

the whole of the Old Testament has been leading up to this point, hasn't it? Where God's people are waiting and waiting for him to appear, but it's the irony of rejecting the one that you're waiting for, of slamming the door on the one that you're preparing to receive.

The light comes into the world in the arrival, but there's a cold reception. The world is blind to the light. So thirdly and lastly, God must give new sight in a new birth.

[15 : 08] God must give new sight in a new birth. John tells us that there is a general pattern in the world. The world is kind of shorthand for humanity in John's Gospel.

Human beings universally are like this, he's saying, a pattern that when you boil it down, it is grossly negative towards Jesus Christ. Up until now, he uses words to describe the world, doesn't he? Darkness, verse 5. There's this ignorance, the world did not know him, verse 10. There's this hatred of Jesus, the world did not receive him.

But then comes this ray of light, because it turns out that there are some people who are marked out as ones who go against this pattern of the world.

Verse 12, but to all who did receive him, he gave the right to become children of God. There are some who do recognize who Jesus is, and who do open the door to him, and host him, if you like, and receive him.

[16 : 31] It's unfathomable, John says, that despite being made by Jesus, the world does not know him. But this is even more of a surprise, that despite being blind, some people do believe.

that is a miracle. Because true Christian belief has got nothing to do with human potential.

Actually, it's got very little to do with you, and your family connections, and your ethnicity. He says, doesn't he, those who received him, it wasn't because of blood, or the will of the flesh, or the will of

man.

this belief, this incredible miracle of belief, happens not because some people might fall back on their better nature, or have more spiritual potential than other people, or they've got a religious gene.

The miracle happens, do you see, at the end of verse 13, because they are born of God. It is when God causes something in them, it is when God causes a deep change, it is like being born, he says, and born again, so that the blind can recognise Jesus, and receive him, and trust in him, and have life in his name.

[18 : 03] And without doing that, without God doing that, Jesus may even be at the very door of your life, but actually you'd rather he left his coat on, you'd rather he didn't get too comfortable, you'd rather he didn't stay for too long.

Let me say that if you're here and you're not a believer, you're not a Christian, and you know that, it's really good that you are here, we are delighted that you are here, and if you wonder why that is, maybe you kind of look at others and you think, I wish I could have their faith, something like that. John knows why. He knows why you don't believe. It is because even despite your best efforts, you just cannot recognise who Jesus is on your own.

John is showing us, isn't he, that this whole belief thing, whilst it is a simple thing, it is actually much harder than we imagined, than we thought.

Until you are born of God, it is impossible to believe. Yet, if you were here last week, John's aim at the end of the gospel is that we may believe, isn't it?

[19 : 23] He wants us to believe. He tells us we can't do it, and yet he wants us to do it. What is going on there? Well, that's the thing, because by knowing that it is something that you cannot do in yourself, therein lies the key of doing it.

We cannot fall back on something within ourselves, on our better nature. All we can do is see our radical blindness to who Jesus is. And just as we need God to intervene and come into creation, to come into the box, we also need him to give us eyes to see who he is.

So true belief is actually all about God, isn't it? what he does, what he does for us. And so we need to pray for his help with this.

Let us do that now. tell you a little a little a little a little a little a little a little a little a little