



## INTRO:

Among his many works, Charles Dickens wrote a little book on the life of Christ for his children. In it he says this, *“My dear children I am very anxious that you should know something about the history of Jesus Christ. For EVERYBODY oughta know about Him. (Because) no one who ever lived was so good, so kind, so gentle, AND so sorry for anyone who ever did wrong or was ill or miserable...as he was.”*<sup>1</sup> Just a great little quote. Cuz given the significance of Jesus, everyone SHOULD know about Him or at the least have the opportunity to take an honest look AT Him... THAT is what we’re attempting to do with this series we began last week entitled, **“That You Believe”** - just go verse-by-verse/chapter-by-chapter through the most famous account we have of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ - the Gospel of John... And if you were with us last week, you know we opened with the picture John gives us of Jesus; namely, Jesus being what he called *“the Word”* - this beautifully complex God-Man, who being fully God is really beyond ability to categorize. Describing Him is like trying to describe the significance of Shakespeare in tweet. Fully God! But too, Fully Man, meaning not a historical invention... And so the question we’re asking today/which John effectively poses to us in our NEXT set of verses is this: **How do you relate to someone like that? What’s it take?** Do ya relate to Him as an example for how to live; a resource for living better; maybe an inspiration, perhaps someone to appease, what? **What’s it take to relate to Him?** That’s the question. So WITH that question in mind: Let’s STAND and follow along in the reading of our next set of verses in *John*. **(PAUSE RECORD)**

## TEXT:<sup>2</sup>

So you can see that, not only does John include a MASSIVE amount theological content in these verses, but he does so in somewhat of a disjointed nature - you see he talks about John the Baptist, then Jesus, then how different groups of people relate to Jesus, then BACK to Jesus, John and again Jesus. You can see, He’s not presenting a chronological argument here, but rather a kind of wide-angle view on how we’re RELATE to Jesus - you see all the language there or *“believing,” “receiving,” “knowing,” “seeing,” “being children of God.”* That’s relating language... And with that language what John does in this passage is give you **4 Things** you gotta understand if you wanna relate well to Him: **4 Things: The Problem, The Solution, The Scandal and The Proof.** So **First, The Problem:** And of course anytime we’re talking about problems from a Biblical perspective, we always gotta come back to “sin.” From a Biblical perspective, the underlying problem - the thing that brings about ALL our problems - is not lack of education, or political instability, wealth gaps, even racial injustice, but sin and hearts corrupted BY sin. But NOTICE here, sin - contrary to popular belief - is not so much a breaking of the rules, but rather a switched relationship. Look at **vv.10-11** there. As Tim Keller points out, you don’t see anything in there about rules being broken.<sup>3</sup> No! **What does it say?** It’s says *“the world,”* meaning humanity doesn’t *“know”* and *“receive”* Jesus. - That even though Jesus, who as we saw last week and it says again here, has made the world and come into the world;

<sup>1</sup> Quote cited in <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-brothers-zahl/id11552891662?i=1000569223199>

<sup>2</sup> Various insights throughout adapted from: Podcast: “46. Born Not Of Blood - 5/24/22” - <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/larkcast/id1339351918?i=1000563493075> + “47. Grace Upon Grace - 6/1/22 - <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/larkcast/id1339351918?i=1000564808350>

<sup>3</sup> “The Sin beneath the Sins: The Apostles’ Creed; Getting a Vocabulary for Faith - November 28, 1999 - John 1:9–14” - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

ironically, we don't recognize Him. We don't "receive" Him. By nature we reject Him! THAT is our **problem**! And you say, "maybe some people's problem right? But not everyone." Well unfortunately, yes, everyone. Cuz look again at **vv.10-11**. In **v.10** it says that, by nature, the "world" rejects Jesus right? And in as much as that word for "world" there is a reference to humanity proper, it's more specifically a reference to BROKEN humanity - what you might call immoral, irreligious rule-breaking humanity...BUT if you look also in **v.11** it says that when Jesus came to "His own people" - **and who were Jesus' people?** - Jews right? So not immoral, irreligious, rule-breaking Gentiles, but rather moral, religious, rule-KEEPING Jews - when Jesus came to THEM, they TOO "didn't receive Him"/rejected Him. **So what's John saying?** He's saying the big problem...for ALL of us - both the supposedly good AND supposedly bad - the Saint Katherines and also the Karens...is that we ALL equally miss Jesus! Later in **Romans 3:23**, the Apostle Paul echoed this when he said, "For ALL have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." We've ALL equally missed and rejected Jesus!

A number of years ago, the Washington Post published a story about Joshua Bell. If you don't know, Joshua Bell is maybe the world's most famous violinist. He's been called "America's best classical musician." If you wanna see him in concert you're gonna have to pony up, MINIMUM \$100/ticket. And people do it! He fills up Carnegie Hall all the time. Back in 2007 he was in DC for a concert and a news outlet put him up to an experiment. He went down - anonymously - into a DC Metro station during rush hour, put out a hat to collect tips like a regular subway performer and then proceeded to play his \$3.5 million Stradivarius violin for an hour. Keep in mind, thousands of people had literally just paid hundreds of dollars EACH to hear this guy play. BUT over the course of an hour, in which he simply stood there playing Bach and Brahms, no more than 6 people stopped and even paid attention to him. Many even passed by scowling, as if he was in their way.<sup>4</sup>... "The true light, John says, which gives light to everyone...was in the world...yet the world did not know him...did not receive him." The **problem** under all our **problems** is that NONE of us naturally recognizes or receives Jesus, as the "true light." It's why, no matter how hard we try, we nevertheless then continue to live in all kinds of darkness - darkness about our purpose, where we came from, where we're going - darkness about what it means to be human, about freedom and how to be free of guilt, enjoy love, acceptance - darkness about how to deal with evil and suffering and find courage in the face of death. Our **problem** is not primarily disobedience or rule-breaking, but distrust, and even disdain for Jesus. THAT'S "the mark of lostness in the world."<sup>5</sup> And until you understand that - just like a bulimic has an unhealthy relationship to food - you'll have an unhealthy relationship to God, because you won't taking into account the main issue. **Do you see that your main problem isn't just what you DO wrong, but who you refuse to trust?**

**Second**, ya gotta understand, not just Problem, but the **Solution** too! And you see it there in **vv.14-18** when John speaks of Jesus coming to earth. As he says, the "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." And the imagery there is from **Exodus 32-34** in which as a part of leading His

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/pearls-before-breakfast-can-one-of-the-nations-great-musicians-cut-through-the-fog-of-a-dc-rush-hour-lets-find-out/2014/09/23/8a6d46da-4331-11e4-b47c-f5889e061e5f\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/pearls-before-breakfast-can-one-of-the-nations-great-musicians-cut-through-the-fog-of-a-dc-rush-hour-lets-find-out/2014/09/23/8a6d46da-4331-11e4-b47c-f5889e061e5f_story.html)

<sup>5</sup> D. A. Carson, "Incarnation," in *D. A. Carson Sermon Library* (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2016), Jn 1:1-18. + Lark Sanctification

people Israel into the Promised Land, God established what became known as the Tabernacle - this place where He partially and temporarily made His home among His people. It's THAT imagery which John is pulling from here, because when He says, "*Jesus became flesh and dwelt among us,*" the Greek word for "*dwelt*" there is "tabernacled" - that in Christ, God has not partially or temporarily, finally and fully made His home with us by literally "*putting on skin.*" **Think about that!**...If that's true/and it is, it means, you understand: No more wondering if God is far off...No more wondering if He's with you or for you...No more wondering what He's like or even if He likes you!...Heck, it means no more life being about what you need to do to get to God, cuz He's come to you. I mean if you've ever been frustrated/and who of us hasn't at thinking about all you gotta do or why this is on your shoulders; then this is INCREDIBLY good news! Cuz it shows you that God has met you where you are NOT where you SHOULD be! AND it shows you why God incarnating/big word, INCARNATING in the person of Christ is such a great **Solution!**...Cuz it MEANS that God's addressed our deepest **problem.** If your deepest problem, remember, is not so much rule-breaking and disobedience, but disdain and distrust of God/not recognizing Him for who He is, then the way to **solve** that isn't by reproofing your behavior; but by recalibrating your belief! And what better way to recalibrate belief than by coming to you live and in-person...As John says, whereas before "*No one had ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, (NOW) he's made him known...we've now seen (God's) glory... FULL of grace and truth.*" "*Grace upon grace*" as he says in **v.16.** And I love that "*full of grace and truth*" there, cuz it's saying that, in coming to you, Jesus has not only revealed God/depicted His "*glory,*" but that God's glory is by definition an over abundance of BOTH "*grace*" AND "*truth.*" NOT "*grace*" OR "*truth,*" like some ying-yang, where they're pitted against each other, but "*grace AND truth*"...in the "*fullest*"! Full of "*truth,*" meaning there's not an ounce of duplicity or spin in Jesus. And also full of "*grace,*" meaning there's nothing but welcome and invitation WITH Jesus. He's someone you can not only trust, but safely ENtrust yourself to. I mean you really take that in, and it recalibrates EVERYTHING about how you relate to God!

It's like my wife. When she was a little her mom/my mother-in-law took her in for a routine doctor's appointment. And as the physician's doing all the diagnostics, he realizes that perhaps Abby could stand to wear glasses. So he asks Abby's mom if she'd ever had a hard time seeing, to which she said, "*no, I think she sees fine.*" But they went ahead fit her with a trial prescription anyway/got her a cute little pair of kid glasses. So Abby gets these glasses and the first thing she does with em on is...run outside to play. And she's playing and playing when all of the sudden, she looks up toward the sky and just freezes...and then darts back in the house yelling, "*mommy mommy, look...The trees have tops!*"...All that time/without glasses, trees were just blurry blobs without any definition! But NOW, it was like the outdoors got completely recalibrated!...When John says, "*The true light, which gives light to everyone, has come into the world*"...and "*No one has ever seen God...(but now Jesus) has made him known,*" what He's saying is that our **problem** of not recognizing God for who He is...is **solved!** JESUS has brought God into high-def. in a way that if you REALLY see it, it'll recalibrate EVERYTHING! **Do you see Jesus for who He is? And are you willing to let that sight recalibrate everything?**

**Third**, ya gotta see *The Problem, The Solution*, but ya also gotta see **The Scandal**. And I say scandal BECAUSE you'd assume, right, that the way to interact with God/ESPECIALLY if He showed up like Jesus did, would be the way you interact with any powerful person; namely, through what you might call "moralism"; meaning, if you're bad you try to be good in their presence. If you're immoral, work hard to become moral in the way they define it. If you're irreligious, get involved in church. ***I mean isn't that what most people think it means to interact with God, religion, spirituality; certainly to become a Christian?*** Like "*I see the Sermon on the Mount/and Jesus' teachings, so I'm gonna try my best to live up.*" That's kinda standard fair **right?** And honestly, it's standard fair, because it IS fair! If you uphold your end of the contract, in this case obey God's teachings, then God upholds His by saving and blessing you! Every religion in history has operated this way.

But notice what John says - the repetition of things he says that are almost the exact OPPOSITE of that. For example, he says: **v.7**, that John the Baptist - and I'll explain more about him in a second - but his ministry in pointing people to Jesus was not PRIMARILY one of pointing people to OBEY Jesus, **but what?** "*BELIEVE in Jesus.*" ...Or look in **vv.10-12** where John distinguishes between people who interact well with Jesus from those who don't. And you notice he doesn't distinguish them in terms of their behavior, but their what? Their "*belief!*" Specifically, whether or not they "*know, receive and believe in Jesus' name,*" which is to say, NOT whether follow the rules perfectly, but whether you put your trust/your confidence in who Jesus is. Since of course a person's name represents who they are...Or look in **v.13**. John says, that "*becoming children of God*"/literally coming into right relationship with God as your Father is not by "*blood*" or "*will,*" but what? "*God!*" meaning, neither your upbringing or traditions, NOR your most moral and religious deeds can bring you into God's family. Rather, the only thing that can cause you to be related well to God - for the first time and continually - is simply trusting in Jesus' name, and what He did for you. Saying, "*Father God, please accept me NOT because of what I'm doing NOW, or on the basis of what I CAN do, or on the basis of what I HAVE done, but simply on the basis of what JESUS has done*" ...When you do that, two things happen to you: **One**, you're, as John says in **v.12**, "*given right to become a child of God.*" That means you're adopted/accepted. So not just that your sins are forgiven and pardoned, but that you're brought into a permanent relationship of love and acceptance with God. And NOT cuz you earned it, but because Jesus loves you enough to include you BEFORE you could ever earn it...But then **Two**, you're born again! It says made a "*child of God, and born not of blood or the will, but spiritually,*" which is to say that God puts His own spiritual DNA in you. You actually begin to become a new person.<sup>6</sup>

***So do you see how really pretty scandalous this is?*** That in ***solving*** your ***problem*** of not recognizing God, Jesus has come AS God, BUT in doing so, determined to relate to you on the basis of grace rather than you in some way having to commend yourself to Him! It's unheard of!... Incidentally, this is why John can say in **v.17**, that, "*the law was given through Moses; (but) grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*" Not because the OT Law is bad and Jesus is good

<sup>6</sup> Insights about two things happening adapted from "The Sin beneath the Sins: The Apostles' Creed; Getting a Vocabulary for Faith - November 28, 1999 - John 1:9-14" - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

or something, but because JESUS is the definitive revelation of God, for WHICH the Law was always just a pointer - a reminder that just like a thermometer versus a thermostat can only ever REVEAL the temperature, but not actually CHANGE it; the Law can only reveal God's truth, but not actually bring it about in our hearts. Only grace on TOP of truth can do that! So only when you see that Jesus graciously invites you to relate to Him on the basis of HIS performance and not yours, will YOUR "spiritual performance" ever be impacted. Cuz how can you look at Christ - right now - and see how much He loves you that He would not only reveal who God is TO you, but ultimately die FOR you - and NOT say, "*I surrender. I wanna obey and follow you Lord!*" **It's Scandalous! Have you let yourself be amazed by the scandal of Jesus inviting you to relate to Him, not through toil but trust? Have you?**

Which brings us ***Finally and very briefly to, How You Can Know Whether Ya Have Or Not?*** A "**Proof**," as it were for relating to God. And it's found in all the references there to John the Baptist - not John the Gospel writer, but this other John, who was BOTH a kind of odd, NT prophet, who's sole ministry was to be for Jesus what a headliner band is to be for a main act AND an archetype - you see his words there in **v.15** - archetype for how we relate to Jesus. ***And what do you see there IN v.15 as well as vv.6-8 ABOUT how John related to Jesus/about his ministry?*** You see he simply saw himself as a "witness" ***right?*** It says, "*He came as a witness; to bear witness about the light*"; "*(He) bore witness about (Jesus).*" John's whole ministry/the way he related to Jesus, was simply about helping people SEE what had been previously UNseen. Meaning John didn't see himself as an apologist needing to angrily make a case for Jesus. OR an inventor needing to create classes and programs for GETTING people to serve Jesus. He wasn't a manager striving to make people PRODUCTIVE for Jesus. And he certainly didn't see himself as some religious headmaster exacting behavior FOR Jesus. No! He was a "*witness*" - simply a person pointing other people to see and believe Jesus. ***Why?*** Because John - like anyone who understands the humanizing nature of the Gospel - understood that however different we think we are from each other, we're all the same. We ALL suffer from the same sin ***problem*** of switched relationship that comes from not recognizing God for who He is. We've ALL been given the same ***solution*** in Jesus. And we ALL have the same opportunity to receive life IN Jesus, given that it's by faith. We're all the same. And if we're all the same, then the goal isn't making people better or different. It's pointing them to, in a sense, enjoy what's already there's - the ***scandalous*** love and acceptance of Christ! "*Witnessing!*"...When you begin to see people that way/in a sense re-humanizing them because of the Gospel, such that ALL you then wanna do is be a "witness" to Christ FOR em - it shows you're beginning to get it. ***Proof*** that you understand "***What It Takes***" - Nothing but Jesus and Jesus alone!...***Let's Pray!***