

Sermon Series Four: Believe and Live
(The Gospel of John: Signs of the Messiah - 1:1-12:50)
John 1:10-13

Who is Jesus? (Part 3: Jesus: Rejected and Received)

Certainly all of us can identify with the feeling of being rejected. When we experience relational hurts (whether through actions, words, or lack of encouragement), we often use phrases like "She broke my heart," or "He hurt my feelings," or it was like getting "punched in the gut." Researcher and neuroscientist Matthew D. Lieberman set out to study the pain of social rejection. One of his studies involved putting people in a brain scanner while they played an Internet video game called Cyberball where three "people" (a subject and two computerized "players") toss a ball around to each other. The point of Cyberball is to make the research subject feel rejected. At first, all three players toss the ball to each other in turn. But at a certain point, the other two players cut the poor research participant out of the game. They toss the ball just to each other. The research subjects were really hurt. They started feeling distress. They felt rejected. When they came out of the scanner, they kept talking to the researchers about how upset they were. But the most interesting part of the study is how their brains processed the social rejection. To the brain, social pain feels a lot like physical pain—a broken heart can feel like a broken leg, as Lieberman puts it. Lieberman writes, "Looking at the [brain scans], side by side, without knowing which was an analysis of physical pain and which was an analysis of social pain, you wouldn't have been able to tell the difference." In other words, "When human beings experience threats or damage to their social bonds, the brain responds in much the same way it responds to physical pain." Have you ever wondered why most people reject Christ while others receive him as Savior and Lord? I wonder how Christ felt and how he feels today when daily he is rejected. Well, let's take a look at the reasons why people reject and why people receive Jesus Christ into their heart and lives.

I. Why do people reject Christ? (John 1:10, 11)

¹⁰ *He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.* ¹¹ *He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.*

1. They do so out of ignorance of who he is.

Even though Christ created the world, the people in the world did not recognize who he was. They had forgotten him. "Christ the Creator" had become "Christ the unknown." The first half of John's gospel documents how not only the pagan world, but even Israel, failed to recognize Jesus as Messiah and Savior of the world, rejecting the light, including all demonstrations of Jesus's deity and Messiahship. When we say they did not recognize, the original language

demonstrates that this was more than mere intellectual recognition, but a willful refusal to accept or believe. Indeed the basic sin in John's gospel is the failure to know and believe in Jesus. Amazingly, in America, many do not know who Jesus is beyond merely name recognition.

Joshua Bell emerged from the Metro and positioned himself against a wall beside a trash basket. By most measures, he was nondescript—a youngish white man in jeans, a long-sleeved T-shirt, and a Washington Nationals baseball cap. From a small case, he removed a violin. Placing the open case at his feet, he shrewdly threw in a few dollars and pocket change as seed money and began to play. For the next 45 minutes, in the D.C. Metro on January 12, 2007, Bell played Mozart and Schubert as over 1,000 people streamed by, most hardly taking notice. If they had paid attention, they might have recognized the young man for the world-renowned violinist he is. They also might have noted the violin he played—a rare Stradivarius worth over \$3 million. It was all part of a project arranged by *The Washington Post*—"an experiment in context, perception, and priorities—as well as an unblinking assessment of public taste. In a banal setting, at an inconvenient time, would beauty transcend?" Just three days earlier, Joshua Bell sold out Boston Symphony Hall, with ordinary seats going for \$100. In the subway, Bell garnered about \$32 from the 27 people who stopped long enough to give a donation.

2. They do so due to spiritual blindness.

Second Corinthians 4:3-4 tells us that "*the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel.*" Satan has done this for centuries by making the lost skeptical about first the historicity of Christ, then the resurrection, the deity of Christ, the message of Christ, and that Christ is the only way to heaven. (Donald Grey Barnhouse tells the story of preaching during a blackout in World War II England. One evening after he had been preaching in the dark for about 20 minutes, someone in a back room accidentally threw the main switch that turned on all the lights in the church. Instantly there was panic and commotion in the congregation. A blind man sitting in the front was quite agitated that the famous preacher would stop preaching until he was told what had happened. This man is a picture of the blindness of the world when Jesus came into it. He was the light of the world. But the world blindly went about its business until John the Baptist came crying "the light is on!")

A website called the "**Experience Project**" describes itself as the place to share "life experiences from people like you." In one post, readers were asked to respond to the following statement: "I prefer darkness over light." A young woman going

by the screen name "Beyond Repair" offered a particularly honest—and insightful—response:

I prefer darkness over light. The darkness allows me to hide who I am and what I truly feel. In the light all things have a chance to be revealed Darkness makes it easier to hide. In the dark you cannot see what is coming next The darkness is a place where you can lose yourself. Lost in the dark is a great place to be because then you are free from what you were and can be what you want. The darkness is bliss.

3. They do so due to human depravity.

1) **They do not want to recognize him due to the self-centeredness and the self absorption of their hearts.** Christ gets in the way of the fulfillment of their plans and their sinful desires.

2) **He does not meet their expectations or requires more than they desire to give him.** Israel rejected Christ because they rejected the Scriptures showing that the Messiah would be a suffering servant. They didn't want to hear about that! When Jesus laid out the cost of discipleship the majority of his disciples reacted saying, "*This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?*" People are still saying that today. They want discipleship to be easy and simple instead of hard and costly because they do not realize that the way of the cross leads to the placing of the crown.

In his article titled "Unreasonable Doubt," Jim Spiegel quotes two contemporary philosophers who have resisted belief in God for personal and not just intellectual reasons. Thomas Nagel, an atheist who authored a popular introduction to philosophy titled *What Does It All Mean?* wrote: "I want atheism to be true ... It isn't just that I don't believe in God, and, naturally, hope that I'm right about my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that."

The 20th-century ethics philosopher Mortimer Adler (who was baptized quietly at age 81) confessed to rejecting religious commitment for most of his life because it "would require a radical change in my way of life, a basic alteration in the direction of my day-to-day choices as well as in the ultimate objectives to be sought or hoped for The simple truth of the matter is that I did not wish to live up to being a genuinely religious person."

3) **They claim that God has failed to communicate in an understandable way to them when in fact:** (1) they have ignored the prophecies of his coming even though nearly every tribe and nation now has the Old Testament in their language; (2) they dismiss the evidence of his miracles even though they see the

miracle of transformed lives and hear the miracles of the Scriptures; (3) they despise and reject his messengers again and again throughout the history of the church.

The Atlantic magazine asked a number of experts to weigh in on the following question: "What was the worst business decision ever made?" Listen to what some of the experts said:

- "In the mid-1970s, a young engineer named Steve Sasson invented the world's first digital camera. He secured a patent for it on behalf of his employer, then pitched his bosses on a new business model based on the invention. They passed. Today, digital cameras are ubiquitous—and Sasson's company, Kodak, is emerging from bankruptcy." (Daniel Pink).
- "Apple's firing of Steve Jobs in 1985 set the company back for a dozen years and drove it to near-bankruptcy. Apple only saved itself by rehiring him in 1997, at which point he went on to make Apple the most financially valuable—and influential—tech company in the world." (Walt Mossberg).
- **THESE DECISIONS PALE IN COMPARISON TO THE DECISION OF REJECTING CHRIST**

II. Why do people receive Christ? (John 1:12, 13)

¹² *But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,* ¹³ *who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

1. They recognize the tragedy of their situation and their complete inability to deliver themselves from it and so see and believe in Christ. There can be *no faith without repentance* and there can be *no repentance without recognizing the enormity of one's sin*. As Paul clearly states we were once slaves to our sinful nature and regularly engaged in either outwardly or inwardly the sins of sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, orgies and the like. (Galatians 5:19-21). And *one cannot recognize the enormity of their sin without recognizing their total helplessness* to free themselves from it. This expression "*believe in the name*" of Jesus is found only in John's writings. It means to believe that he bears the divine name - that all he says concerning himself is true. It is to receive him and confess him (Romans 10:9, 10).

2. They begin to recognize the blessings that Christ offers them.

- 1) Adoption into a brand-new family - "children of God."
- 2) Authoritatively declared by Christ to be his child and ambassador.

(The story is told of Napoleon's horse suddenly rearing up and nearly unseating him. A corporal leaped forward and grabbed the reins the Emperor's horse and brought it under control. Napoleon turned to the corporal and said, "Thank you, Captain! The corporal asked him "Captain of what?" "Captain of my guards" answered Napoleon. The corporal immediately went and joined Napoleon's guard and was received as a captain by the staff. Now that was only possible because of the authority of the commander involved. We go forth and live in the world upon the highest authority - the King of Kings and Lord of Lords!) We have been given "*the right to become children of God.*"

3. They understand what it means to receive Christ.

1) One is not saved because of their pedigree (*not of blood*).

A Jew was not saved simply because he was of the physical descent of Abraham. We cannot confuse physical birth with spiritual birth as Nicodemus did. Because the life of the flesh is in the blood, many Jews thought that "blood birth" was equivalent to spiritual birth. Today we would speak of people with noble blood or someone who is a blueblood. One's station in life, popularity, or power has no bearing on their salvation whatsoever. God does not show favoritism! Your denomination, the belief of your parents, the popularity of your church has no bearing on your salvation.

2) One is not saved by a merely emotional response (*nor of the will of the flesh*).

This is a very difficult phrase and has been interpreted differently. What is helpful is to realize that the word "flesh" in the New Testament is used of our natural appetites or emotions. As James Montgomery Boice says, "John is saying that a person cannot become a child of God by exercising his emotions anymore than he can become God's child by being born of privileged parents." We are not saved by a sudden emotional impulse, but by full commitment and faith in Jesus Christ. That is what sometimes happens when people come forward in a burst of emotion, pray a prayer to accept Christ, and then soon live a lifestyle that shows no commitment to Christ.

3) One is not saved by human initiative (*nor of the will of man*).

Paul tells us that no one seeks after God on his own. We cannot by mere determination or human effort (of any sort) become children of God. Nor can we, or do we, decide the path to, or requirements of, salvation.

4) One is saved by divine initiative and human responsibility.

(1) God lovingly pursues them.

(2) They respond by believing in or receiving Christ as their Savior and Lord.

Conclusion

John begins his book by answering the question “Who is Jesus?” He does this in a number of ways. Jesus is God; Jesus is the Word; Jesus is Life; Jesus is Light. Today, we have taken a look at the “Rejected Jesus” and the “Received Jesus.” The question is which is Jesus to you, your family or your friends. Trusting in and receiving Jesus will sometimes take a fearful step of faith. But the step will make all the difference in your life or their life for eternity! Riding the first elevators required an act of faith **You have undoubtedly been on an elevator that bears his name, Otis. Otis elevators have been the industry standard for more than 150 years. While Elisha Otis did not invent the elevator, he did devise the braking system that ensured its safety. At the time, most elevators were little more than open platforms. They'd come apart and people would be seriously injured if the cable broke. And without a trustworthy braking system, elevators were earthbound and building heights were limited to a mere six stories. With it, the sky was the limit. The braking system for elevators made modern skyscrapers possible. But initially Elisha Otis had trouble selling his elevators, until 1854 when he concocted a creative sales pitch at the Crystal Palace Exhibition in Manhattan. Every hour at the exposition, the World's Fair of its day, Otis stepped into his machine. He gave the order to an assistant who cut the rope. The crowd held its breath. The brake kicked in, the elevator stopped and Otis announced: "All safe, gentlemen. All safe." With this demonstration, Otis quickly sold his first three elevators for \$300 apiece. Today, New York City alone has about 70,000 elevators, and it's estimated that the equivalent of the world's population travels on an Otis elevator, escalator, or moving walkway every three days. This story shows the critical difference between knowing about something or someone and putting your faith in something or someone. Jesus is and must be the object of our faith.** Ultimately everyone is confronted with the person of Jesus and they will either accept him or reject him. Who is Jesus to you?