

BELIEVE IN HIS NAME

John 1:1-18

Key Verse: 1:12

“Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God....”

We can find many key verses in John 1:1-18. But we chose verse 12 as a key verse, because it is related to the purpose of John’s gospel as stated in 20:31: “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” In verses 1-18, the author introduces who Jesus is in many ways: the Word (1,14), God (1,18), the light (4,5,7,8,9), the one and only Son (14,18), and Jesus Christ (17). These descriptions are also referred to by 21 pronouns (he, him, his, himself). All together Jesus is referred to 37 times in 18 verses. We can say that this passage is all about Jesus. Not only does the author directly mention Jesus, but he also introduces the testimony of John the Baptist. Furthermore, he included himself, together with others as Jesus’ witnesses. So in verses 14 and 16, he says “we” have seen his glory, and “we” have all received grace. In addition, John tells us how Jesus is related to the world. The word “world” appears four times in this passage (9,10) and 74 times throughout all of John’s gospel. It refers to the dominion ruled by Satan, “the prince of this world” (12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Though the world was made through Jesus, it was estranged from its Creator due to people’s sins. However, Jesus came into the world as a human being to save mankind from sin and Satan.

As we observe this passage, we can find some important contrasts: light and darkness, belief and unbelief, law and grace. These contrasts help us understand the significance of believing in Jesus. To believe or not believe is a personal decision that each human being will make, and it has serious eternal consequences. To believe in Jesus we must know who he is and what he has done. This is what we can learn in today’s passage.

First, Jesus is God (1-9). If we ask people who Jesus is, there will be many different answers, but they will fall into two major categories: Jesus is God, or

Jesus is just a human being. Though many people say they believe in Jesus, they miss the main point of who he is. The author John, from the beginning of his gospel, clearly proclaims that Jesus is God, and at the same time is fully human. He begins in verses 1-2, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning." Why does the author refer to Jesus as "the Word"? It is because Jesus is a personal being who speaks, not an impersonal energy force. Jesus speaks the word of life. Revelation 19:13 says, "His name is the Word of God." The phrase "with God" is repeated in verses 1-2. It literally means "toward God." It signifies engaging in a mutual love relationship. God and the Word are distinct from each other, but are one in love. John is not trying to explain the Trinity, which is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Rather, he declares that Jesus is God who was there in eternity. John plainly says that the Word was God. This means that Jesus has the same attributes as the Father God. As the Father God is eternal, almighty and life-giving, so is Jesus.

John makes an amazing declaration in verse 3: "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made." God created the universe through Jesus. This is such a fantastic statement that we need to think about it in concrete terms. Every day in the city of Chicago we see airplanes flying overhead. Do you know how hard it is to make an airplane? As an example, take the Airbus A380. It has approximately four million parts produced by 1,500 companies from 30 countries around the world.¹ Do these airplanes exist by chance or did someone create them? Can you imagine how big a galaxy is? Scientists estimate that there are about 100 billion galaxies. Among them is our Milky Way, which has about 100 billion stars. On the other hand, consider the micro world. It seems to be another universe. On the earth, there are so many kinds of flowers, insects and animals. God's creation is so vast and diverse that we could go on and on about it. Do you think all of these things came into existence by chance? Or developed from an amoeba? If someone believes that, it is amazing faith. The Bible says that all these things were made through Jesus. When Jesus made all things, it was with a great purpose and a great plan.

Another amazing declaration is in verse 4: "In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind." Where does life come from? Scientists try to define

¹ <https://apod.nasa.gov/apod/archivepix.html>

life in many ways, and scholars have many theories about where life came from. But sometimes all they say that life is life and non-life is non-life. The Bible tells us very clearly where life comes from. The origin and source of life is Jesus. The ultimate source of our lives is not our parents, but Jesus. Since our lives came from Jesus, they belong to him. Some people claim, "My life belongs to me. Don't interfere with my life, okay?" But actually, we are all stewards of the life Jesus gave us. When we recognize Jesus as our Creator and life Source and live for him, we live the most meaningful and dynamic lives. We are part of a grand, glorious harmony, which reveals God's glory.

Jesus' life has a marvelous impact on people. It is the light of all mankind. Since Adam's fall, all human beings fell into darkness. They look alive, but actually they are dead. They don't know where they came from or where they are going. They lost the meaning and purpose of life. They suffer from despair, meaninglessness, fear of death, doubt, anxiety, hatred and bitterness. They seem to have no way and no hope. But Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (Jn 8:12b). Also he said, "Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light" (Jn 12:36).

Verse 5 says, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." Here the darkness refers to the evil world, a realm ruled by Satan. By its very nature darkness hates the light and cannot understand the light. At the same time, darkness cannot overcome the light. There are so many realms of darkness in our society: the abortion industry, human sex trafficking and pornography, the illegal drug trade, racial injustice and so on. When we think about the dark sides of our society, it is easy to feel overwhelmed and become negative. But we should know that Jesus' light overpowers the darkness. Jesus is the true light that gives light to every man (9). We need Jesus' light. John the Baptist was like a small lamp, but Jesus is like the blazing sun and has great power to give us eternal life. Human lights come and go, but Jesus' light is eternal. When we accept Jesus' light in our hearts, it expels all the darkness, and enables us to shine Jesus' light to our neighbors. "Shine, Jesus, shine! Fill this land with the Father's glory!"

People living in darkness desperately need the light. The problem is that they are not aware they are in the darkness. They are in the darkness because they don't know who Jesus is. This is true of many who grew up in a Christian culture. According to a 2014 Barna poll, as new generations of Americans arise, fewer believe that Jesus is God.² They need a witness. That is why God raised John the Baptist as a witness to the light. When John testified about Jesus, the whole nation was stirred and many people came to Jesus. There are also other witnesses. While in Russia, I met Missionary Peter Yun of Astana, Kazakhstan. Once, he read a book by an atheist scientist that proclaimed there is no God. Peter was so angry and determined that he would be a witness to reveal God in this dark world. He went to Astana as a self-supporting missionary. It has not been easy to support himself. His brother invited him to take over a grocery business in the Philippines and make \$50,000 per month. Instead, Peter got a job as a professor in a university making \$200 per month. God is raising many witnesses around the world to testify to people in the darkness. Let's pray to be one of them.

Second, Jesus gives the right... (10-13). When Jesus came into the world, how did people respond? Verses 10-11 say, "He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him." Why did the world not recognize its Creator and Owner? John tells us several reasons in his gospel. One is that people loved the darkness instead of the light because their deeds were evil (Jn 3:19). Another reason is that they did not love God or seek his glory; they loved human praise more than praise from God (5:42,44; 12:43). Those who love human praise and glory have no room in their hearts to accept Jesus. A further reason is that they demanded miraculous signs for their own benefit and ignored the meaning of the signs--which revealed who Jesus is (2:23-24; 4:48; 6:34-35). Jesus once fed 5,000 hungry people with five loaves and two fish. They became excited and wanted to make him a King by force. But Jesus taught them, "I am the Bread of Life," who gives eternal life. Still, they kept asking for bread and in the end they rejected Jesus. In the same way, when we stubbornly demand our own benefit, we will end up rejecting Jesus. An additional reason is that they saw Jesus from a human point of view (1:46; 6:42). He was from the despised region

² <https://www.barna.com/research/what-do-americans-believe-about-jesus-5-popular-beliefs/>

of Galilee, had a poor family background, no social position, and no advanced education. When people saw him from a merely human perspective, they did not respect him, and rejected him. We can do the same when we see Jesus and his ministry from a merely human perspective.

When we see that so many people reject Jesus, it seems there is no hope. But there is hope. There were some truth seekers who followed Jesus and accepted him. They were Andrew, Simon Peter, Philip, Nathanael, and John himself (1:35-51). Among the Sanhedrin members, Nicodemus came to follow Jesus, together with Joseph of Arimathea (19:38-39). A Samaritan woman and her entire village believed in Jesus (4:42). A royal official and his family believed in Jesus based on his word (4:53). A man born blind experienced Jesus' healing grace and saw Jesus as the Messiah (9:38). Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, Mary Magdalene, and others believed in Jesus.

What blessings were given to those who believed in him? Let's read verse 12: "Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God--...."³ In Greek, the verb "receive" is in the aorist tense and the word "believed" is in the present tense, which means it is ongoing. These two verbs indicate that a person receives Jesus at a certain point in time and continues to believe in Jesus from that moment onward. Receiving Jesus is the beginning of a relationship that grows and develops. Jesus wants us to grow more and more like him every day by trusting in him continuously. Sometimes we feel that we are not growing. Then we need to come to Jesus and have a quiet time with him. He will renew his relationship with us and help us grow continually.

When we believe in Jesus' name, we receive tremendous blessings. It is not just a possession or some kind of treasure; it is a complete change in status to become children of God. Recently, we heard the good news that Joe and Faith Grady successfully adopted 18 month-old twin babies: Grace Seohee and Joseph Seojoon. These precious children are no longer orphans, but will grow in a godly

³ In this verse, verb tenses are important. The Lexham English Bible translated this verse: "But as many as received him--to those who believe in his name--he gave them authority to become children of God." The word "received" is in the aorist verb tense. It is hard to explain the equivalent in English. Simply speaking, it means something happened in the past without reference to completeness, duration or repetition. The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines "aorist" as: an inflectional form of a verb typically denoting simple occurrence of an action without reference to its completeness, duration, or repetition.

home and enjoy a blessed life. It is wonderful for them and the answer to our prayers. However, becoming children of God is an even greater change in status. It is like Old Testament Joseph going from the lowest prison cell to being prince of Egypt in a day, but even greater. This is such good news that we may find it hard to believe. But we must believe this. How does this happen? He gives us the right to become children of God. Here the word "right" is "power." We were powerless, helpless, and hopeless due to our sins. We could not change ourselves, not even our small bad habits. But God gives us the power to change into children of God. This power is dynamic and irresistible. Can you imagine this power? Every day, as the sun rises, its warm, energetic rays touch our planet bringing power to produce life in all the plants and animals. Yet this great power cannot change a person from the inside. However, Jesus' power transforms sinners into beautiful children of God.

Verse 13 says, "children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." Growing up in a Christian family does not guarantee that one becomes a child of God. With our own effort, we cannot make ourselves children of God. In Jesus' day, a husband had great power to control his family members. But his power could not make anyone in his family a child of God. It is only possible when God himself works. It is the supernatural work of God to give a person new birth. Jesus said that no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of the Spirit (3:5). When we simply believe in Jesus, God empowers us to become children of God by the work of the Holy Spirit. Then we can become a new creation. Everything changes: our value system, our hope, our lifestyle. Furthermore, we become heirs of God's glorious kingdom. What a blessing and privilege it is to become children of God! To make this possible for us, what did Jesus do?

Third, Jesus became flesh (14-18). Verse 14 says, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." Jesus did not abandon the world which was so hostile. Rather, he entered into this world as a human being to live among us. The Eternal God became a human being who was limited in time and space. The Almighty God became a weak and vulnerable human being. The Glorious God became a despised and rejected person. As a human being, Jesus did not come as a powerful and glorious ruler. Instead, he

made himself nothing and took the very nature of a servant. Why did Jesus come in this way? It was to show us that he is gentle, humble, approachable and understanding. It was to be the friend of all kinds of sinners. Most of all, he came to die for our sins on the cross. Only in this way could he make us children of God. Through his cross he forgives us, heals us, reconciles us to God, and restores God's image in us.

When John saw this Jesus, he testified, "We have seen his glory." This means that we can see God in Jesus. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known (18). People have their own concepts about God based on their experiences and knowledge. Some people see God as a harsh judge, others as a kindly old grandfather, and others as an indifferent scientist. To truly know God, we need to see Jesus. Once Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have lived among you such a long time. Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:8-9).

"His glory" also means his exaltation: his resurrection and ascension. God did not abandon Jesus in his grave. God raised Jesus to life and made him Lord and Messiah (Ac 2:32,36). Through Jesus' death and resurrection, God conquered the power of sin and death. After his resurrection, Jesus ascended into heaven and was seated at the right hand of God. He became the sovereign Ruler. He will come again as Judge with great power and glory (Mk 13:26).

Jesus' coming into the world was the beginning of a new era. People had lived under the law, which brings condemnation and curse. But Jesus brought grace and truth. By his grace we can come to God freely and have fellowship with him as his precious children. By his grace we are set free from bondage to Satan and have a living hope in the kingdom of God. Now we can receive grace upon grace. This happens when we simply believe in Jesus' name. Name means his character and person. Today we have learned many things about Jesus. Jesus is the Eternal God, the Creator God, the Author of life, the true Light, the Son of God and Savior of the world. Let's believe in Jesus' name and live as children of God! Let's testify about Jesus to those living in darkness so they may also come into Jesus' marvelous light!