

The Greatest Right

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 September 2022

Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, everyone. How lovely to see you. Here's what I'd love you to do. I'd love you to grab your Bible, if you have one, and turn to the Gospel of John.

If you don't have your own Bible with you, you've got two options. Number one, poke your neighbour or something like that to get the one that's on the pews. You can do that. Also, if you want to put up your hand, another option is you can get one of these, John's Gospels.

We've got tons of these to give away, but this is going to be really helpful for you to have God's Word open in front of you. As we start this morning, a new series in the Gospel of John, which I'm really thrilled about.

I promise you as well, just before we start, that my PowerPoint has no cannulars in it. So hopefully it won't make you too squeamish because I was there saying, get that off the screen.

Here is John's Gospel in at John chapter one. So here's what happened to me the other day. I was on the phone to my insurance company. And after a few pleasantries and a few security checks, the person on the other end of the line said, Sir, just before we start, I just want to take a moment to read you your rights.

[1 : 1 1] Now, folks, I had no idea that I had so many rights. And so it got me thinking from there of all the rights that I enjoy in my life.

I'm living in the West. Are we not the beneficiaries of so many as we live our lives here that people have died for over the years? Our rights. I've got so many rights in my life.

And then the question came to my mind. One that I extend to you to think about as we begin this series. Whoever you are here today, whatever you think about this God, what is the greatest right that you have?

You know, go on, give it to you, folks. What's the right that gets you out of bed in the morning? What's the right that offers you any kind of hope about what tomorrow might hold?

What's the right that gives you any kind of comfort or purpose in the day? What's the right that makes your soul sing? I've been a Christian for 20 years.

[2 : 2 1] And here's why I love coming back to John's gospel. I read it hundreds of times in my life. But every time I come back to it, my heart sings.

Do you know why? Because it wonderfully reminds me of my weariness and my unspectacular life. I'm a life that feels so mundane all the time.

Doing the same things every day. Same school runs, same meal, same everything. It reminds me of my unspectacular looking life. It reminds me of the greatest right that I have.

And it reminds me of the right, the only right that's going to matter eternally in life. And it reminds me of the greatest right that any of us here today could ever hope to know.

And we get it here in the opening verses that we're going to read in just a minute of John's gospel. You know, in our Bibles, we've got four historical accounts of Jesus' life. We have Matthew, Mark and Luke.

[3 : 21] They're often called the synoptic gospels, right? Synoptic derived from the Greek word syn meaning with, optic meaning sight, right?

Opticians. So it's commonly believed that Matthew, Mark and Luke come at Jesus with the same sight, right? You kind of read them and you'll discover a lot of the same material.

But John, here is a man who also wants us to know about Jesus, but who writes from a profoundly different angle. It's almost as if, and this kind of helped me think about it, right?

Matthew, Mark and Luke, their aim is to show us the face of Jesus. But John invites us deeper and he wants us to see his heart.

And who better to write this gospel, this man who Jesus invited to come and be not just one of his 12 disciples, but to come and be one of the inner three.

[4 : 18] So that means that this man, he saw and he heard things that deeply moved him. And he writes towards the end of his life, having reflected long and hard on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

And the guy cannot get enough of him. And so what's his aim? He writes it, and this is always important in John's gospel. He says right at the end of his gospel, chapter 20, verse 31. 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.

So that's why he's written his gospel. So that we may have life in his aim. Life in his name. That's his aim. So let's read together from verse 1 of chapter 1.

Again, into this glorious gospel. John writes this, and hear him reflecting on just how mind-blowing Jesus is.

He writes this, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

[5 : 29] Through him all things were made. Without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life. And that life was the light of all mankind.

The light shines in the darkness. And the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. Different John.

He came as a witness to testify concerning that light. So that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light. He came only as a witness to the light.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. 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. Yet, to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

[6 : 37] Children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. 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. John testified concerning him.

He cried out saying, This is the one I spoke about when I said, He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me. Out of his fullness, we have all received grace in the place of grace already given.

For the law was given through Moses. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in the closest relationship with the Father, he has made him known.

So as we step through the front door of John's prologue, the introduction, again, this is what helped me. The prologue functions almost like a hotel foyer.

[7 : 53] Right? You know, you would go into a hotel and you would, in the foyer, the lounge, you would get a sense of what's on the walls, you would get a sense of the color scheme, you would get a sense of the smells and the sights that set you up for what the rest of the hotel is going to be like.

Well, in the foyer of John's gospel, in the time that we have, friends, there's so much we could say here. Encyclopedias won't even cover this. Right? Four pictures are on the wall by way of a simple structure.

Right? Here's the first one. It reads identity. Who is Jesus? Love it. Was it a sound of music? What did Julie Andrews, her character, say?

Where is it good to begin? In the beginning. Right? Who is Jesus? The gospel, other gospel writers, you see how they go to Bethlehem. But John takes us way back into the corridors of eternity and says, in the beginning.

Do you see those opening words? In the beginning. That's a deliberate echo of the first words of the Bible. Genesis 1 reads, In the beginning, God created, the heavens and the earth.

[9 : 03] Who is this God? The God who was there before anything was. The God who has always and will always be. The God who exists as a loving community of Father, Son, and Spirit, and who has for all eternity been one God in three persons.

This God created the world out of an overflow of his loving existence by the power of his word. Friends, this should stretch us. Right? Should stretch us.

And John says, in the beginning was the word. Greek word there, logos. One which the philosophers, the Greek philosophers of the day, but these guys who are reading this as the first readers are steeped in.

Greek philosophers used that word, logos, to talk about the wisdom and the perfection by which the world was made. And John draws a massive equal sign and he says, the word equals Jesus.

He was with God. He was God. This is Jesus. Now put it in everyday terms, right? Have a breath. Inhale, exhale.

[10 : 21] Inhale, exhale. Do you understand that Jesus is the one who sustains that breath? He's the very reason, friends, that there is existence, any kind of existence.

He is the one who designed and sustains the law of gravity. He is the one who created and maintains the process of photosynthesis. He is the one that makes the birds sing.

He is the one that wakes the sun in the morning. He is the one that makes the seas calm. The Jesus who is the life and light of men and take in the imagery there, the life and the light of men.

Do you know when we walk to school each morning with the kids, do you know when we get a cracking view of Arthur C? It was so early in the morning and yet every morning the kids look up and see the ants at the top and they say, how early does somebody need to get up to climb that thing?

Who would get up that early? Why would you get up early to climb that thing? Answer, why would you climb it that time in the morning? See the sunshine. See the sunrise. Isn't it amazing that wherever you are in the world a sunrise is one of the most spectacular things, breathtaking things friends, that you and I can ever hope to see.

[11 : 35] And it's as if John is saying just as in Genesis God spoke and the light penetrated the darkness in a physical sense it's almost as if he is saying with the coming of Jesus into the world that we'll think about in a moment God was penetrating our world and the light was shining on the spiritual darkness.

In the words of J.C. Ryle former Bishop of Liverpool Christ is to the souls of men what the sun is to the world. And just like an inextinguishable candle and those things annoy me like anything that light is never going to be overcome.

Right? Never going to be snuffed out. Never going to put it out. Identity. This is who he is. Second picture rattling through this reads tragedy.

On the wall the foyer tragedy. Verse 9 the true light was coming into the world. John masterfully building the tension here as we move towards the theological climax of this at verse 14.

Jesus was coming in. Do you see notice the downward movement? There he is. That's who he is. Jesus was coming into the world. Now what is it? Jesus was in the world. The creator of all things wrote himself into the creature's world.

[12 : 56] And here's the tragedy end of verse 10 the world did not know him. Two senses I think to that. First one the world did not see his greatness didn't perceive it.

What is it we spent the last number of days doing as a country paying our respects to greatness? We all get it. We all get it. Loved it. David Beckham Kuhn for how many hours of the day? 12 hours, 13 hours along with hundreds of people to honour greatness.

Some of our most historic buildings in this country, police escorts everywhere, non-stop TV coverage. Friends, we're responding to greatness. But contrast that to how the world looked upon a humble carpenter with splinters in his hands.

A lowly teacher who called former fishermen to be his students. A defeated man who didn't even put up a fight and was crucified on a Roman cross and he was laid to rest in another's tomb.

The world did not recognise him. Didn't see his glory. And not just the world, did he have his fellow Jews furnished with the promises of God, called to live by the law of God.

[14 : 07] They did not receive him. The world did not see his glory. It was totally upside down to the world's glory. There's one angle on it but I think another one is simply that the world just did not want to know.

Refusing to see him for who he truly is. You know, John Piper writes that our greatest problem as human beings is not that we lack light, it's that we love the dark.

It's our heart's disposition. It's the light of the world came in who did not want to know. And yet, do you see that word yet but verse 12?

John introduces us to the other side of the coin, to what is on offer in Christ. And here's our third picture, friends. It's the opportunity, the word opportunity, one freely available to all those who believe in his name.

Now, before we get to what it means to believe in his name, see what John's doing, primarily for his fellow Jews. He's showing them that there's no such thing as a spiritual shoe-in.

[15 : 21] Okay? No one is adopted into the family of God merely by being born into the right tribe. Born of blood. Or no one is adopted into the family of God by being from good religious stock or because they live a moral life.

Born of man. Adoption is a privilege granted to follow the language to all those who are born of God. In other words, only God can do this light shining work into our dark hearts.

If you're a Christian here today, that's what's gone on in your life. Yes, you made a decision to follow Christ, but before that, God wrote your name into his book before the foundation of the world.

And the son came into the world. The Holy Spirit worked and light dawned in your heart. How do we know who are those people?

We've got to see that all those born of God and all those who believe in his name are the same thing. Those that recognize him as the creator and us the creature.

[16 : 31] A cracking conversation with my girls in the car today. They were telling me that we're all mammals. Daddy, I didn't know we were mammals. I said, yes, we're all creatures. Of course, we're all creatures, but do you know what? Animals aren't dignified, said they were made in the image of God.

Human beings are. We are creatures, but friends, we are made in the image of God. We recognize that we are the creature and he is the creator. We understand that our unworthiness before him, a holy, worthy God.

People who've come to see their unrighteousness before a holy God and in light of all those things, stake it all on Jesus, right? His perfect life, giving us his righteousness that we could not earn, his death where he became sin for us, his resurrection showing that the price of paying the penalty of the offense of my sin in the eyes of a holy God really has been paid.

And because of that, what does God see? when he looks at me, when he looks at you, if our faith, small as a mustard seed, is in what Christ has done for us, what does God see?

Who are we? Children of God, precious sons and daughters of God, get your head around that, guys.

[17 : 52] Call to share in the love that the Father has for all eternity had for his Son, to share in that. And do you know what I love? I was thinking about this week, I love that God, my Father, wants me to know that that is a right.

It's not some kind of coupon, it's not an opportunity, a chance to become a child of God, knowing that there's an expiry date at the end. Do you know I hate expiry dates? You know when you go into the fridge for a deep clean, and you go through the fridge, and you'll inevitably find something that smells and looks a bit, what do we call it, a bit funky.

Normally brought to you by the color green. What's happened there? It's expired. It's gone off, hasn't it? I love that God wants us to know that this is a right.

It's something that's yours, and a right that's been given to us as opposed to being earned. Something that cannot be taken away, that's yours for life. Friends, that is something that I can build my life upon.

And get this, whatever's going on in your life today, a right is true just as much on your worst day. When you've kicked the dog, when the washing didn't get done, when you fell out with your spouse on the way to church, whatever it is you've done this morning, a right is true for you on your worst day, just as much as it is on your best day.

[19 : 17] A right is true in the times when the future looks rosy, and life is cushy, and it's true when the future is unclear, and life feels messy.

Brothers and sisters, here is what I believe the Lord would want us to know today. It's a right that he's given us. It's a right that he's given us.

The Father has not saved us and placed us on a probation period before him to see if we're worthy enough of his love. You know, I hate those things you've got three months in your contract to show if you're good enough for this job.

It's not how it works with God. He's not placed us on probation period. Our experience of his love for us does not work like performance related pay.

How often we live our Christian lives thinking that that's how it works with our Father. Just reflecting on this in sabbatical, friends, how often is that the thing that causes me not to progress in the Christian life?

[20 : 15] And how often is that the thing which stifles my joy in the Christian life that I forget that that's who he is? He's my Father. Because of my faith in Christ, he loves me as he loves his Son.

Oh, how often I allow the logic, my logic, my thinking of how it should work to determine how I live my life rather than allowing the voice of my Father through his words to tell me how it works in my life.

You know, the status of being declared a child of God with everything that that entails. Because of your faith in Christ, however unimpressive you think your life is just now, however wrong you think you've got it, friends, know that that is your right.

And I would have killed in America. Amens everywhere. Oh, friends, I was thinking about it this week as we buried our dear sister and friend, Doreen, into the ground.

And as I thought, how unimpressive does this look? And yet, what did I picture? I pictured her going into the ground and she's clutching her right. It's Lenn, she goes through her chemo treatment starting soon.

[21 : 25] What is it that can get her through that? It's her right that she's loved by her Father. They're holding the right given to them by their Father that says, you're my child.

And no power of hell, no scheme of man, can ever pluck us from his hand. Oh, and here's best book I read on sabbatical.

In the words of J.I. Parker, if you're not familiar with J.I. Parker, he's a guy really to get in touch with. And his wonderful book, Knowing God, and I've got one copy I can give away at the end of the service if you come in. I was going to say fight me for it, but you don't fight me for it because I'll beat you.

Just come and take it, okay? J.I. Parker, and get this in your heads. Adoption is the highest privilege of the gospel. The traitor is forgiven, brought in for supper, and given the family name.

Do you get that? To be right with God the judge is a great thing. And make no mistake that it is to be right with our God, but to be loved and cared for by God the Father is greater.

[22 : 35] And that's only possible because of our fourth and final picture. And it reads mystery. Verse 14, and here we've reached not only the theological center of John's introduction, but we've reached the staggering truth that's right at the heart of the Christian faith.

And if you aren't with me, come and with me to verse 14. The words became flesh. So Jesus, without for a moment ceasing to be everything that John has just described in verses one to five, and we've got to be theologically clear on that.

He took on a human body. The eternal became an embryo. Rebecca McLaughlin, I was leading that last night, as she pointed that out, and he dwelt with us.

The word dwelt there, literally he tabernacled among us. That's the word there. He tabernacled among us. John, very deliberate in the use of that word. The tabernacle, the tent, the place where God had said that he would be, as it stood right in the middle of his Old Testament people.

John is saying that God's come to dwell with us in a fuller way in the person of Jesus. Jesus. Fully God, fully man.

[24 : 00] Not 50-50, not 70-30, 100-100. That really matters. Fully God, fully man. Why does that matter?

It matters, friends, because if he's not fully God, if he's from the same gene pool as us, if he is tainted by the same sin that we are, then he's unable to live a perfect life of obedience and worship and righteousness in the eyes of the Father.

He'd have no righteousness to share with us that we might be right with God. It matters that he's fully God. And it matters that he's fully man. It matters that he's one of us.

Why? So that he could represent us and sympathize with us in all our weakness and be, and be stretched by this, be the second and better Adam who God created right at the beginning of the Bible to live in a perfect relationship with him before Genesis 3 and sin entered the equation.

Jesus stands in the place of Adam as our perfect representative before the Father. And because he's that, because he's fully God, fully man, do you see the end of verse 18 what that means?

[25 : 19] He makes the Father known. You know, the first person launched into space was a Russian man, I learned this on holiday, called Yuri Gerdgaren.

I think I've said that right, Yuri Gerdgaren. And he joked when he got up to space, he said, I went up to space and I didn't see any God. But see when the Bible talks about finding God, it's never in language that suggests that we somehow need to make our way up to him.

And I once heard someone say that we should stop calling it the enlightenment and start calling it the endarkenment. Because what the human heart does is we try and figure out what God would be like.

All it does is it just comes up with idols. We fashion God into our own likeness and according to our fancies. In other words, this is what we think God would be like. But in the Bible, do you see, friends, it's always the other way around.

The only way that we can know who God truly is, is if he reveals himself first to us. We derive our understanding of Christianity because our God is exactly like Jesus.

[26 : 31] We derive our understanding of Christianity and what God is like solely by looking at him. And I say that because I know that so many of us may well be getting our info about God and what he's like from somewhere else.

Okay, perhaps rumors that you've picked up on the news or impressions that are given to you by friends or family or parents or experiences that you've had of church from years ago.

And listen, I've spoken to enough people in my time doing this that I understand that lots of those things might have deeply hurt you. You've got to get real about that. And so here's my invitation to you this morning.

Is one who would love to walk with you in your pain and questions. Friends, if that is right, if Jesus has come to reveal to us the Father, here's the question then. When was the last time that you looked into Jesus?

Why not allow him to do the talking? Is you seek to understand who God truly is and what he's like. It's a loving invitation.

[27 : 37] If you want to take me up on that, take anyone who's seen up the front on that, we'd love to explore that with you. It's why we do this, so we can get to know God better. Because verse 14, what you'll find, says John, when you look at Jesus, is a Jesus full of, and take these two words in, not harshness and falsity, but grace and truth.

And we need both those things. Imagine if it was harsh and truth, we would be so scared. Imagine if it was grace and falsity, we wouldn't know where we stand with him.

Grace and truth. You will find a Jesus surprisingly and wonderfully brilliant. A Jesus in this gospel as we journey through it, and this is why you've got to come back in the weeks to come. A Jesus who will go towards the outcast.

A Jesus who lifts up the broken. A Jesus who calls out the hypocrite. A Jesus who is moved by exploitation. A Jesus who speaks openly about heaven and hell.

A Jesus who speaks plainly about the wickedness that lurks inside of every human heart. And a Jesus who will show us that he loves us more than we ever thought possible.

[28 : 50] because he's come to reveal to us God the Father. And so John can say through the eyes of faith right at the end there, and this is his invitation to you, as you look at Jesus as he's recorded here, to come and see his glory.

You know, just as we close, friends, do you want to hear about why they laughed at me in America? Of course you want to hear that, right? As we close, and that's always cue for, come back in for three, four minutes, okay?

Here's why they laughed at me in America. They laughed at me because I'd never seen a firefly before. Ever seen one of these things? No? There we go, friends.

There we go. They laughed because I'd never seen a firefly before. So there I was one evening sitting on the back porch of our host house, 85 degree heat, chatting to friends, James Taylor playing on in Alexa in the background, living what I would call the real American dream, okay?

And all of a sudden, this bug flies past my line of sight, and it flashes. And I turned to my host, and I said, please tell me I'm not the only one that just saw that bug, because that thing is on fire.

[30 : 12] Please tell me someone else saw that. And all of a sudden, my eyes are taken from this one bug that's flashing. I look at the garden, and the whole garden is lit up by these bugs. As they do the resmeric dance, as they blow my mind, as I thought I'd seen it all almost in creation.

And I say, guys, listen, how awesome is that? And they say, yeah, buddy. Dude, we see them all the time.

And listen, that thrill for us wore off a long time ago. And here's the point. How easy is it for us to get so familiar with things that should blow our minds?

Things that should blow our minds. How awesome is that, friends? This God, through Christ, has given us the right to become children of God.

Let me ask you, are you weak in your affection for Jesus? Are you growing in your understanding of who he is? Or has he become to you just somebody that you turn up on a Sunday and sing about and has no relevance for your everyday life?

[31 : 23] This is what this series is about, friends, because here's what I love about John. John is a man. As you read him, he strikes me as a man who has never got bored, never ceased to be thrilled by Jesus of Nazareth.

Let me just say, if you're here and your affections for your Savior have gone cold, you need this gospel. Maybe you're a student here today, and I just say because it's this Sunday and you guys are back.

Friends, this is why you need to pick a church and go to a church. Don't drift. Please don't do it. I've done this for 10 years to see it happen often enough. Go to a church and settle, because that is a place where you're going to grow in your affections and love for Jesus and knowledge of who he is.

And if you stop coming to church on a regular basis since COVID, it's difficult to come. Friends, this is why we need to get here, because this man is glorious. Here's what John writes at the very last verse of his gospel.

And hear him say it himself that Jesus is blowing his mind. Here's what he's saying. Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

[32 : 42] Friends, here is the God who in Christ offers us the opportunity, the right, to become children of God. Let's pray, will we?

Father, I thank you so much for your word. Thank you for what we were thinking about there. That the only way we know what you are like and who you are is because you are a God who has revealed yourself to us in creation, in your words, and most perfectly in your son.

Father, I pray this morning that by your spirit dwelling amongst us, Father, that you would comfort the disturbed. Lord, those who come at this and say, this couldn't be true for me.

Father, would you reassure us wonderfully because of our faith in Jesus that this is true for us. And Father, conversely, as comforting the disturbed, I pray that you would disturb the comfortable.

Lord, those of us here who have grown tired in the Christian life, Lord, would you encourage us? Those of us here who maybe don't know this Jesus, Father, would you convict us of our sin and the eternal reality ahead of us.

[33 : 52] Father, would you help shine the light of the truth of the gospel into our hearts that we might behold the glory of this man. Father, thank you for your love for us. Lord, help us this week in all the different things that are going on in our lives.

Father, help us to live in light of the right that we have because of your wonderful grace to us. And we pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.