

## “Responses to the Light: Rejection or Reception”

John 1:9-13

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<sup>9</sup> The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup> He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. <sup>12</sup> But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. – John 1:9-13, ESV

*The True Light was coming into the world . . .*

Sometimes a writer feels the need to write themselves into the story. Dorothy Sayers was an English mystery writer. Though she was not a member of the famed Inklings, she was a friend of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, and they influenced each other in significant ways. Her most famous series of books was the Lord Peter Wimsey mysteries. Peter Wimsey was a wealthy, intelligent detective, but he was always lonely. About halfway through her series of books and stories, Sayers knew that Wimsey needed somebody in his life to fill the emptiness, and so she wrote in a female character, Harriet Vane. Harriet was a writer of detective fiction and one of the first women to graduate from Oxford. Sayers could write Harriet Vane very well, because she herself was one of the first women to graduate from Oxford and was also, obviously, a writer of detective fiction. Coincidence? Of course not. Dorothy Sayers saw her protagonist’s need and decided the best solution was to write herself into the story.

As a Christian, Sayers must have realized that what she was doing was an echo, a faint imitation of what the Author of Life did 2,000 years ago, in the middle of the story of the world He had created. The True Light, which gives light to everyone -The Word Himself in whom is Life and whose Life is the Light of Men – came into the world. The Author wrote Himself into the story because He knew He was what we needed to fix our brokenness and make us complete.

Now, in Dorothy Sayers’ Peter Wimsey stories, Peter and Harriet end up getting married. But perhaps if she had wanted to reflect what really happened when the Author of Life wrote Himself into the story, Lord Peter would have rejected Harriet, saying, “Who do you think you are and why are you here? I don’t need you. You’re just a threat to my independence,” and then killing her.

Ah, but the good news is that, while this was the response of the world to the coming of Jesus, by God’s grace, that wasn’t the response of everyone. And just as Peter and Harriet’s story led to a wedding, so, too, the story of Jesus and His people is heading to the same wonderful conclusion.

### I. The World’s Ignorance

*The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. – vv. 9-10*

Think about the astonishing reality of this fact – “*the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.*” What does John mean here by “the world”? John uses this word repeatedly in his writings, and he often means different things by it, different aspects of “the world” – but the two most common aspects are the whole world and then the people in the world. The whole world – or all of creation – is morally neutral and is God’s creation. The people in the world are God’s creation made in His image and in active rebellion against Him – fallen and dead in sin, blind to spiritual truth, trapped in the darkness of ignorance and unbelief.

So, here, John is telling us that, although the whole world was created by God, the people in the world did not know Him. If you read the Gospels, you’ll see that the creation itself does recognize its Maker and Master, but the people in the world, who are made in God’s image, do not.

So, we see people constantly asking of Jesus, “Who is this?” and astonished when He does things that only God would have the right or power to do.

In Luke 7, when a sinful woman comes to Jesus and washes His feet with her tears and dries them with her hair, Jesus “*said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this, who even forgives sins?” And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”*” (Luke 7:48-50, ESV)

Not only His enemies, but even His own disciples did not recognize Him. In Mark 4, Jesus calmed a raging storm on the Sea of Galilee.

*awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?” And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” - Mark 4:39-41, ESV*

The contrast in this passage is stark. The wind and the sea know their Maker and Master, and they obey Him immediately. The disciples are filled with great fear over this Man they have known and followed and yet have not truly known at all.

Even the demons know and submit to the Maker when He comes into the world. Immediately after calming the storm at the end of Mark 4, Jesus encounters a demon-possessed man on the other side of the Sea of Galilee –

*They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones. And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before*

*him. And crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." – Mark 5:1-7, ESV*

Diseases were healed by Him. Storms were calmed by Him. Food was multiplied by Him. Demons were banished by Him. Yet the world of people made by Him in His image and for fellowship with Him did not recognize Him.

## **II. His Own People's Rejection**

*He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. – v. 11*

Verse 11 takes the negative response of the world a step further. Because not only did the Maker and Light of the World come into the world He had made and go unrecognized by people made in His image, but He came to His very own covenant people, the ones He had chosen to be His own possession, and His own people did not receive Him.

The first stunning example of this comes just after the birth of Jesus in Matthew 2 –

*Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup> saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." <sup>3</sup> When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup> and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup> They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:*

*<sup>6</sup> "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for from you shall come a ruler  
who will shepherd my people Israel."*

*<sup>7</sup> Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." <sup>9</sup> After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. <sup>11</sup> And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. – Matthew 2:1-12, ESV*

The wise men asked where they could find the newborn King of the Jews. The chief priests and the scribes knew exactly where to find Him. They knew that Micah had prophesied that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. But even though these wise men had seen the sign of the star and had travelled 1,000 miles to find the newborn King, and even though the people of God had waited over 700 years

since Micah's prophesy for the birth of Messiah, these religious leaders couldn't be bothered to travel the 5 miles from Jerusalem to Bethlehem to find the Promised One. Instead, they let Herod deal with the wise men and even later order the slaughter of the babies in Bethlehem without raising any fuss or objection. Political position and appeasement had replaced true godliness.

His own people and their leaders continued to reject Jesus throughout His earthly life and ministry. Even though they had seen the signs He did and had to know He was the Messiah, they rejected Him and plotted to destroy Him. This reaches an almost absurd climax at the raising of Lazarus in John 11 –

*<sup>45</sup> Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, <sup>46</sup> but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. <sup>47</sup> So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. <sup>48</sup> If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." <sup>49</sup> But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. <sup>50</sup> Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." <sup>51</sup> He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, <sup>52</sup> and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. <sup>53</sup> So from that day on they made plans to put him to death. – John 11:45-53, ESV*

Again, the leadership of the people of God chose political power and position over faithfulness to God and His Messiah. And the people themselves proved to be no better than their leaders when, at the trial of Jesus, they demanded the release of Barabbas, an insurrectionist, and cried out for Jesus to be crucified. Even on the cross, those who passed by mocked Him and derided Him.

### **III. Those Who Received Him**

But not everyone rejected Him. Not everyone failed to recognize Him.

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

While the world did not recognize Him and His own people did not receive Him, some did come to know Him and trust in Him.

#### **a. What is necessary? Saving Faith**

It is those who receive Him, who believe in His name, who are given the right or authority or power to become children of God. John is trying to make it clear what it means to receive Jesus; it is to believe in His name. What is required is true and saving faith in Jesus.

But what does it mean to believe in Jesus? Well, it means to receive Him for who He is. Believing in His name is believing in who He is, and receiving Him is receiving Him for who He is.

It is possible for people to come to Jesus and receive Him for all the wrong reasons and in all the wrong ways. Usually, such wrong receiving of Jesus is focused on trying to get Him to meet our felt needs and serve our selfish, petty agenda. In John 6, Jesus feeds 5,000 and the next day, a large crowd tracks Him down at the synagogue in Capernaum –

*<sup>26</sup> Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. <sup>27</sup> Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.” <sup>28</sup> Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” <sup>29</sup> Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” <sup>30</sup> So they said to him, “Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? <sup>31</sup> Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” <sup>32</sup> Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. <sup>33</sup> For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” <sup>34</sup> They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”*

*<sup>35</sup> Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. <sup>36</sup> But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. <sup>37</sup> All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. <sup>38</sup> For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. <sup>39</sup> And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. <sup>40</sup> For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” – John 6:26-40, ESV*

Jesus said they were not seeking Him because they saw signs but because they ate food. Wasn't that the same thing? Wasn't their eating their fill of bread miraculously provided to them seeing a sign? No. They didn't really see the sign; they just ate the bread. What they were seeking from Jesus was not the true light which enlightens everyone but rather just free food. Even when they say in verse 34, “Sir, give us this bread always,” what they means is not the true Bread of Life that Jesus Himself is but rather the gift of free food every day, like God gave the Israelites through Moses. They even demand that Jesus do a sign, when He had already done a sign that they themselves saw and ate.

People who come to Jesus in this earthly, self-seeking way, trying to get from Him what they think they need instead of coming to Him for who He is, are not really receiving Him. I sometimes wonder how many of the 5,000 who ate the bread miraculously provided by Jesus might have later been in the crowd in Jerusalem shouting, “Crucify Him!” If you come to Jesus for what you want from Him, not only are you not truly receiving Him and believing in His name, but you're bound to be disappointed, because He won't be received as a heavenly genie or a Super Santa Claus.

So, why would you come to Jesus?

Some people come to Him because they want Him to heal all their sicknesses and make them wealthy. Some people come to Him to fill them with self-esteem and help them feel better about themselves. Some people come to Him to win culture wars and gain political power – This is why Emperor

Constantine and so many so-called Christian rulers who followed in his footsteps professed faith in Jesus – to secure a following and strengthen their political position. Others come to Jesus to bless their pursuit of the American Dream or to give them a happy marriage and good children. Some come to Jesus because they don't want to go to hell when they die; heaven seems like a much better alternative.

To all who look to Him to provide them with some selfish benefit, Jesus says, *“Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal. . . This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”*

To believe in Jesus as Lord of All, Light of the World, Savior of Sinners, the Gift of Heaven, the True Eternal Life, the Express Gift of the Goodness of God is to receive Jesus for who He is – not for what He might give you – and to believe in His name, to trust in Him truly.

### **b. Where does it come from? God's Will & Work**

Where does this kind of saving faith come from? It really seems to run counter to human nature, doesn't it?

Jesus said in John 6:37: *“All that the Father gives me will come to me”* Then, later in verse 44, He said, *“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.”*

When Peter made the first public Christian profession of faith in Matthew 16 –

Simon Peter replied, *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”* And Jesus answered him, *“Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. – Matt. 16:16-17, ESV*

This is what John means when he says those who become children of God *“who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”* As Jesus Himself said to Nicodemus in John 3:3, *“Unless you are born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God.”*

So, if your eyes have been opened and you have come to Jesus with true and saving faith, thank the Lord, because it's His grace that has made all the difference in your life.

### **What's your response to the Light?**

So, let me close by simply asking you:

What is your response to the true light which enlightens everyone coming into the world?

Have you failed to recognize Him? Have you rejected Him as irrelevant to your life?

Have you tried coming to Him and receiving Him but for all the wrong reasons, not for who He is but for what you want from Him in service of your kingdom, your life agenda?

OR, are you receiving Him and believing in His name as the Son of God and Savior of Sinners and as your only hope?