

Receiving Jesus

Text | John 1:10-13
Readings | Romans 9:1-16, John 1:1-13

One of most recognisable faces in the history of film is the face of Charlie Chaplin. Back in the days when movies were black-and-white with no sound, Chaplin was a star. And one of products of his popularity was look-alike contests that sprung up around the world. Contestants would attempt to imitate Chaplin dressed as “tramp” character made famous in his films.

Chaplin was a comedian, and he must have had a very good sense of humour since we know that on at least one occasion he entered one of these contests himself! And, somewhat amazingly, he failed to even make the finals! There he was. The real Charlie Chaplin. Staring the judges in the eye. And yet passed over! They just didn’t recognise him for who he was.

In his gospel, John tells us about another case of mistaken identity. About someone else who wasn’t recognised for who he was. That person, of course, is Jesus Christ. The whole of the gospel is written about Jesus Christ. He is the star of John’s story. A story written so that all who read it might come to recognise Jesus for who he is. As the Saviour. As the Son of God. John wants you to know that!

John begins by speaking about “the Word”. And although he hasn’t yet named him, it’s clear that he’s speaking about Jesus. Jesus is described as the *Word* very appropriately, since we use words for two main purposes. We use words to express our inner thoughts. And we use words to reveal things about us to others. And Jesus, as the Word of God, does both. He expresses the mind of God, and he reveals God to us. Jesus came to shine the light and life of God into our lives.

And what happened when Jesus came to shine light into the world?

1. A Tragedy Occurred

Yes, a Tragedy Occurred. That’s the first thing we see in God’s word today. Verse 10:

“He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him.”

Jesus entered the world, as we remember each Christmas. God the Son entered our world. And there’s something very personal about this.

These days, when we want to tell someone something we have a multitude of ways to do so. We send a txt message, we Skype, we pick up the telephone, we send an email or a fax. But you may have noticed that something often gets lost in these methods of communication. We write something in an email, only to have it misunderstood or misinterpreted. We think the other person will understand what we are trying to say, but they don’t.

Now God didn't *have* to enter our world just to make himself known to us. He could have remained in heaven and sent a prophet or given someone a vision; certainly, he'd done that in the past. But this time, it's personal. God comes himself. Jesus enters our world. He's present with us.

"but though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him."

John expresses surprise - surprise, because there is similarity between us and the God who made us.

One place we often notice similarities is in families. The parents have blonde hair and blue eyes, and so that's exactly what we see in their children. It's in their genes. And we are often like our parents in more than just looks. We are also like them in ways that we act. And so we say, don't we, "he's a real chip off the old block."

The Bible tells us that we have been made in the image of God. Made, in some way, similar to God – like our Father. Our conscience reflects God's holiness. We reflect, in part, God's glory. We're a display of his power and goodness and creativity.

But even though this was so, John tells us - *"the world did not recognise him."* In fact, it gets even worse in verse 11 - *He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him."*

When John writes that Jesus came *"to that which was his own"*, what he writes could also be translated as "Jesus came to his own home" or "Jesus came to his own people." God had set aside Jewish people to be his special possession. To be his very own. He set them apart to broadcast the knowledge of God to the ends of the earth. But when Jesus came, even his own people didn't receive him!

If you've ever met or seen a picture of Alistair McEwen, one of professors at the R.T.C. in Australia, you'll know that he used to have a big bushy beard. It was as wild as anything. One year he went overseas to Israel for a semester on study leave. And then, just before came back, he shaved his wild beard down to a very tidy goatee. (This, of course, completely unbeknownst to his wife and children, who were still in Australia!) And so when he arrived home on the bus from the airport, he hopped off the bus, with his new goatee, wearing wrap-around-shades – and his daughter, who was waiting to pick him up, gave him one glance and then looked back at the others hopping off the bus! His own people, his own family, didn't even recognise him!

Of course, **he** really *had* changed. His daughter's failure to recognise him was somewhat understandable. But Jesus hadn't changed. Israel's God came in person, as he always had been; full of grace & truth. And yet Israel didn't receive him - what tragedy! What a tragedy that people who were supposedly hanging out for their Saviour to come, didn't even want to know him when he did come.

Why was Jesus not recognised? Why was Jesus not received? After all, as we read before in Romans 9, it seemed like the Jews had everything to make them ready for his arrival! They had the promises, the covenants, the sign of circumcision. They had temple worship and examples in history of God saving them – but it still did them no good.

The reasons why Jesus was not recognised and received then, are the same reasons why Jesus is not recognised and received today. Why people, as U2 put it, "still haven't found what they're looking for." And that's because while many people would like to *think* they are looking for Jesus, really they're not.

They're looking for a Jesus who will give them all the good stuff now. The good life now.

Not a Jesus who calls them to be willing to give up everything, for the sake of his kingdom.

They're looking for a spiritual experience. A feeling of religiosity. Inner peace.

Not a Jesus who requires us to own up to the wrong we've done, to put things right, and go and sin no more.

They're looking for someone to make the bad stuff disappear. A troubled marriage. Not enough money.

Not a Jesus who actually *brings* difficult times and hardship into our lives, in order to help us grow in godliness and character.

Are you looking for the *real* Jesus? Or deep-down, are you really just looking for the good life, however you might define it? And, if anything, you're thinking of Jesus as just a means to help you get there.

That's not Jesus. Jesus came because the problems we face are not external problems.

It's not just that we've found ourselves in the wrong place at the wrong time.

It's not just that life has dealt you a bad hand of cards.

No, the problem is internal. It's within us. It's a problem of the heart.

And the reason our hearts don't desire the real Jesus, is because in our hearts we want to please ourselves. We think we can solve our own problems, and fill the emptiness and the void. Whereas really we need radical, open heart surgery. We need a heart transplant. We need a new heart - a heart that's free, once again, to love the God who made us.

Or perhaps you are here today and everything is just fine with you. And the reason you *know* that everything is fine is because you're part of the church. I've been baptised, you think to yourself. God's made promises to me, so I must be fine.

But that is a very dangerous assumption to make. The sort of people who didn't receive Jesus when he was on earth were people just like you. They'd been circumcised, just like you've been baptised. They'd been taught the law, just like you've learned about the Bible at home and at church. Their parents were in the church, just like your parents are in the church.

And they were lost. They died in their sins. For them, having seen and heard Jesus only made it worse. They met God face-to-face in Jesus. They had first-hand knowledge, yet turned it down. And so the wrath of God remained upon them. They rejected the Saviour, and there is no other.

John tells us this tragedy because he doesn't want us to make the same mistake they did. Don't let your life be a tragedy as well. Either because you are seeking the wrong sort of Jesus. Or because you're just assuming things are fine, and you haven't really come face to face with Jesus.

But all is not tragedy. Hope still remains. And that what John tells us in verses 12 and 13. That...

2. Hope Remains

Verse 12 – “Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God”

It might have been that the majority of his own people, the Jews, rejected Jesus when he came. But not **all** did. There some who were faithful. There were some who did believe. There were some who saw Jesus accurately. And not only that, many who had never belonged to God’s family came to believe. Many non-Jews, many gentiles, saw in Jesus the wisdom and love and power of God. And they received him, they believed in his name - Jesus, which means God Saves.

The fact that only *some* believed might sound somewhat discouraging. It might *seem* that God’s word and his promises had come to nothing. But this was not so. As Paul said in Romans 9, “*it is not as though God’s word had failed.*” Not all of the people who *appeared* to be a part of God’s family actually belonged there.

Yes, they had all the right outward signs. Like any child who you’ve seen baptised, they’d received the sign of God’s promises. But there was no faith. No heart for the Lord. No desire to love God.

God’s children are not those who are in the church only outwardly, but those who believe... those who believe, even though at times their faith is weak and they doubt and they struggle. But the good news is that salvation does not depend upon our desire or on our efforts, but on God’s mercy. It’s his gift. We cannot earn adoption into his family - we receive it, as we receive Christ. As we are born again. Not a natural birth, not through our decision, but born of God.

And what a wonderful privilege is promised to all who believe - “*the right to become children of God*”. When we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, life changes and we are not the people we used to be. Yes, we still struggle with sin and temptations. We live in difficult circumstances, or with the consequences of poor decisions we made in the past. But we are *changed*. We receive a new *status* - children of God, part of God’s family. Our name is on the Will. And we stand to inherit more than you can possibly imagine in life to come!

Whenever we witness a baptism, we see it as a sign of belonging to God’s family. We remember the promises that God makes to us, and that they are promises we can hold on to as we grow older.

But to the person who is baptised, as well as to each one of us who have already been baptised, also comes a responsibility. A responsibility to take our baptisms seriously. To recognise and receive the Lord Jesus Christ. Because as we’ve seen today, it’s possible to be baptised - to have all the right external stuff - and still fail to recognise Jesus for who he is.

God calls you to belong to his family not only outwardly, but to belong by faith. And so, through faith, to inherit all that God promises to us.

Have you received Jesus?

Amen.