

Receiving Christ

John 1.10-13: So far, we have looked at the way in which the coming of Christ calls us both to wonder and ponder at that event, in both its past and present impacts. But there is a further step by which Christian spirituality finds expression as a response to the coming of Christ. It is the step of *receiving* Christ – opening ourselves to him.

The coming of Christ is, as John says, like the coming of light. Christ, the light of the world, uncovers dark areas in our lives. Jesus takes no delight in ‘finding us out’, but he does delight in ‘calling us out’ – out of our darkness and into the light of truth, beauty, goodness and love of God.

John identifies *receiving* as the key to walking God’s way. Bringing our lives before God and looking to Christ to direct our choices, priorities and attitudes in life are all part of receiving Christ. It is not just a ‘once in a lifetime’ step, it is how we walk in the Way of Christ. Our culture, however, teaches us that being in control of our own life is the ultimate sign of maturity.

Back to pondering

There is a rhythm and a pattern to following Christ. Yes, the right starting points are in stopping the rush of life long enough to give God our worship (which is what *wonder* is about) and to listen to what God has to say to us (which is what it means to *ponder*).

That then leads on to *receiving* grace, and *reflecting* that in the way we live our lives.

“Were there no God, we
would be in this glorious world
with grateful hearts: and no
one to thank.”

Christina Rossetti, poet

John is eager to get into the story of the ministry of Christ, about which he has so much to say. But before he does so, he pauses – and reflects further on what it is about Christ that he has seen, and longs for others to see. Two things stand out.

First, John has seen, and been overwhelmed and energised by, grace and truth in all their fullness. *‘From his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace’* (v.16). Grace is generous, undeserved goodness. It comes from God who is goodness, generosity and grace personified.

Second, John has seen something particular about how *‘the Word was with God’* (v.1). It is in the depth and quality of relationship between the Father and the Son (vv14,18). There is a divine intimacy that makes them one, so that Jesus can say to Philip, *‘whoever has seen me has seen the Father’* (14.9).

Here is something very special that John will spell out in due course. It is what the believer receives: namely, the same intimacy with God, as there is between Father and Son. John Chapter 15 uses the vivid imagery of the vine and branches to explore this most glorious of gifts. It is open to all of us who will stop long enough to ponder these things and to receive their truths into our lives.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUPS

1. John uses words about Jesus such as life, light, grace, truth. What words would you use to describe Jesus to someone today?
2. Some people, when they come to God in personal prayer, use a verse from scripture or a hymn, to focus their thoughts on God. Do you have a favourite way of ‘paying loving attention to God’?
3. Have you seen the light and life of Christ making a difference in some way in the life of someone you know, or know of?
4. John the Baptist is described as someone ‘sent from God’. Have you ever felt, or seen in others, a sense of God calling you to do something – and what was it? Did you feel able to respond?
5. **Track 20 on the CD/Transcript.** What’s the difference between a wicked act and an evil act?
6. What would help you, personally and as a church, to ponder about God? Books, sermons, courses ... or something else?
7. Here are three quotes about the dark. How do they help you face the dark places and dark times in life – if they do?
 - ‘Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.’ (*Martin Luther King Jr*)
 - ‘We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy of life is when adults are afraid of the light.’ (*Plato*)
 - ‘Look how a single candle can both defy and define the darkness.’ (*Anne Frank*)
8. Theologian Rudolph Bultmann defined sin as ‘our determination to manage by ourselves’. Robert Warren writes, on p. 14 ‘Our culture teaches us that being in control of our own life is the ultimate sign of maturity.’ Do you feel that you need to retain some control – or do you have to turn it all over to God? And if the latter, how do you do this?
9. **Read Philippians 4.8-9.** Thinking of the matter of pondering, what practical steps do you, or can you, take to ‘think on these things?’
10. Choose one of the quote boxes that you might like to discuss.