

(This is mere mechanical translation without manual check due to lack of time for this week.)

“Receive Christ”

December 1, 2024
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John 1:11-14

We are in the time of Advent again this year. Today I hope that we can learn together from John 1:11-14 how gracious it was that God sent Christ into the world.

I suppose it depends on how you define “faith,” but if you consider that there is an aspect of waiting on God, then it is impossible to believe without absolute trust in God. It means nothing to say that you believe just by talking about it.

However, even if we want to trust God, a heart that trusts God does not come easily. First of all, we must carefully consider what kind of person we are trusting and whether we have a reason to trust Him as an individual. If this is not considered, it is easy to fall back into a lifestyle that relies on one's own deeds.

Then, what kind of person is the One whom we trust? That is what is said throughout the Word of God, but today's passage, which teaches about Christ's coming into the world, also speaks to the heart of the matter.

First, verse 11 says the following about Christ

Verse 11.
He came to His own, and His people did not receive Him.

It can be said that the Christian's faith is born on the basis of various works of God. If the religions of this world are the product of man's efforts to create God and to seek Him, the Bible teaches the opposite: that God seeks man and somehow tries to give him salvation.

In this passage, too, it could be said that man did not seek God, but God voluntarily stepped forward and presented Himself.

But the human side did not welcome him, John says. When Christ came to the world, He came to His people, Israel. It seems that there was no small amount of expectation for His people. However, the people who should have been waiting for God the most, the people

who should have been walking with God, were not waiting for God.

Not only were they waiting for God, but they were not even thinking of Christ as the God they believed in. I believe that “His place” and “His people” in this passage refer to the perception of God. It does not say that the people recognized Christ as “their God. So, the people have stumbled upon a very elementary point about Christ. They were not even sure who God was. At least, from God's point of view, it may have appeared that the Israelites had not been able to do what was obvious to them.

But just because the people stumbled in a very elementary way and rejected Christ did not mean that judgment fell immediately. We must also remember that there was further patience there.

In retrospect, I think there is a suggestive truth to be said here. We can say that the real God is the Creator, the God that every human being knows as his or her creator. However, in contradiction to this, fallen man has fallen into a state in which he is not clearly aware that this God is God. Even when Christ, who is God, became man and was with man, most people rejected Him. It is totally unreasonable, but it seems to be unreasonable to God as well.

It seems that John, the author, had to be persuaded also that John the Baptist was not God, although this is a little before today's passage. Of John the Baptist, he said, “He was not light. He came only to testify about the light. That is how deranged people's senses had become.

It can be said that God presented Christ to people who were in a truly strange state. He is true even to such people, and He tries to persuade them to the point that they wonder why He would go to such lengths.

However, knowing Christ is a very difficult thing, almost impossible. How difficult it is is explained in verse 13, but first, let me read verse 12. Before that, let me read my translation of verse 12.

Verse 12 (my translation)
But to those who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.

When we say that God is making a concession, how much more so when we say, “those who received him,”

at the beginning of verse 12, and even in this expression the magnitude of God's blessing is expressed.

The expression "men received God" is unusual in the Bible, but it is possible that this was an original expression conceived by John. Why other biblical writers did not use this expression is obvious when we consider its meaning. The reason is that this expression makes it sound as if the relationship between God and man is the opposite of what it should be. If God were to say that He accepts man, that would make sense, but here it is the opposite.

The fact is that man is in sin and is hostile to God. But John seems to be saying that God nevertheless took the utmost humility toward man and presented Himself to man from below. The result would be that Christ is presented to everyone in the world, and it is up to them to accept Him or not.

At the same time, however, this also means that there will be severe judgment for those who do not accept Christ. If God has so humbly made a concession to a person and he considers it unnecessary, then tremendous wrath will descend on him.

The second half of verse 12 explains what happens to those who believe in Christ. He who believes is given the power to become a child of God. This means that if he or she seeks it, he or she can become a child in the image and likeness of God.

This also relates to the next verse.

Verse 13.
These people are born, not by blood, nor as the flesh desires, nor by the will of man, but only by God.

The process of becoming a child of God, John argues, involves being born again. This phrase "born of God" is a very peculiar expression when one thinks about it.

This phrase "born of God," as John often uses it, refers to a person who has already been born and is born again, so one can imagine that he is referring to a major turning point in which the person himself is changed. However, considering that it is impossible for a person to be born again physically, it is also impossible for a person to experience being born again spiritually.

John goes on to explain what it is like to be born again, and what it is different from. He says, "Not by blood, nor by the will of the flesh, nor by the will of man, as the flesh desires." Here he contrasts the three ways in

which a person is born again: "by blood," "according to the desire of the flesh," and "according to the will of man," with the case in which a person is born again by God.

The former, "by blood," "according to the desire of the flesh," and "according to the will of man," can be said to refer to various human efforts. It may refer to transformation relying on worldly things, such as making efforts to change one's conduct and relying on human wisdom. There is no need to deny human effort altogether. One also needs to try to make efforts in seeking God. But here we are told that we cannot be "born" anew through that human effort.

But when we see that it is said "not as the flesh desires nor by the will of man," we can say that for John, being "born of God" was a very limited phenomenon. It would be something that "the flesh does not desire," something that would not come from "the will of man."

The difficulty of being born of God was suggested in verse 10, two verses before today's passage. For "He was in the world from the beginning, and the world was made by Him, and yet the world did not know Him." From John's point of view, there seems to be such a disconnect between the world and God that the world cannot know Christ the Creator. There are many different thinkers in the world, but none of the ideas that come from the world embrace Christ. The fact is that none of the world's ideas, produced with all their creative ingenuity, have reached God.

So the event of being "born of God," as John calls it, is not within the common sense range of human will to reach, or even an extension of it. It is on a path that man would not choose, a path that goes where the flesh wants it to go, a path that goes against the will of man.

In the Old Testament, the phrase "a broken heart" is often used, and there is a place that can be reached only when the flesh desires it and the will of man is broken. However, it is very difficult to reach that state. Christ said to Nicodemus, "The judgment is the judgment of the light upon the world. Christ said to Nicodemus, "The judgment is that the light has come into the world, but because of their own wickedness they have loved darkness rather than light. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light for fear that their deeds will be brought to light. Loving the darkness seems to refer to one's various prides, achievements, wealth, wisdom, social position, family

ties, etc., and one does not leave them. However, one must come to the point of accepting the truth that it is because of such pride that one is judged.

Therefore, John seems to be saying that a person whose will and fleshly hopes are crushed and who has nothing to desire in this world, such a person is born by God. It is not that man can obtain salvation through the combination of fleshly desires and human will and the power of God, but that only when the human will is crushed can the power of God work and a new man is born.

I would like to return again to verse 12.

Verse 12 (my translation)

But to those who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.

We read here that the power to become children of God was given to those who received Christ and believed in Him, but we must also remember that those who “received and believed” were not born of their own will or the desire of the flesh.

For John, belief in God and the will of man are opposites. It is not as if both coexist. When both coexist, people tend to give priority to their own will. Therefore, when we say that a person believes, he or she does not believe by his or her own will or power, and there is nothing to be proud of. Rather, it is only when there is no more hope in the world that a person is able to “acknowledge that God was God,” which is natural for a human being.

Here again, I would like to consider the expression “received. The New Revised Translation translates this as “accept,” which is more of a concept of “receiving. This act of “receiving” is very simple.

Why do we view faith as such a simple act? I think it is because it is really simple for the weak. Who have nothing left. A person who has nothing to be proud of. To such a person, God voluntarily appears in a humble way, seeking such a person and trying to reclaim him or her as His own. In such a case, the person does not make a difficult theological study, a splendid offering, or an accurate confession of faith. He simply acknowledges that the person of Christ was the very image of God and receives Him.

As an example, did the tax collectors and prostitutes in the Gospels find faith difficult? They did not feel as if

they had learned and understood about faith, but only received Christ with gratitude. For a weak person who has nothing, faith may be such a simple thing in some aspects.

In the following verse 14, the same thing is restated again from the believer's perspective.

Verse 14.

The Word became man and dwelt among us. We have seen the glory of this One. We have seen His glory as the only begotten Son of God, who came from the Father. He was full of grace and truth.

It can be said that the glory of God is something that fills the world but is ignored as something that is not there. But the faithful have come to see the glory of Christ. They have come to realize that Christ, who became man, is God.

His glory seems to have been of a completely different quality than that of the world. We can say that the glory of this world is like that in a royal palace. Power, wealth, etc. are considered glory. But the glory of Christ was in His grace and truth.

So, the grace, where was it located? First of all, it was invisible to most people. It was not something that everyone could feel. However, since the grace was visible only to those who were aware that they were sinners, we can say that the forgiveness of sins and the power to become children of God were the blessings. For those who did not deserve forgiveness, God humbled himself, fulfilled his promise of forgiveness, and gave forgiveness to the sinner.

Such a glorious work of God is not known to those who do not consider themselves sinners. Even those who confess their sins may not really believe that they are sinners, and in such cases, they may only feel that they have confessed their sins and “given” them away. But can such a person see the grace and truth of God?

Today we have been learning about believing in Christ from John. John explains this in a very abstract way, but I would like to consider how it can be applied in concrete terms.

First, one can say that one's life of faith is either “not by blood, but by the will of man, even as the flesh wishes,” or it is by God. In other words, I would like to remember that there is a clear distinction there.

The fact that John felt the need to make that distinction may itself have been a consciousness of the person who is born again in the flesh. Some people may lead a life of faith for the wrong reasons, such as being able to gain honor or to please others. However, even with such fleshly realities, it can be difficult for the person to understand. However, it is ultimately a question of whether or not one loves one's neighbor. By answering this question, we can know whether we love our neighbors.

In the first place, it can be said that the origin of faith is the bankruptcy of life. It is only when one is bankrupt that the meaning of trusting God is revealed. Those who are not broken will always create a false faith with the power of the flesh. But if you are bankrupt, only then will you come to know Christ and His glory, and only then will you come to know Him in a way that will completely change the direction of your life itself.

Now I would like to return to the issue I discussed at the beginning of this article. Why should we trust Christ when our lives are in shambles? What kind of God is He? What can we say from this passage?

First, we should remember that the sending of Christ was a great blessing in itself. God has taken the lowly step and made a great concession, and as a result, we are presented with two choices: to accept Christ or not to accept Him. There is a forgiving attitude toward sinners that is not deserved. It is that kind of One in whom we are to trust, not a false one like man. Isn't that more than enough to trust God?

And since He has already given us all the concessions He can, if we trust Him, He will not withhold His guidance.

Another reason to trust God is that He is powerful. The world was created through Christ. That same One can transform us who are living in sin. The Mighty One who created the magnificent nature of this world can also change us.

Nothing is impossible for God. Our salvation does not depend on whether God has the power to save or whether He has love, but on whether we can stop loving the world and receive Christ.

So, the way of God is already presented, not unwrapped. Rather, it is not God's attitude that is being questioned, but rather our attitude around whether we trust such a One, or rather, whether we feel the need to trust Him before that.

The confident person does not even see the need for it. For most people, Christ is unnecessary. What's more, no one in this world realizes that God is God. The real God is not perceived as God by anyone. We must remember that that is the way it is.

Now that we have considered the reasons for trusting God, it would seem that we have a natural choice to make. However, I should add that it is extremely difficult for post-fall man to stop relying on any power of his own and simply rely on God, trusting and waiting for His work to be done.

So what should we do? Should we confess, "I receive Christ?" Receiving in that way may ultimately be necessary. But it seems a bit prideful to be aware that we will inevitably do so. Does a person who no longer believes in his own power really think consciously in that way? The sinner may feel that he has received when he realizes it. It would be more important to concentrate on humbling oneself and continuing to acknowledge one's sins before thinking, "I will receive Christ."

One who has faced the law and strived to do it. The person who as a result has lost his or her mind and does not have the strength to turn back or even know how to turn back. A person who realizes that he or she does not have the strength to do even the simplest thing, which is to receive Christ. It is to such a person that the power of the Spirit works and guides. Such a person will have a clear view of Christ's glory as God. And faith will be seen as a simple matter of "receiving" the glorious Christ. God can make such a person born again. With these things assured, we hope to find the real God and be recipients of Christ at this time of Advent.

PRAYER: Gracious Father.

Today, as we enter the season of Advent, we remember what a great blessing it was that Christ became man and dwelt in the world. We are not qualified to demand such a work of you. But you have treated us voluntarily and graciously.

And yet, we sometimes disregard Your gracious works and do not even see the need for them. Let us once again humble ourselves before You and acknowledge our fallen condition. Then place your guidance so that you may see the glory of Christ.

With thanksgiving, we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.