

The True Light's Coming Brought out Tragic and Tremendous Responses

December 20, 2009 - John 1:6-13

The Word Became Flesh

1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life,¹ and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to his own,² and his own people³ did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Footnotes

[\[1\]](#) 1:4 Or *was not any thing made. That which has been made was life in him*

[\[2\]](#) 1:11 Greek *to his own things*; that is, to his own domain, or to his own people

[\[3\]](#) 1:11 *People* is implied in Greek

Can the same event bring both tragedy and joy?

It happens in sports all the time – one team or person wins; joy.

One team or person loses – tragic. It happens in job promotions – one person gets the position – joy; others don't get it – tragedy/sadness. It can happen with a new hairstyle – the person with the new hairdo and some friends love it – joy; others don't like it or are jealous. It can happen with a movie, book, art work or song performed – Some love it and think it was well done – joy; Others hate it and think it was poorly done.

It happens in a year – One year brings tragedy, disappointments, but also happiness and tremendous things to most lives. If you were to look at your life today, would you describe it as tragic, tremendous, ordinary, or a mixture?

At Christmas, the tragedies and triumphs of this past year can creep into our celebrations. There may be reminders of each through this season. But Christians can celebrate something tremendous in their lives even if they've had a tragic year. That tremendous event happened with the coming of the true light into the world 2000 years ago. His coming brought out tragic and tremendous responses! Today we're going to look at what happened when He came. We will look at

how people responded. Then we will ponder what the true light's coming has brought out in our lives. By the end of our time together my hope is some of you will see how your response to Jesus is currently tragic. But you will also see how it can turn into a tremendous response. If you've already responded to Jesus, my hope is you will see afresh the tremendous gift you've received and then the need to use this gift.

This all comes from the opening verses of John's gospel. John puts Christ's coming in cosmic context. He goes back to before the beginning of time. Yet John is intent to emphasize the reality of Jesus' coming. This was not something solely spiritual but real. The last time we were in this passage we ended at verse 5 with the very good news – The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. But then what happened?

The messenger announcing the true light (1:6-8)

The Gospel writer John turns to the messenger sent to bear witness about the light. In verse 6 the writer brings the Light's coming into history and down to earth. "There was a man sent from God, whose

name was John." So we're no longer talking in abstract terms.

There was a real man. He was not God, nor was he with God in the beginning. But he was sent from God.

His name was John. Notice John the Gospel writer doesn't name this man John the Baptist. This is the only Gospel where "the Baptist" is not added to John's name. Perhaps its because John the Gospel writer never identifies himself as John. He calls himself the disciple whom Jesus loved. John and Jesus were close.

So this John in verse 6 is John the Baptist, sent from God with a specific task. Verse 7 – "He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light." He came as a "martuion" to bear "marturs." Witness is "marturion" in Greek from which we get our English word martyr. The NIV translates this verse "He came as witness to testify." That's a good translation but it misses John's emphasis using the same word. He came as a witness to bear witness.

In fact, John sprinkles witness and courtroom language throughout his Gospel. That's what this Gospel is all about – to bear witness about the true light so that you might believe. So John 4:39 – "Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the

woman’s witness or testimony.” John 5:32 – The Father bears witness about Jesus. John 5:36 – The works of Jesus bear witness to who He is. John 5:39 – The Old Testament bears witness about Jesus. John 12:17 – The crowd that had been with Jesus when he brought Lazarus out of the tomb continues to bear witness. John 15:26 – The Holy Spirit will bear witness. John 15:27 – The apostles will bear witness.

John the Baptist was the first to bear witness to the light. There were many others during the time of Christ. God has raised up faithful messengers who bear witness throughout history. In fact, if you’re a Christian, think back to the time you came to Christ. That coming was likely because someone witnessed or gave testimony to you about Christ. It could have been a preacher, a friend, a parent, a camp counselor, the Bible, something you read in a book. God raises up His messengers to bear witness. John was sent from God as a witness to bear witness that all might believe through him. His witness was about the true light.

The true light – Jesus Christ. (1:9)

So John the Gospel writer goes to the light in verse 9. The “true” light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. **What is the “true light?”** Well, remember we learned earlier about the identity of the light. Verse 5 says the light shines in the darkness. Who is the light? Verse 4 – In him was life and that life was the light of men. So “his life” was the light. The “Him” is the Word from verse 1. He is the pre-existent Christ. So the light is Jesus’ life.

But here John adds the modifier “true.” True here means genuine; real – not counterfeit or false. So the answer to the question “what is the true light” would be *Jesus’ life showing the genuine (and ultimate) self-disclosure of God to man.* If you want to know about God, look at Jesus and His life. One commentator writes “Other lights “were flickers of the truth; some were faint glimpses of reality; some were will o’ the wisps which men followed and which led men out into the dark and left them there” (Barclay).

The same is true today. People look to the Dalai Lama for light; or some self-help guru. They think they can find light by blending all religions together into one harmony. But there is one true light that reveals God and many false ones.

But how does it “enlighten everyone?” That could be a troubling statement. Some have taken it to mean that everyone gets enlightened, and therefore, everyone is right with God and everyone is going to heaven. But that goes contrary to many other passages in the Bible. So in what sense does the true light enlighten?

The word is “photizein” from which we get photo. What does photo mean? It’s a prefix meaning light. All the words that come with this prefix have something to do with light. So photograph is an image put on light sensitive paper so it can be seen by others. A photocopy is a reproduction of an image. And how do photocopiers work? Well if you’ve ever tried to photocopy your face you have to stare into blinding light. That light illumines the original so that the machine can then copy it and transfer it to other paper.

“Enlighten” in verse 9 means something similar – “to shed light, to give light, to make visible.” I don’t think it could be an internal illumination. I think it reveals who we really are compared to God. The true light enlightens us when God’s blinding, piercing light shines on our lives.

What happened when people encountered Jesus? Peter – “go away from me Lord for I am a sinful man” – When you read or hear about Jesus’ life? Maybe we’re struck with the profound nature of His wisdom. Maybe we’re shamed and exposed by what He teaches. Maybe His life exposes our poor response to a person or situation. One commentator puts it this way. “By this light man is able to look inward upon himself, and to become conscious of the strange contradictions in his nature – his capacity for doing good and for doing evil, his heavenly aspirations and his earthbound desires, his reaching for the stars and his descent into the abyss, his hope and his despair, his godliness (piety) and his godlessness. The light is external and genuine. It exposes who we really are and reveals our desperate need for God.

The true light which enlightens everyone was coming “into the world.” But **what world did it come into?** Is the world the universe? Is the world the planet earth? The word for world here is “cosmos.” Originally, cosmos meant “ornament.” The universe was a beautiful ornament. That’s why cosmetic comes from cosmos. Cosmetics help make beautiful the faces of those who wear them.

But Christian writers like Paul and John adopted another meaning for cosmos or world. Their meaning for “world” was “creation shattered by the fall.” The world opposed Christ, rejected Him and finally crucified Him. So here the world means “*Mankind in opposition to Christ.*”

“For John and Paul, the shattering thing was that people who inhabit this beautiful and ordered universe acted in an ugly and unreasonable way when they came face to face with Christ.” John carries this theme of the world’s rejection of Jesus throughout this Gospel. In John 7:7 Jesus says, “the world hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil.” John 12:31 – Jesus talks about the devil and says “Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.” John 16:20 – The world rejoices over things we Christians weep over. John 17:25 – The world does not know the Father.”

So the world – human beings in rebellion – hates God and hates Jesus. This makes God’s response to the world all the more remarkable. John 1:29 – Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. John 3:16 – For God so loved the world. . .” Isn’t it

tempting to picture that verse meaning Jesus came into the wonderful universe and planet Earth to bring peace. No, God so loved this hostile place that He saw our desperate need. So he sent His son into it.

Then in 4:42 we find out Jesus is Savior of the world. That says a great deal about Jesus. But nothing positive about the world. It tells us the world needs a savior. John 6:33 – He gives life to the world. John 6:51 – He gives his flesh for the world. John 12:47 – He came to save the world and not judge it. John 16:33 – He overcame the world. “In this world you will have trouble; but take heart I have overcome the world.”

So in just a few phrases we now know as verse 9, John has laid out the staggering truths about Jesus’ coming. He is the true light – the ultimate self-disclosure of God Himself to man, which enlightens everyone – shows us who we really are compared to God, was coming into the world – a place full of humanity opposed to God. From this verse, we now have a context to evaluate the responses to Jesus’ coming.

Two tragic and one tremendous response to the True Light's coming. (1:10-13)

Tragic Response #1 – Indifference – The world failed to recognize the true light's real identity. (1:10). Verse 10 – “He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know Him.” Here were millions of people. They needed reconciliation with God and themselves. The one who created them came to them. But they did not know or recognize Him. They did not see that this was God among them. They failed to come to know Him intimately, to know and love Him as a friend and to take His gift so they could be in right relation with God. So they responded with a shrug, a yawn and moved on. But then came an even more tragic response.

Tragic Response #2 – Rejection – His own refused to receive Him. (1:11)

Verse 11 – He came to His own, and his own people did not receive him.” We might translate the opening words “He came home.” He came to Israel. He came to God's people. But they rejected Him

en masse. This pattern was the same one repeated throughout the Old Testament.

Isaiah 65:2-3

- “I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices; a people who provoke me to my face continually, sacrificing in gardens and making offerings on bricks.”

Jer. 7:25-26.

- “From the day that your fathers came out of Egypt to this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them day after day. Yet they did not listen to me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers.”

One commentator writes “If there was one, dominant point that Christians had to make in their evangelism of first-century Jews it was that the man they proclaimed as Savior and Lord was largely rejected by his own people.

If the passage ended there, it would be grim indeed. But then John writes verse 12. “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”

Tremendous Response to the Light’s coming – Receive Him and Believe on His name. (1:12-13)

To receive Him means to take Him into your life as Lord and Savior. To believe on His name means to give allegiance to Him because He is what His name or names imply. To believe is to trust him completely. It means “I believe Jesus is God the Son and completely trust Him with my life. He is now my Lord and Savior.

But why is it a tremendous response? It’s not tremendous because we’ve done such a remarkable thing – receiving Christ and believing in Him though it is wonderful – it’s tremendous *because of what God does with the response.*

We see in verse 12 that to those who believe, Jesus gave the right to become children of God. Jesus gives anyone who believes in Him a new status. They are now authorized to become God’s children. When they get that “right” God performs a tremendous act. Verse 13 – “Who were born, not of blood, not of the will of the flesh, nor of the

will of man, but of God.” In other words, God gives a supernatural new birth to these children. The origin of our rebirth comes from Him. We are born “of God.” We’re not born of God because of the blood of our parents. The text actually says “bloods” likely meaning the two bloods of our parents mixing together. Being born into a Christian home does not mean we’re born of God. We’re not born of the natural human desire for procreation. We’re not born because of our will. Although we must be willing to be born again, we don’t create the new birth. Your new birth in Christ is a sheer miracle. The power to produce the new birth does not rest with anything or anyone but God. So when a person receives Christ and believes on His name, that’s a tremendous response because of what God does with it.

So the light has shone in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. But this was not some abstract light. It was Jesus’ life. God sent a man named John and many other messengers to bear witness to the light. This true light shows everyone who they really are compared to God. He came into the world opposed to Him to save that world. Many responded with indifference. Many responded with rejection. Some received Him and believed on His name.

What has Jesus' coming brought out in your life? Where do you find yourself in this account?

Where are you at with respect to Christ?

- Indifferent – Who cares – with a slight shrug and you're on your way?
- Rejecting – saying No to Jesus and get away?

If that describes where you've been with Jesus, your response is tragic. You're missing the true light who can enlighten you and reconcile you to God. Will you change your response from tragic to tremendous today by receiving Him and believing on His name?

During our time of prayer in a moment, you can do that or you can even tune me out right now and talk to Jesus in prayer.

Many here have already received Jesus and believed on His name. So we have two responsibilities that come with receiving this tremendous gift. First, we must walk with Him. Later in the New Testament, John writes in 1 John 1:5-7 – “God is light and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the

blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.” Are you walking with the Light Jesus and letting Him shine His light over your life? What's going well? What needs to change for 2010?

Second, we must take up our responsibility to follow in John the Baptist's footsteps. We, too, are sent as witnesses to bear witness. We have heard and seen witnesses bear witness through baptisms, testimonies and new members over the past few weeks. But we must bear witness in every day life as well. We do that by bearing witness to others about who Jesus is and what He's done. Are you taking up God's call to bear witness to true light?

Jesus' coming brought out tragic and tremendous responses. May those of you stuck in the tragic move to the tremendous now. May those of us who already have experienced the tremendous will move to passing that light on through Christmas and the rest of our lives.