

The Word

Christmas in Perspective

John 1:1-18
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The other day a mother described her phone conversation with an adult son.

He will call on the phone and I'll answer, "Hello." He'll respond, "Hello." I'll say, "Is this Freddy?" He'll answer, "Yes." There will be a long pause. I'll ask, "What's happening?" He'll answer, "Not much." I'll probe, "How's work?" He'll say, "Good." I'll ask, "How's the family?" He'll say, "Good." I'll ask, "Any special reason for the call?" "Nope," he'll answer.

I burst out laughing as I heard this mother describe my friend. I thought, "I'm glad I'm not the only one who is oblivious to what he thinks." Have you ever had conversations like that? It is difficult to know people if they don't speak. I had an introverted couple tell me they could take a hundred-fifty-mile trip together and not utter a single word to each other. In cases like that, I'm sure there is something going on inside each individual; but knowing what is limited to non-verbal signals such as sighs, frowns, smiles, and wrinkled eyebrows. Now, communication is both verbal and non-verbal. However, if you ever have played charades, you know that words are far more efficient and helpful in communicating.

When the Apostle John decided to write about Jesus, he wrote a prologue to introduce his account. Instead, of penning, "I'm writing about the life and ministry of Jesus," he began: "*In the beginning was the word.*" Why did he write that? Was he just being poetic? Was he being clever or mysterious? John wrote his gospel because God wanted to use his knowledge of Jesus to reach people. In this prologue, John was not only introducing why people should read his gospel. He and God who inspired him were communicating something extraordinary that they

wanted each reader to understand. *God wants you and me to understand that he is not and has never been silent: “**In the beginning was the word.**”* People are ignorant of God. People are estranged from God. People are searching for God. But none of that is because God was silent or hidden.

The most religious city in New Testament times may not have been Jerusalem. Instead, it probably was the Greek city of Athens. When Paul visited Athens, he was troubled by all the idols he saw. The book of Acts says that they were found everywhere (Acts 17:16). At one point Paul said:

I notice that you are very religious. (Acts 17:22, NLT)

These were very religious people, yet they were very ignorant. In addressing a council of philosophers, Paul confronted them, saying:

You have been worshiping (God) without knowing who he is... He is not far from any one of us. For in him we live and move and exist. God overlooked people's former ignorance about these things, but now he commands everyone everywhere to turn away from idols and turn to him. (Acts 17:23, 27-28, 30; NLT)

These people were ignorant of God and foolish in their practices not because God was an introvert. They were searching for God not because he was lost, hidden or quiet. Indeed, Paul noted that God is so close that in him we live, move and exist. He's no more absent than the air we breathe. Why then do we become ignorant?

Years ago, when I was in elementary, junior high and high school, I experienced a mantra from teachers. They thought we'd learn better if they affirmed us. Time after time, my classes were told how smart and knowledgeable we were. We were smarter than any generation before us. We began to believe it. We became historically arrogant. We thought that our ancestors' were primitive. We had the better grasp on truth. We were more developed. Such notions fit

well with the theory of evolution. Species evolve over time, and so does human thinking. Applying this, biblical and historical scholars taught that biblical accounts of creation and the flood were simply historical refinements of older mythological stories. It all worked out quite neat and made the current occupants of this earth look quite brilliant.

Unfortunately, there is a problem. The history of human civilization reveals that there is as much tendency to disintegrate as there is to develop. Archeology shows that Sumerian society in 3200 B.C. was much further advanced than its descendants in the thousands of years that followed. More recently, in the middle ages, the disintegration was so profound that we nearly lost all record of human history. It would be lost if it weren't for the monks. In addition, some historians have noticed that legend and myth-making take root about 200 years after an event. The tendency for lie and ignorance to develop over time is as present as the tendency toward truth and illumination.

The tendency to ignorance and disintegration is revealed in Scriptures. Paul wrote in Romans:

God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who push the truth away from themselves. From the time the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky and all that God made. They can clearly see his invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse whatsoever for not knowing God. Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. The result was that their minds became dark and confused. Claiming to be wise, they became utter fools instead. Instead of believing what they knew was the truth about God, they deliberately chose to believe lies. So they worshiped the things God made but not the Creator himself. (Romans 1:18, 20-22, 25; NLT)

The Bible reveals that impact of sin is far greater than a guilty conscience. Sin affects our ability to grasp truth. It makes us progressively ignorant. We become more confused, deceived, ignorant and destructive. We not only miss truth, but we become stumbling blocks.

We make it harder for others to comprehend the truth. Our children suffer. Our friends suffer. Our neighbors suffer. Our society suffers and all creation suffers. The fool is a danger to all. We see that on the highway, but that is so true in all of life. We are fools through sin. We personally destruct and cause social disintegration. Consequently, we miss the obvious. We miss God. The truth of creation becomes myths about creation. The truth of the flood becomes myths about a flood. The truth of God becomes buried in myths and lies.

Despite that, God kept speaking. The writer of Hebrews began:

Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. But now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son... The Son reflects God's own glory, and everything about him represents God exactly. (Hebrews 1:1-3, NLT)

Despite our distraction and our rejection, God kept patiently speaking to us. He spoke first in and through creation. He then spoke through corrective word after corrective word from prophets. Finally, his word became a human being. He didn't just speak through the words of Jesus. No, Jesus was and is his word. The Hebrew writer declared: "***The Son reflects God's own glory, and everything about him represents God exactly.***" Jesus put it this way to one of his disciples:

Philip, don't you even yet know who I am, even after all the time I have been with you? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking to see him? (John 14:9, NLT)

Jesus was amazed that Philip didn't understand this. You see he understood that he was God's word to Philip. He was God-spoken to Philip. He was God-unveiled, God-revealed, God-communicated. In relating with Jesus, Philip was relating, conversing and seeing God who was making himself heard and known, explicitly. There were no charades. In Jesus God spoke with both words and actions!

About Jesus, John writes:

In the beginning the Word already existed. He was with God, and he was God. He was in the beginning with God. He created everything there is. Nothing exists that he didn't make. Life itself was in him, and this life gives light to everyone. The light shines through the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it. (John 1:1-5, NLT)

When people speak, their words can be twisted and turned. In the Garden of Eden, Satan asked Eve, “Did God really say?”, and then Satan lied about what God said. With words one can say, “I interpret it this way, but you interpret it that way.” One can exaggerate. One can minimize. One can distort. God witnessed that over the centuries with his Scriptures. He had instructed Moses to be careful, but the people were anything but careful with his word. Instead of being careful, they were being convenient. They made the word fit what suited them. However, with Jesus, the word is a life that illuminates what the darkness hides. You can’t distort a life. God’s word became a human being that no plot of darkness can obscure.

Focus on the life of Jesus and you’ll see God. Focus on Jesus and you’ll know God. Receive Jesus and you’ll welcome God himself. Reject Jesus and you reject God.

John wrote the prologue to his account of Jesus because he wanted readers to know that what they did with Jesus they do with God. John wrote:

Although the world was made through him, the world didn't recognize him when he came. Even in his own land and among his own people, he was not accepted. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn! This is not a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan — this rebirth comes from God. (John 1:10-13, NLT)

So what are you doing this Christmas? When you look into the manger, do you see the Word of God? Do you see God’s word to you? Do you see your own rebirth of innocence? Do you see your own rebirth of purpose? Do you see your own rebirth of identity? Do you see your Father’s love and your rebirth in it? Are you observing the holiday, but missing the word? Turn to Jesus and you will see. In his presence the darkness can only recede.