

From Audience to Stage

Bible Verses Referenced: John 1:1-14, Genesis 1:3, John 3:19-21

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank You for the gift of Your Son, Jesus Christ, who, through the revelation of His glory, speaks to our hearts and minds and calls us to not only be in wrapped attention to Him, but also to enter into the life of His glory so that we might manifest that same light.

And so we ask that the preaching of Your Word might be Your Word for the sake and glory of Your Son, Jesus, in His name we pray. Amen. There was a late Roman Catholic theologian. His name was Hans Er von Balthazar, which kind of sounds like one of the wise men, but he was a fantastic theologian, wrote 85 books, but most famously wrote a 15-volume trilogy which I'm commending to you for light reading for maybe a New Year's goal to read von Balthazar's Fifteen Volume Set.

But one of the things about that 15 volumes, it was divided up into three parts, and it was all about, and this is, I think, the focus and interest of von Balthazar's life work, is what is it that really, truly grabs the attention of human beings when it comes to God? And so he was very much interested in aesthetics, and particularly the trilogy focuses on the aesthetic of beauty, goodness, and truth.

And so, fifteen volumes on beauty, goodness, and truth. That wouldn't hurt you to read that, but I'll admit that I'm not going to read it all this year. But one of the things he writes about beauty is about the glory of the Lord, that it's God's glory, His light.

And I mentioned that in my sermon on Christmas Eve, that God's light is like an efolgent beauty, its brightness, its light, and when you refract it, it becomes the beauty of the various colors of the rainbow, which are the visible manifestation of all the attributes of God. And so that's one piece of it. Then he zeroes in on the goodness of the Lord, which he describes as the theodrama.

And then the truth is theologic. And so, what I want to focus on today is this idea of a theodrama, because more than anything else, this prologue of John's gospel is describing for us the Theodrama in bold brushstrokes that in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and the Word, and He is in the beginning with God.

All things were made through Him. Without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. Hans, let's just call him Hans, for the sake of not getting tongue twisted. Hans describes both a Theodrama and an ego drama. The idea of the Theodrama is that there is this grand master story, for lack of a better term, that is playing itself out with what God has done in creation.

And God is the author of that story, and he's also the master director of that story. And that's what John is describing with this idea of the logos. That the logos is the script, so to speak. It's the logic or the truth or the word that the author of this drama has written. And so, it's not just a script that has been written, but it is a script that is now being enacted.

Nothing could be more dramatic than let there be light. In fact, many of our dramas and plays, they start in darkness, don't they? And all of a sudden, you see a spotlight coming from behind, and it lights up the stage, and the drama unfolds and begins. "Well, that's what God has done with creation," John says.

"Let there be light," and instantly the magnificent story and the grand drama of God has begun to unfold. And what John says is that there was one who was very much integrally a part of this drama, which he names as the Word. But he also personalizes the Word. He says that He was in the beginning with God.

All things were made through Him, and without Him, not one thing was made. In Him was the life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it. So, the Theodrama is unfolding.

One of the arguments of Scripture is that human beings are walking around in this amphitheater of God's mega drama, and yet we have rebelled against it.

Starting very early with the founding of humanity and our creation, we turned against the plan and the will of God and started to set off on our own storyline and say, "Okay, you have your Theodrama, Lord, but we're going to make up our own story." And this is what von Balthazar calls the ego drama. So you have the Theodrama and you have the ego drama.

And many people in this world, and this is part of what John is arguing here. Many people in this world live as if the theodrama, one, doesn't even exist, or two, is irrelevant to their lives. It's kind of like I picked up the newspaper today and I was reading the sports section, and I got to the whole story about our quarterback.

What's his name again? What is it, Doug? Do you remember? The quarterback of the Jacksonville Jaguars? No, we don't. Somebody over here doesn't follow football. Trevor Lawrence, that's his name. Trevor Lawrence. And how he's not going to be playing today. Does anybody follow football in here? Sorry to use you as a foil, Doug.

But, you know, many of us live our lives in the drama of the NFL football. And for those of us who say follow a team, we get very caught up in the characters of that team, and we're understanding how the season has unfolded, et cetera, and we give our attention to it. But there are people in this world who don't really care about the Jacksonville Jaguars.

No. Well, here's the problem is that's an ego drama. That's one little aspect of individualistic stories that are unfolding in the created order. Is it an important part of the story? Sure. But is it as important as the Theodrama?

No way. And yet, some people live, and I don't want to just pick on football, but some people live as if their ego drama is all that there is. And this is the fundamental problem with the way that the created order has been unfolding, is that God has a master plan and vision and scene that is happening, and humanity is living as if it is not relevant at all.

Now, to be fair, to humanity that is, part of the problem is evil and all of the suffering and the challenges and difficulties. And one of the reasons why many in this world reject the divine drama and the divine story is because of the problem of evil. This was the problem of my grandfather, actually, who was a veteran of World War II.

He flew in the B-17s, 25 missions, and lost a lot of his friends and members of his squadron. In fact, his plane was the only one of his squadron that made it to 25 missions. And he would call me up sometimes at holiday times after having too many scotches, and he'd want to argue about the Theodrama.

How can you believe in this kind of stuff? Say, "Hey, Papa." And he would say, "How can you believe in it with people like Hitler and the war and all the death and the disease and the challenges of this world?" And so he used in his mind, and this is what he called himself an atheist, somebody who did not believe in God.

But he used in his mind the problem of evil as his reasoning for the rejection of the Theodrama, and again, asserting the importance of his ego drama. John says it this way, "The true light which gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him.

The world did not know Him." Now, on one level, the reason why you could say the world has rejected God's drama is because of the problem of the evil in the drama. But the other reason is the fundamental rebellion of human nature itself. John would go on to say in his gospel, "This is the judgment. The light has come into the world, but people love the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil.

Everyone who does wicked things hates the light, does not come into the light, lest his work should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light so that it may be clearly seen that its works have been carried out in God. There is something within the heart of humanity, and each one of us as individuals that asserts the ego drama over the Theodrama and wants to just write our own story rather than surrender our hearts and our lives to the divine story.

So, what has God done to grab us back and bring us back into his story? Well, what John is announcing is that he is doing something incredibly radical. Not only is God the author of the drama, the director of the drama that makes it happen.

But he has now, in these last days, become a full-on participant within the drama. In other words, that word, that logos, that light, which is above and leading and directing all things, has now become flesh and made His dwelling among us. The author and director has now come on the stage.

And this is a new twist in the Theo drama and one that we have to pay attention to, even if we are enwrapped in our own ego dramas. This is the announcement of Christmas and the incarnation is that God is getting our attention boldly and profoundly by the sending of His Son.

And so, what Irv von Balthazar, he wrestles with, well, what is it that God is doing to grab our attention?

And the way John puts it is he is manifesting all of that divine glory, that beauty, that truth, that goodness in the person of Jesus Christ, so that the world has to stand up and take notice and be either enwrapped by it to where our hearts are moved, and we want to enter into that dramatic story or continue in our rebellion, but be firmly judged in it.

The way John puts it is, "To all who receive Him," I'm sorry, let me back up. Verse 11, "He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him.

But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become the children of God, who were born not of blood, nor the will of the flesh, nor the will of man, but of God." On one level, our calling here is to be attentive to what God is doing in this world, and especially attentive to what God is doing and what is displayed here in this crash in the coming in the flesh of God in the incarnation.

Our minds, our hearts, our very lives need to be so captured and captivated by that that our own little ego dramas and stories become subsumed with the divine story, where we become caught up in it and connected to it and try to sort out how our lives are to be brought into alignment with it.

One of the shows that I enjoy watching is "America's Got Talent." You ever seen that one, Doug? Ah, we found out what Doug's interested in over football. But America's got talents. I just love seeing people on stage doing great things. You know, there's something powerful about the drama of that.

But one of the scenes that happened last year, and it was kind of a surprising thing that was captured in "America's Got Talent", is they have all these people that are watching the people with talent upfront, and those are called the audience. And one of the things that they do at commercial breaks at America's Got Talent is they let audience members sing and stand up and do something, you know, try on their talents.

And so the judges go off and take a break, and they kind of just play around with the audience. And so, at one of these, this was back in July of last year, there was this young girl, let me get her name right. Her name is Madison Taylor. She's an 11-year-old girl, stands up in the audience and sings this amazing version of amazing grace. It was just beautiful.

I mean, it's like Aretha Franklin came out of this 11-year-old girl's voice. And the judges were kind of like walking in with their cox and that sort of thing. And they hear this young girl singing. And all of a sudden, they're captured by it.

And they do something that they never do, but they take a person who is an audience member, and they say, "We need to have you be up on the stage." And so, little Megan gets up on stage, and she is so filled with nerves, but they give her a moment, she collects herself, and they have her sing Amazing Grace from the stage. And she does it again.

Just lets off with her a Reeth the Franklin voice, and hits all the notes perfectly, and the judges all collectively give her a golden buzzer. You know what that is, right, Doug? Oh. That's where they kind of hit it and all the confetti falls down on the person on the stage. It's a glorious moment.

But I think that, more than anything else, represents what God is doing with the incarnation, and especially in John chapter 1. See, he's saying that God entered onto the stage as the main actor, but then

he saw fit to choose us out of the audience and say, "Hey, you, Megan, get up on stage here and let's see what else you can do." And this is what John is getting at when he says, "To those who received Him," in other words, to those who believed in Him, He gave the right to become children of God.

Children not born of the will of man or of flesh, but children born of God. In other words, the incarnation, what it's doing is it's reaching out into your life and saying, "Hey, come get involved in the theodrama." And not only are you going to be an audience member, but the Lord wants to use you as a participant and get you on the stage.

And he's chosen you and called you and elected you. And more than that, he's also hit the golden buzzer for you. He thinks you're awesome and wonderful. And he has designed you to be that way. So here's a potential 2024 New Year's resolution.

That I would take my little story and I would figure out God's story and how my story syncs up with it and how I can get engaged and become an active participant and engaged participant in the theodrama of God in Jesus Christ as His child.

One of the things that we have going on today is we are commissioning a group of young people who have said yes to the Theodrama of God. Some of our teenagers who are going and spending a portion of their holiday on mission trip to Jamaica.

They have said, "We're not just going to be spectators in the faith, but we're going to be active participants and get on stage and go engage in the mission work of the Lord." They are a great visual manifestation of God's glory working in the flesh through them in order to, right at the beginning of the year, challenge us to be the same.