

Proposition: The gospel of John teaches us about the uniqueness of Jesus by making an important contrast between Jesus and a man named John in John 1:6-13.

- I. John was a witness (6-8).
 - A. He was a great man (6).
 - 1. He was sent from God.
 - 2. He was like a prophet.
 - B. He had a great ministry (7).
 - 1. His goal was to point people to Christ.
 - 2. His goal was to see people believe.
 - C. But he wasn't the light (8).
- II. Jesus is the Light (9-13).
 - A. He's unique because of what He *does* (9).
 - B. He's unique because of what He *did* (10-11).
 - 1. He came to the world.
 - 2. He made the world.
 - 3. He was not recognized by the world.
 - 4. He felt the rejection of those who were His own.
 - C. He's unique because of what He *will do* (12-13).
 - 1. He will bring sinners into the family of God.
 - 2. He will do for us what we can't do for ourselves.

I remember a Christmas when I was about ten that stands out. We were at our grandparents house, the next morning we'd open gifts. I never slept too well on Christmas Eve as a child--lots of trips to the clock to see how much more time until I was "allowed to" get up.

On this night, I awakened and it was still dark. But something caught my eye at the window. It seemed brighter in the room than usual. I walked over to gaze outside, and what I saw caused me to blink hard a couple of times. There was a mysterious light in the sky. It was bigger than any star I'd ever seen. It looked kind of like the moon, but it wasn't the moon.

A couple of days later I saw something in the newspaper about it being an usual alignment of the planets or something, but that night all I could think of was that amazing star connected with the first Christmas. I wondered how the shepherds felt when they saw the light in the Bethlehem sky. I had even more trouble than usual sleeping the rest of that night!

There's a great emphasis on *light* in our observance of Christmas. We decorate with lights. Many of the Christmas hymns reflect on the *light* theme:

"Shepherds, in the fields abiding, watching o'er your flocks by night, God with man is now residing, yonder shines the infant *Light*: Come and worship, come and worship, worship Christ, the newborn King." (*Angels from the Realms of Glory*)

"Hail the heaven born Prince of Peace! Hail the Sun of Righteousness! *Light* and life to all He brings, risen with healing in His wings. Mild He lays His glory by, born that man no more may die, born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth." (*Hark! the Herald Angels Sing*)

** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

"The first Noel, the angel did say, was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay; In fields where they lay keeping their sheep, on a cold winter's night that was so deep. They looked up and saw a *star*, shining in the east, beyond them far, and to the earth it gave great *light*, and so it continued both day and night." (*The First Noel*)

"O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie! Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by. Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting *Light*; The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight."

"Silent night, holy night, Son of God, love's pure *light* radiant beams from Thy holy face, with the dawn of redeeming grace, Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth, Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth."

The connection between *light* and Christmas is biblical, as we'll see this morning in part two of our series, "When God Became Man." We're probing perhaps the most amazing event this planet has ever seen, doing so from the perspective of one of Jesus' followers, John, the son of Zebedee. Our goal is to get to know the Christ of Christmas better. John can help us.

At the beginning of his gospel, John teaches us about the uniqueness of Jesus by making an important contrast in John 1:6-13. It's a contrast involving the *light* theme, a contrast involving two people. Here's the first...

I. John was a witness (6-8).

"There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John." That's interesting. In an introduction to a biography about Jesus, the apostle John inserts a reference to a man named John. Why? And what John is he talking about? And why do we need to know about John if this is a book about Jesus?

As I mentioned last week, one of the first things I typically do with seekers is encourage them to read the gospel of John. And one of the first responses I hear from those who take the challenge is, "What's going on in chapter one? I know that John is writing this book. Who's the John in verse 6?"

A different John! The author is John the apostle, a man who spent three years as an eyewitness of Jesus, and who at the time of writing (some sixty years later) was serving in the city of Ephesus. The John in verse 6 is the man commonly known as John the Baptist (though John doesn't refer to him as "the Baptist" here or anywhere else in his gospel).

What does the apostle John tell us about this John? Three things.

A. He was a great man (6). "There was a man sent from God." Stop there. We need to go back to verses 1-5 to see an obvious contrast: verse 1, "In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God;" verse 2, "He was with God in the beginning;" verse 3, "Through him all things were made;" verse 4, "In him was life."

That's what's true of the Logos, the Second Person of the Triune Godhead, the One who is the Life-giver and Light-bearer. Jesus is God!

That's the subject of verses 1-5. What about the subject of verses 6-8? "There came a *man*." Don't miss that. We're talking now about a *man*--a great man, without question--but nonetheless, a man. This isn't the Logos. This is a man, and concerning this man we learn two insights in verse 6.

1. *He was sent from God.* Indeed, the word "came" in verse 6 ("was" in the KJV) means "to come into being." Jesus "was," but John "came." He was sent from God.

2. *He was like a prophet.* The text specifies that his name was *Johannes* in the Greek, John. John's name means "Jehovah has been gracious." Prophets were men sent from God. John the Baptist was a transitional figure, a bridge between the Old Testament and the New Testament. His attire of camel's hair clothing and his diet of locusts and wild honey (Matt. 3:4) remind us of the ancient prophet, Elijah (2 Kgs. 1:8). And like Elijah, John was a great man.

B. He had a great ministry (7). Verse 7 tells us what it was: "He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe." In his ministry, John devoted himself to a twofold goal.

1. *His goal was to point people to Christ.* The KJV's translation, though wooden, captures the repetition that exists in the Greek text, "The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light." John was a *witness*--that's what he was, and he came to *bear witness*--that's what he did.

The *witness* theme runs throughout this fourth gospel. In fact, the apostle John presents witness after witness to substantiate the deity of Jesus--at least seven witnesses in fact.

We see the witness of the *Father* (5:37). There's the witness of *Jesus Himself* (8:14). There's the witness of the *Holy Spirit* (15:26). John also mentions the witness of Jesus' *works* (5:36), the witness of the *Scriptures* (5:39, 46), the witness of *those with whom Jesus came into contact* (like the woman of Samaria in 4:39, and the man born blind in 9:25, 38, and the disciples in 15:27). And it begins with the witness of John the Baptist.

There is a legal ring to this gospel. Testimony is a serious matter, and it's required to substantiate the truthfulness of something or someone. It's not always easy to discover the truth about someone, as we've seen in graphically illustrated in the investigation of our president by the special counsel. That's the purpose of witnesses, to substantiate truth.

John was a witness. Simply put, his goal in life, which turned out to be a very short life of approximately thirty years, was to be a witness, to point people to Christ. And why did he do that?

2. *His goal was to see people believe.* As verse 7 specifies, "So that through him all men might believe." Bearing witness isn't an end in itself. It's a means to an end. The end isn't popularity or a pat on the back. It's to see people believe, to bring them to faith. Faith in whom? The light (8).

It's curious that John the apostle would insert this paragraph about John the Baptist in the middle of his introduction of Jesus. Why would he do that? The answer may have to do with John's followers.

John knew what his role was, but apparently, after his death some of his followers didn't. They began to elevate John.

Remember, the gospel of John was written more five decades after John died. There are historical indications that there was actually a sect who revered John the Baptist. We find a hint of that in Acts 19:3-4. Do you remember what Paul found when he first visited Ephesus as a missionary? Luke writes, "There he found some disciples and asked them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' They answered, 'No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.' So Paul asked, 'Then what baptism did you receive?' 'John's baptism,' they replied."

Perhaps John the apostle faced the same thing, or worse. Perhaps he knew there were people who gave John the Baptist a place that (as Barclay puts it) "encroached upon the place of Jesus himself."

That's nothing new. One of the great barriers we face in evangelism is that people settle for substitutes. They're not interested in Christ because they've given someone or something else the place that Christ alone deserves in their lives.

Maybe as John tried to share Christ with some people, they rejected his message because of their unbiblical elevation of John the Baptist. So John the apostle corrects the confusion. He doesn't depreciate the Baptist. He just exalts Christ.

Suppose I took you outside on a clear, summer night. And suppose I asked you to lie on your back on a grassy hillside and look at the magnificent stars in the night sky. And just imagine that while you're gazing at the Big Dipper, I take my flashlight, use it as a pointer, and direct your attention towards Polaris, the amazing north star.

And suppose I tell you some amazing facts about this great light we call the "North Star," how that it does not appear to move, and that it's some 2,000 trillion miles away. Would your response be, "Wow, what a beautiful flashlight!"?

I doubt it! It may be a nice flashlight, but it doesn't compare with that magnificent light in the sky called Polaris. In fact, the purpose of the flashlight was merely to point your attention to the real light, and once that's accomplished, you forget the flashlight.

So it was with John--and should be with us. John was a great man, and He had a great ministry. But...

C. But he wasn't the light (8). "He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light."

Throughout his gospel, John takes great care to show the subordinate role of John the Baptist in relationship to Jesus. According to 1:8, he wasn't the light, only a witness to the light. In 1:20 we see John the Baptist flatly denying that he was the Christ. Later in chapter three, when the Jews came to John and told him what Jesus was doing, they expected him to resent the intrusion. But instead he announced, "He must become greater; I must become less (3:30)." In 4:1 the text points out that Jesus gained more disciples than John. And in 10:41 the people recognized that Jesus did things John never did.

No, John wasn't the light. That's not to demean John. I remind you that Jesus later gave this glowing commendation of John (5:35), "John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light."

John wasn't the light. What was he, according to Jesus? A lamp. What does a lamp do? Its function is to let the light be seen.

Is that true of your life? Can people see the Light of Jesus through you? My friends, John is an excellent model for us. Like John, we exist for Jesus, to point people to Him. And like John we are called to be a witness. What do we tell people? What John did...

II. Jesus is the Light (9-13).

As you compare what our text tells us here about Christ and John, you can't help but be amazed by the contrast (see Hendriksen, 76). Christ *was* from all eternity (1), but John *came* (6). Christ is *the Word* ("logos," 1), while John is a mere *man* ("anthropos," 6). Christ is Himself God; John is commissioned by God. Christ is the real light; John came

to testify concerning the real light. Christ is the *object* of trust, while John is the *agent* through whose testimony men come to trust in Christ (8).

Do you see the superiority of the One who is the *Logos*? In case you're still not convinced, the apostle presents three accomplishments that highlight the uniqueness of Jesus.

A. He's unique because of what He *does* (9). "The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world." Ponder that word *true*. The Greek language has two very similar words translated "true" in our English Bibles. The first is *alethes*, which means "true as opposed to false." The other is *alethinous* which means "real or genuine as opposed to unreal" (like Coke which is the *real thing* as opposed to imitation colas).

It's the second word that John uses here. Jesus is the *real* light. It's true, there are other lights flickering in the world, each claiming to offer a path out of the darkness. And there are lots of people following them.

But there's only one who is the real light. Please realize that Satan masquerades as what? An angel of *light* (2 Cor. 11:14). But Jesus is the only *real* light.

And what does He do? John says He "gives light to every man." James 1:17 says that every good gift comes from above, from the Father of lights. Commentator Leon Morris says, "There is a general illumination of mankind. It is the common teaching of the New Testament writers that God has revealed something of Himself to all men (Rom. 1:20), sufficient at least for them to be blameworthy when they take the wrong way instead of the right way." John attributes this work of general illumination to the *Logos*.

That's what Jesus does. He is the One who "gives light to every man."

B. He's unique because of what He *did* (10-11). "He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him." Here John mentions four past activities related to Jesus.

1. *He came to the world.* He was in the world. John should know--he saw him, and spent three years with him. Just think of it. God paid a visit to the world. *In cognito*. God was here in the person of Jesus. A second activity...

2. *He made the world.* "The world was made through ["by" in the KJV] him." That's quite a feat to put on your resume, isn't it? He made the world (also in verse 3).

3. *He was not recognized by the world.* "The world knew him not," is how the KJV puts it. That's unthinkable--the Creator came and the creation misread Him!

The innkeeper didn't recognize Him, and so He was born in a stable. King Herod didn't recognize Him--indeed resented Him--and so He was taken into hiding in Egypt as a babe. Later, his half-brothers and sisters didn't recognize Him and accused Him of being out of His mind. The crowds loved His free lunches, but in the end forsook Him. Likewise, the Jewish religious leaders resented Him and attributed His works to the devil. Finally, Pilate and the Romans didn't recognize Him, and executed Him.

Jesus was an enigma to the world. Especially what He did at the Cross. It didn't make sense. He didn't make sense. Great leaders aren't supposed to die a criminal's death, are they? No, but He didn't die for His crimes. He died for ours.

It's tragic, yet true. When Jesus came, the world didn't recognize Him. It will when He comes the next time. Revelation 1:7 says, "Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen." But the first time it was so different.

4. *He felt the rejection of those who were His own.* Verse 11 explains, "He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him." Remember, He's the One who built the universe. Barclay is right when he paraphrases verse 11, "It was into his own home that he came, and his own people did not welcome him."

We could well translate the opening words, "He came home." When Jesus came to this world, He did not come as an alien. He came home. And He didn't come to North America or China or Russia. He came to Israel, to the place and people He had chosen and blessed for more than 14 centuries. Had He come to some other nation and been rejected, it would have been bad enough. But He came home, to the people who should have known He was coming, who should have known Him.

He came to His own, but His own didn't receive Him. It started with *no room* in the inn, and 33 years later, the world said to Him, "*No room* on the planet for you!"

So He destroyed the rebels, right? He gave those ungrateful rejecters what they deserved, didn't He? No, the fact is, He didn't. You say, "Well, that's what I would have done." Me, too. But that's what makes Jesus so unique--that instead of giving us what we deserve, He took what we deserve so we don't have to. Which brings us to His third unique accomplishment.

C. He's unique because of what He will do (12-13). Verse 11 is tragic beyond description. But verse 12 is amazing beyond description. Listen to this amazing offer: "Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God."

What is it that Jesus will do? Two amazing things.

1. *He will bring sinners into the family of God.* John doesn't want to give us the impression, in light of verse 11, that nobody responded to Jesus. Most didn't, but some did.

F. F. Bruce suggests that right here we see a summary of the gospel of John (37-8): "Over the first main division of the Gospel, to the end of chapter 12, we might write the words, 'his own people did not receive him', but over the next division (chapters 13-17) we might write the words which immediately follow in our present context: 'But as for those who did receive him...', --and it is of those that we read at the beginning of chapter 13, 'He had set his love on his own people who were in the world, and he loved them to the uttermost.'"

Those are the only two options: It's either *rejection* (11) or *reception* (12). You either don't receive Jesus (as in verse 11) or you receive Him (as in verse 12).

What happens if you receive Him? What happens to *all* who receive Him? He [Jesus] gives "the right to become children of God." What happens if you don't receive Him? Then you have no right to call yourself a child of God.

The two phrases in verse 12 are synonymous. To "receive" Jesus is to "believe in His name." To believe in Him is to receive Him as a person, to enter into a personal relationship with Him whereby you trust Him to be your Savior and Lord.

"What's in a name?" we might ask and answer with Shakespeare, "that which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet." For us a name is just an identification tag. Not so in the Bible. To believe in Jesus' name means to trust in Him as a person, to believe in Him as He is. It's not just to believe that what He says is true; it's to believe in *Him* as a person.

Well, how do we actually become God's children? Contrary to popular thinking, we are not all God's children. Indeed, we are born into this world as the devil's children (John 8:44), and blind to our condition. How do we become children of God then?

It involves a divine/human cooperative. Verse 12 looks at our responsibility. Verse 13 at God's.¹ "Children born not of natural descent--literally "not of bloods--"nor of human decision." Barclay says this is a Jewish phrase for the Jews believed that a physical son was born from the union of the seed of the father with the blood of the mother. But birth into God's family is quite different from physical birth.

Divine birthright has nothing to do with who you know, or who your parents were, or what nationality you hold. Those things are spiritually irrelevant.

No one gets into the family of God because he has "connections." There are no group rates! Your parents can't get you in. Your friend can't do it for you.

How then do we become God's children? How does it happen? The end of verse 13 tells us. We must be "born of God"--literally, "born from out of God." God must do something that we cannot do. Only God can give spiritual birth.

John develops this truth throughout his gospel: "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit (John 3:6)." "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him (John 6:44)." "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe...This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him (John 6:63-65)."

Paul said the same thing in Titus 3:5, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit." And James put it this way in James 1:18, "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth." And Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1:23, "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God."

In his epistle of 1 John, John elaborates further. 1 John 3:9 says we have been "born of God." In 1 John 4:7 we read, "Let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God." And in 1 John 5:1, "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God."

To enter God's family, you must be born of God? Have you been? "How can I know?" you ask. This verse tells us, "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God."

To put it another way, the truth of the matter is this. Believe in Jesus and...

2. *He will do for us what we can't do for ourselves.* Yes, He is the Light!

¹Verse 13 states, "Children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. Some commentators follow the example of Irenaeus, translating the subject as singular, "to him who was born," suggesting that verse 13 is talking about Christ and His virgin birth. But the oldest manuscripts use the plural.