

Series Slide

You may have never heard of *Thalia & Melpomene*, but I bet you recognize their faces.

[Pic]



These masks have been used in theatre for 2500 years, and have come to represent the ideas of comedy and tragedy. The polar ends of human emotion- deep sadness and overwhelming joy.

Their greek names, (Thalia "*tha-LIE-yah*" for comedy and Melpomene "*mel-POM-enney*" for tragedy) were names of muses in Greek mythology.

In the simplest of terms- a tragedy is a play whose protagonist tends to be a royal or superhuman character that declines through the play, usually ending in the death of that character...and a whole lot more.

If you've read Shakespeare- think about Macbeth or Hamlet- both about Kings that get wrapped up in ambition and a vast majority of the characters end up dead at the end.

Comedies on the other hand usually have characters that are ordinary people that grow and change along the way and they have happy endings-where the ordinary person transcends their circumstances to become better.

Then there are tragicomedies. A tragicomedy is just as the name suggests. Its a blend of both.

Then there are fairy tales.

Fredrick Büchner puts it like this in his book “The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy and Fairlytale”

The Gospel is bad news before its good news. It is the news that man is a sinner, ... that he is evil in the imagination of his heart, that when he looks in the mirror all in a lather what he sees is at least eight parts chicken, phony, slob. That is the tragedy.

But it is also the news that he is loved anyway, cherished, forgiven, bleeding to be sure, but also bled for. That is the comedy.

And yet, so what?

So what if even in his sin the slob is loved and forgiven when the very mark and substance of his sin and of his slobbery is that he keeps turning down the love and forgiveness because he either doesn't believe them or doesn't want them or just doesn't [care]?

In answer, the news of the Gospel is that extraordinary things happen. Zaccheus climbs up a sycamore tree a crook and climbs down a saint. Paul sets out a hatchet man for the Pharisees and comes back a fool for Christ. It is impossible for anybody to leave behind the darkness of the world he carries on his back like a snail, but for God all things are possible. That is the fairy tale. All together they are the truth.

Title Slide- “Thalia & Melpomene: How the Gospel is a Tragicomedy” 1 John 2:3-11

The book of 1 John is not really written in a linear fashion. Its not like Paul's letter to the Romans that is making an argument. This letter is more about amplifying ideas. So John takes 3 ideas that all start with L- life-meaning how you live if you know Jesus, love, and Light- meaning the exposure of the truth— and he sort of goes about in repetitive cycles through 5 chapters- amplifying what those things are and how they relate to God

Thats why if you look in chapter 1- you find him taking about life, love, and light...and then chapter 2, 3, 4, and 5...he just keeps saying it louder and louder for the people at the back

So what I'm preaching today, will carry through the rest of the book.

My aim today is to show you that the gospel- the truth that Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Messiah, is Lord- is a tragicomedy. That each of these words Light, Life, and Love have a tragedy side- where a character in high position is taken down to death...

and a comedy side- where an ordinary person of low position is transformed into something extraordinary.

My hope is this that gives us another deep glimpse into the extraordinary way God love us and changes us.

1 John 2:3-11

3 This is how we know that we know him: if we keep his commands. 4 The one who says, "I have come to know him," and yet doesn't keep his commands, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But whoever keeps his word, truly in him the love of God is made complete. This is how we know we are in him: 6 The one who says he remains in him should walk just as he walked.

7 Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old command that you have had from the beginning. The old command is the word you have heard. 8 Yet I am writing you a new command, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. 9 The one who says he is in the light but hates his brother or sister is in the darkness until now. 10 The one who loves his brother or sister remains in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. 11 But the one who hates his brother or sister is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and doesn't know where he's going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

1) Light exposes the tragedy of our sin- and the comedy of God's love.

In these verses there is lots of talk about light, and being in the light. Light is a metaphor that represents the truth. Light brings exposure. It helps us to see things as they are- instead of how they wish they were.

Ever go clothes shopping, and put on some jeans in a dressing room- and they look great. Then you get them home and you can never quite get them to look the same. That's because light is manipulated in those dressing rooms to make clothes look better than they actually do.

At home- there are no tricks being played. its just you in front of a mirror with you \$2.50 Wal-Mart bulb.

v 4 & v 11-

Look how oblivious we are to our sin. We refuse to admit that its there. We deny it. We put ourselves in God's place. Its often why people run from God. Run from the church. Because we don't won't exposure.

Its why we blame shift. We work so hard to convince ourselves and others that we are without sin- or that someone elses' sin is worse than ours.

But that's exactly what is holding us back. Its what characters like Macbeth did- Convince themselves that what they were doing was right.

The word "gospel" literally means "good news". And you can't receive this "good news" until you first receive the "bad news".

There is no resurrection without death. There is no healing without sickness. There is no appreciation of the light, without understanding the darkness.

Mirror moment. Necessary in understanding the gospel. When the light shines in- when the truth comes out- we see we are 8 parts chicken, phony, slob.

Going through the 10 commandments Ray Comfort style- according to Jesus you are a lying, murderous, adulterer.

When you see that you have been suppressing the truth. Hiding in the dark. Making claims about knowing God, when really you have been running from him...its a tragedy.

Back to 1)

And yet...the light doesn't just expose the bad news- it also exposes the good news.

And that is despite how sinful we are...and despite the fact that God always sees that... he loves us anyway. That is comedy.

v 7-8

There is a strange bit here where John says, "This love one another thing- is an old command- but its also a new command." And he says its new in the sense that now, because of Jesus- we a new light has shined on love.

Remember- 1 John just keeps stating the same points over and over and over- louder and louder with more clarity. So I want to take you to chapter 4 to show you how this old command is made new through Jesus.

4:9-10

God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his one and only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 10 Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

You see the word reveal- that word means to make clear. Its root word in the greek is "SHINE". In other words- the light that reveals our sin- also reveals the depth of God's love.

On the cross- Jesus, the one and only Son of God, was dying in our place. Tragedy. So that we could live eternally. Comedy. He took the punishment- the condemnation- the shame- the separation from God the Father- so that we could be atoned- brought near.

When the light of the truth shines- its tragedy. Its your sin that put Jesus on the cross. You were so bad, he had to die.

But when the light of the truth shines- its comedy. Even though you were so bad Jesus had to die...he loved you so much that he was glad to do it. Thats how much God wants you.

Our little piddly "I know God and love him." but then we continue to run away from him and selfishly do what we want...is not love.

Real love is sacrifice that brings resurrection. Laying down your life for someone else's good.

Back to 1)

That's the tragedy that the light exposes. And the comedy of the truth about God's love. He shouldn't love us. But he does...at his own expense.

2) Love is tragedy because we rejected it- and comedy because its completed in us.

One of the great frustrations living in a broken, fallen world...is because we are created in God's image- we have this ocean of love we all want to give. And we have this giant well waiting to be filled with love. But at the root of sin is this lie, this darkness about how we should give and receive love.

Think about all the twisted ways we try to get and receive love.

Ever met an insecure person? If not, "Hi, my name is Trevor. Every time I step up here I'm wondering if you'll like me".

In a sense, all of us are insecure.

So we do things to find love that is going to secure us. We brag about ourselves. We demean others. We bully. Think about the foolishness of little boy on the playground that picks on and makes fun of the little girl he has a crush on. It makes no sense.

In our broken state as fallen sinful human beings, we end up not really knowing how to get the love out.

Additionally, we are afraid to receive it. We always feel like somebody is tricking us. I mean, that is the original temptation.

In Genesis 3, during the story that explains our fallen human state, God puts humanity in a perfect garden- with all his good gifts and fellowship to enjoy. And the serpent comes along and he tempts. He doesn't threaten- he makes it seem as though the man and woman are being tricked. Duped. Taken advantage of. He tricks them to put their guard up...become hardened and cynical- to lose vulnerability and outsmart God. Stop receiving the love of God that has overflowed to you in a relationship with all these wonderful gifts..and focus on the one thing he said you can't have- a bite of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Gen 3:5

He turns God into competition, instead of a cooperative relational being. And so all his acts of love- become acts of manipulation. And when you think you have blown the lid off of manipulation- you reject those actions.

That's the thing. They thought they had exposed, and revealed God's true motives. They thought they were the light. But when they rejected the love and fellowship of God- they retreated into darkness. They hid in the bushes and covered up. When God called them, they blame shifted. They were afraid. They did anything but take ownership for their sin.

Back to 2)

Jesus' disciples, though they had pledged their undying allegiance to him, when it appeared he had failed, when it looked like he had manipulated them...and led them only to death- they didn't stick around. They abandoned. Rejected. Went their own way.

When the greatest act of love- the sacrifice of the Son of God in our place for our sin was happening- Jesus' disciples said "No Thanks".

When Jesus came healing and inviting people to know God and come into his Kingdom- people said No thanks- because there is no way this upside down way, death leading to life- is THE WAY. And so they crucified the Son of God.

That is the tragedy. In our hubris, in our belief that God is tricking or manipulating us- we reject his love.

...and yet...a great comedy remains.

Because though we rejected his love- it is through that sacrifice that he actually completes his love for humanity.

v 5

John says, If you keep his word- if you obey him- if you in the light of the truth that Jesus died for you, resurrected- and now you will follow him in both an eternal quantity and quality of life- you will then trust him completely. You will no longer believe that he's trying to manipulate you. or take advantage of you. Or keep you from good.

v 4:18-19

(Perfect love drives out fear)

You will trust him- even with the things that seem like death- like not taking revenge on those that harm you...or committing to a sexual ethic that means you don't do everything you feel like doing with whoever you feel like doing it with. Instead of evaluating God's love by what he "lets" you do- you evaluate his love by the cross and resurrection- and from that you trust even the difficult commands.

And through that- John says you Complete his love.

v 5

Now- how in the world is God's love incomplete.

Well- in this way. came in the flesh once. Jesus died once. Historically- he was crucified once. Now- he works through his church- the new Body of Christ. He said to his disciples "you will do greater things than I did, when I leave and send you my Holy Spirit."

That doesn't mean that we will do things BETTER than Jesus. It the church, filled with the Holy Spirit- will carry his love- his gospel message- to more people than he ever did in his short life.

Back to 2)

Think about that. It is finally- the way the ocean of love that has been under the surface comes out. Its what you've always wanted. When you receive the love that Jesus gives from the cross- it transforms you- to love in a supernatural way...even to people that you used to think didn't deserve it. Once you experience the perfect love of God in Christ- you no longer fear rejection..even from others- because you know he's seen you to your core- you know he knew you would reject him...and yet- he still died.

Transition: And that re-defines the way you look at life..

3) Life is tragedy because its sacrificial obedience- and comedy because we make family of our enemies.

I'm willing to bet that most of us would say its "good news" that life is Sacrificial Obedience.

Sacrifice means it costs you something. You give something up. Something goes away that you value.

Obedience means that there is an authority over you

v 6 & 10

In v 6- John writes that to remain- or LIVE- abide- in Jesus must walk as he walked that is sacrificial obedience.

Jesus- God himself- the 2nd member of the trinitarian 3-in-1 God, put on flesh, became a man...and entered our broken world. And he did it in submission to his Father's plan to save the world.

And at the lowest point- he was humiliate and died shamefully on a cross.

That is how He walked. Humbly. Sacrificially. And obediently.

Its tragedy. The highest rank of heaven...descended to a shameful death- all in Sacrificial obedience.

But the comedy is Sunday morning. That man- that God, that messiah resurrected. But he didn't just resurrect and say "SEE- I TOLD YOU I WAS GOD- SUCKERS!!!"

No, he resurrected and then he went back to his deserting disciples and said- "I still love you, and I'm still inviting you to come in. To follow me. To walk as I have walked."

John writes in his gospels- that Jesus went to Peter who denied him 3 times, and said, "Peter, do you love me. Feed my sheep. Tend my lambs." And then he tells Peter- Feeding my sheep, tending my lambs- loving my church is going to mean sacrifice. Obedience is going to mean sacrifice. Just look at what I've done for you.

In fact Peter says "Wait- is this fair?" And Jesus says "You keep your eyes on me and what I've called you to do. Remain in me. Abide in me. Give your life to me. Do you trust me, Peter?"

You know what that means- its exactly what John writes here in 1 John. If you love Jesus- you will obey. And obedience will mean sacrifice.

Yet through it- if you follow the story line through the book of Acts- you see Peter boldly preaching the church's first sermon at Pentecost. And the man who once ran to hide to save his own skin- like Adam and Eve in the garden- is now preaching in front of people who want to kill him. Bold, Unafraid. Because he knows that it is through sacrificial obedience that love is experienced. that its felt. And then spread

Peter knows- like John- that when you experience someone else submitting themselves sacrificially- it has the power to turn your enemy into a friend...even a family member.

That's why John writes- if you remain in the light- you will love like Jesus- and you won't stumble when life gets difficult- instead you will keep loving. Because you are sure you are loved.

Back to 3)

In sacrificial obedience to Christ- you are bleeding- but even more so- because you have seen Jesus on the cross in his sacrifice for you- you know you are bled for.

Death brings life.

Sacrifice turns enemies to family through love.

The truth hurts- but it sets you free.

That is the tragicomedy of the gospel.

Do you believe it?

PRAY