

“Your Name and Renown, the Desire of my Heart”

John 3:22-36

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Appendices

P 15, *A Partial Commentary*

P 25, Chapter 4 from *The Pursuit of God*, A.W. Tozer

They were in their mid-30s.

They were talented, educated and mentally and physically strong.

They had great promise to be very successful men.

But these five men, these five missionaries, were murdered by the stone-age Auca Indians of Ecuador as they attempted to make contact with them.

LIFE magazine, one of the most widely circulated American magazines of the time, ran a ten-page story on what the world considered a tragedy and worse yet a great waste.

But the five men had a very different perspective.

They were so convinced of who Jesus is that their passion and joy in life was to spread Jesus' fame, to make Jesus known for who he really is.

In light of today's text from the Gospel of John, I want to emphasize again, that both **their passion** and **their joy** was to make Jesus known.

I don't know if they had read the following words from Isaiah, but they certainly understood the idea: Isaiah 26:8 “Your name (O God) and (Your) renown are the desire of our heart.”

What is my passion in life? What is yours?

What gets us up in the morning; what excites us; what can we not stop thinking about; what is our strongest passion in life?

Some people have lesser passions such as a certain sport or making a certain amount of money, or earning a name for themselves.

Others have noble passions of ending poverty, stopping abortion, building a certain ministry, or finding the cure for some disease.

But only one goal is worthy of your life and will make a difference for eternity.

I'm presenting a passage from Scripture today that I wish someone else with more credibility on the subject were presenting.

For it speaks to me in the way I pray it will speak to you.

Oh, at first the passage appeared harmless enough.

In fact, placed between Jesus' famous encounter with Nicodemus in the first part of chapter three and the nearly as famous encounter with the woman at the well in chapter 4, this passage seemed, at first, to be little more than a transition.

Jesus isn't even in the story.

And yet the more I studied it the more I realized everything in this passage is about Jesus.

It is what theologians might call a text of high Christology – a presentation of Jesus as the Christ.

**And it is about two men's passion and joy for making that Christ known.**

I want you to hear the text – Please stand  
READ John 3:22-36

They were becoming very famous men.

John the Baptist had large crowds going out to see and hear him.

Many were accepting his message of repentance and being baptized by him.

Then Jesus came and while he was in Jerusalem he did many miraculous signs and his popularity grew rapidly.

In fact probably so rapidly that Jesus knew he had to get out of town or there would be increasing pressure to compromise the timing of his plans.

So he left Jerusalem and went into the countryside to preach his message and his disciples began baptizing people.

In fact Jesus and John the Baptist wound up with ministries quite near each other.

The proximity of Jesus' and John's ministries and the growing popularity of Jesus prompted some of John's disciples to what appears to be jealousy.

John 3:26 "They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him."

Now John the Apostle, the author of this Gospel, uses this setting and situation to tell us some very important things about Jesus and about us.

Remember, I quoted earlier, "Your name and renown are the desire of our heart."

I think this text of John 3:22-36 is in four parts.

1. In verses 22-25 we have the setting, which I already very briefly described.
2. In verses 26-30 we have John the Baptist's declaration of his passion in life.
3. In verses 31-35 we have the author's, John the Apostle's, description of Jesus, his passion in life.
4. And in verse 36 we have a call to respond.

I want to go first to the third of those four parts, verses 31-35, where John the Apostle describes Jesus.

John's first readers of this Gospel and for that matter John the Baptist's disciples knew that Jesus was from Nazareth.

It was commonly understood that he was the son of Joseph and Mary.

Except for the miraculous signs he was doing, he appeared to be the same as other men.

But those miraculous signs strongly suggested there was more here than meets the eye.

Who is this man Jesus?

I think, in our Scripture for today, John the author is saying, if we understood and believed who Jesus really is we would understand both Johns' passion for him and Jesus would be our passion in life as well.

To people who have heard a lot of sermons, it is hard to describe Jesus in ways they haven't heard many times before.

But I'm asking you to look at him with fresh eyes this morning.

Hear John's description again in 3:31-35 "The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all.<sup>32</sup> He testifies to what he has seen and heard...<sup>34</sup> For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit.<sup>35</sup> The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands.

That Jesus who was on the other side of the river from John the Baptist's disciples is an extraordinary person.

**First of John reminds us again that Jesus existed before he became a human being.**

Verse 31 He's "the one who comes from above..."

Again verse 31 He's "the one who comes from heaven..."

Verse 34 He's "the one whom God has sent..."

Just before his death and resurrection Jesus would pray to the Father saying, John 17:5 "And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with **the glory I had with you before the world began.**

John already told us that in chapter 1:1 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

**So not only did Jesus exist before he was born but he has always existed and most importantly, he *is* God.**

**And we are told that God, in the person of his Son Jesus, came to this earth.** He's the one God sent!

John 1:14 "**The Word (Jesus) became flesh** and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of **the One and Only, who came from the Father**, full of grace and truth.

There's an interesting confrontation recorded in John 9 that speaks to this issue of where Jesus came from.

Jesus gave sight to a man blind from birth and the religious leaders were upset by it.

Those leaders confronted the healed man saying, John 9:29-34 "We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow (speaking of Jesus), we don't even know where he comes from." <sup>30</sup> The healed man answered, (I think sarcastically) "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes." <sup>31</sup> We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. <sup>32</sup> Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. <sup>33</sup> If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." <sup>34</sup> To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out."

Blindness comes in more ways than one and so does sight!

Think again about who Jesus is!

He is a man, he is fully human, but he is infinitely different than Joseph Smith or Mohammed or even Moses or David, because this **man**, Jesus, **is** also **God**.

**Then the Gospel writer, John, says not only is Jesus God who has come from heaven, but understand that he comes speaking truth – he comes to tell us what we could not otherwise ever know.**

John claims that this Jesus speaks as God.

The rest of us are from the earth and speak from a very limited earthly perspective.

Jesus comes from above and speaks from that unlimited perspective.

If we want the best information we must go to the primary source.

If you want to know about someone either you must go to that person or to someone who knows them best.

If you want information about God you must get it from God.

When Jesus speaks about God it is not second-hand information.

He tells what **he** has seen and heard. (William Barclay, *The Gospel of John* Vol 1, 136)

**There is a God** and it is therefore essential that we know him and respond to him.

But we are limited in our knowledge of God unless God speaks, unless God reveals himself to us.

And so the Bible says, Hebrews 1:1-2 “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways,<sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...”

John 1:18 “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only (Jesus), who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.

It is no wonder that when his disciples caught on they said more truthfully than even they knew at the time, “Lord, **you** have the words of eternal life.” (John 6:68)

There is a God and **by knowing Jesus**, I know that God!

Could anything be more important?

**John goes on in his description of Jesus: Jesus has the Spirit of God without limit.**

The prophets of old were visited by the Holy Spirit from time to time to accomplish special things.

Believers since the NT have the Spirit of God dwelling in them.  
But no one else has the Spirit of God in the way that  
Jesus does.

We saw it at his birth: In Luke 1:35 To Mary, “The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

We saw it at his baptism: John 1:32 “Then John gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him.

And throughout his ministry we see in Jesus’ relationship with the Spirit of God a different relationship than even we can experience today.

The reason for this is because **Jesus and the Spirit are one** just as Jesus and the Father are one.

Every motive and every move of Jesus is Spirit-led because they are one. Jesus has the Spirit without limit.

**But John goes on to say that (v35) “the Father loves the Son...”**

We will hear it again several times, from the lips of Jesus, in the Gospel such as in John 5:20, “The Father loves the Son and shows him all he does.”

Many of us learned John 3:16 in the King James Version where we read that God gave his “only begotten son.”

That translation sometimes confuses because, to some, it suggests that Jesus had a beginning which is contrary to the Bible’s teaching that Jesus has always existed as God.

But the NIV, and other translations, more accurately read, “One and only” speaking of his uniqueness.

The same Greek word was used to translate an OT Hebrew word meaning, “beloved.”

Jesus is the unique, one of kind, greatly loved Son of God.

We heard of this uniqueness and unique love at Jesus' baptism  
 Matthew 3:17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I  
 love; with him I am well pleased."

We heard it again on the Mount of Transfiguration in Matthew  
 17:5, "A voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I  
 love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

This relationship between Jesus and the Father is unique  
 – the love is exceptional and he thus represents the  
 Father in ways no one else possibly could.

**And lastly John says, the Father has placed everything in his hands.**

That Jesus who was on the other side of the river with his disciples  
 may look like any other ordinary man but understand that he is the  
 sovereign Lord of everything.

Yes, it is true that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
 determined before the world began that Jesus would shield his  
 glory for a season, to become a human being, **but that glory  
 would be restored fully in the resurrection and in age to  
 come.**

Hear these transitions from glory to humility to glory again in Philippians  
 2:5-11: "Christ Jesus: <sup>6</sup> Who, being in very nature God, did not consider  
 equality with God something to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but made himself nothing,  
 taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

<sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and  
 became obedient to death—even death on a cross! <sup>9</sup> Therefore God  
 exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above  
 every name, <sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven  
 and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus  
 Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Matthew 28:18 "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to  
 me..."



And in your mind's eye can you see Jesus coming again?

Revelation 19:11-16 "I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. <sup>12</sup> His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. <sup>13</sup> He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. <sup>14</sup> The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. <sup>15</sup> Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. <sup>16</sup> On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS."

### **John said the Father has placed all things in Jesus' hands.**

The Apostle Paul said it this way in Colossians 1:16-20 For by (Jesus) all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. <sup>17</sup> He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. <sup>19</sup> For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."

See Jesus again:

- His knowledge is complete – there is nothing he does not know and all truth is from him.
- His power is absolute – there is nothing that can thwart his will.
- His goodness is unlimited – All beauty, kindness and generosity in the universe flow from him and through his creation. He is the source of ALL goodness.

- His love is unfathomable and unconquerable – those whom he chooses to love are shown limitless mercy and grace.
- Jesus is, himself, the source of every good thing we enjoy in this life and the next.

He was Israel's provider.  
 He was Moses' counselor  
 He was Joshua's guide  
 He was David's forgiver  
 Daniel's savior  
 The prodigals' father,  
 The blind man's healer  
 Paul's encourager  
 And he is my saving-Lord and coming King.

Can you imagine if you had seen Jesus calm a raging storm or give sight to a blind man or raise Lazarus from being three days dead?

He is God!

It is any wonder John is excited about Jesus?

### **And now back to John the Baptist.**

This Jesus the author describes is the Jesus John the Baptist tells his disciples that he exists to honor.

John's disciples saw Jesus' ministry as competition.

They wanted John to claim a prominent place in the contest-of-ministries that they imagined.

But John gives a clear expression of his passion in life.

3:27-28 "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.'"

John had known from infancy that God had given him a role, a ministry clearly defined.

John was to be the herald, the announcer of the Messiah.

John's response here is at least a mild rebuke of his disciples.

One author wrote, "Discontent with the role God gives us in life suggests unbelief in God's sovereignty and maybe worse yet an arrogance that we know better than God." (Carson, 211)

John the Baptist did not see himself as cruelly hemmed in by fate. He not only accepted his role, he reveled in it.

Listen to him: 3:29 "The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete."

This is clearly an analogy.

John is the friend, Jesus is the bridegroom and **the people** going over to Jesus **are the bride**.

In the analogy the friend of the bridegroom, the best man, assists to make certain everything at the wedding proceeds as it should and his greatest joy is to serve his friend, the bridegroom.

And when the union is completed, the friend's joy is complete.

**John the Baptist ends his declaration of his greatest passion in life with these words in John 3:30 "Jesus must become greater; I must become less.**

The lesson here is not first of all about John's humility.

I think John would scoff at such a thought.

This is about his passion – his great joy in seeing Jesus recognized for who he truly is.

I think we experience something of this when we see someone we deeply love honored for who they are or what they have done.

For example, there is great joy in seeing your child receive an award for something they worked so hard to accomplish.

We are delighted from our hearts for the recognition and honor they receive.

So it was with John the Baptist.

His greatest joy in life was seeing Jesus honored.

His life ended not long after that; he was executed by beheading.

Like the five missionaries in Ecuador, the world would say it was such a tragedy, such a waste.

Would John say that?

His reason for living was not to have a position of prominence or gain a certain amount of wealth.

He didn't live to enjoy grandkids or to retire in comfort.

All those would be blessings for which he would be grateful but they were not his reason for living.

**Instead his passion in life was the same as in Isaiah 26:8 "Your name and renown are the desire of our heart."**

The Apostle Paul said, in Philippians 1:21, "For to me to live is Christ."

And in Acts 20:24 "However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.

His great passion in life was to see Jesus honored.

I find it very hard to keep that focus!

The siren songs of "more," or of excitement, or of ease all sound so promising.

There's even a siren song for committed Christians – it is of living a moral life, not watching the wrong movies, not getting drunk and helping our kids to live the same way.

As if that was the point of life.

**But if Jesus is who the Bible says he is**, if he is God, fully God, God in human flesh, who has come to earth to save us, and who will reign supreme over all things, then all the other goals of life, even those seemingly religious ones, become so small, so inconsequential, compared to this goal of knowing Jesus and making him known.

If Jesus is God, what will you do with him?

Is your passion and joy his name and renown?

The author ends this passage with a promise and a warning:

John 3:36 “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.”

Rejecting Jesus is a refusing to believe him.

And the Bible is clear that willfully rejecting Jesus means that God’s anger, no, God’s wrath, remains on such a person forever.

But believing, trusting, the Son of God means eternal life – a life worth living in relationship with God now and forever.

What does it mean to believe, to have faith, in Jesus?

Francis Schaeffer in his book, *He is There and He is not Silent*, describes **two very different kinds of faith**.

Assume we are mountain climbers caught in a storm at night.

The guide tells us that ice is forming and we have no hope; we will die before morning.

Someone asks the guide what would happen if he dropped off the edge of the mountain and happened to land on a ledge just below them.

The guide says that you might make it.

So with absolutely no knowledge of any ledge actually being below, the person drops off into the fog.

That would be one kind of faith – a leap of faith.

That would be the kind of person who thinks his faith creates reality.

If I believe sufficiently, it will happen.

But for another kind of faith, suppose you heard a voice saying:

“You cannot see me, but I know exactly where you are. I am on another ridge. I have lived in these mountains (all my life)... I assure you there is a ledge ten feet below you. If you hang and drop, you can make it through the night and I will get you in the morning.”

After asking many questions of the “voice,” you ascertain he knows what he is talking about.

Then desperate enough, and having being reasonably satisfied with his answers, you hang and drop.

That is a different kind of faith. *(Schaeffer, He is There and He is not Silent, 99-100)*

That faith doesn't create reality; that faith recognizes reality and trusts it.

That is biblical faith – faith **in the Jesus who is there.**

Who is Jesus? You have sufficient information to trust him. Will you?

For those of us who believe him, how can he be anything less than the passion and joy of our lives?

Isaiah 26:8 “Your name (O God) and (Your) renown are the desire of our heart.”

Please consider this question: What would it look like in your life if Jesus were your passion, your reason for living?

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## Additional Notes:

### A Partial Commentary on John 3:22-36

#### An Outline:

23-26 the setting and situation

27-30 our calling

Our place is determined by God v27

Our focus is on Christ and our role is to point people to him v28

Our joy is to see Jesus honored like a bridegroom v29

Our goal is to see Jesus take position of preeminence (as we recede).

31-35 the priority of Jesus

31 Jesus is from above and is above all

32 Jesus tells what he actually knows from experience (he has come from God).

34 Jesus speaks God's words

34 Jesus has the Spirit without limit. 1:32

35 Jesus is loved by the Father (uniquely- his one and only)

35 Jesus is supreme over all creation.

36 A response is called for.

This seems to be another opportunity for the author to let this very famous man, John the B, give testimony to who Jesus truly is by allowing him to contrast himself with Jesus? Then the author (John) capitalizes on John the B's testimony to add his own comments (verses 31-36) on Jesus' uniqueness and deity?

The "greater/lesser" statements, in context, seem more about Jesus than about John the B. A lesson on humility may be drawn from this illustration, but I don't think it is the primary reason for the account. But I think we can learn a lesson from them about acceptance of God's plan for our lives –

about trusting his sovereignty in our situations (even it is not the main point).

John 3:22 “After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized.

Jn 3:23 Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized.

Jn 3:24 (This was before John was put in prison.)

John specifically identifies the place and the time-frame.’ This ministry of Jesus takes place earlier than any of Jesus’ ministry recorded in the other gospels. This makes it rather evident that John had read the other gospel accounts. (Carson, 210)

Salim is most likely a town about four miles southeast of Shechem (Sychar) where we see Jesus next, when he meets the woman at the well in chapter 4.

John doesn’t give us as much information on the Baptist’s baptism as to Luke and Matthew. Why? His focus is instead on the identity of Jesus.

Some background study on John’s baptism might be helpful however, since John’s readers would have known it.

John’s baptism:

1:23 “John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, “I am the voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’ ”

1:31 “I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.”

Luke 3:3-4 “He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.<sup>4</sup> As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: “A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.”

Luke 3:7-8 “John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?<sup>8</sup> Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.”



John MacArthur on John 3:22-36 “They had accepted the ministry of John the Baptist, definitely they had. In fact, the Bible says all Israel went out to John, and all men perceived that John was a prophet. They had wholeheartedly and totally accepted the ministry of John the Baptist. And the reason was because he was an Old Testament prophet; he was a part of the old economy. He was the last of the Old Testament prophets. There hadn't been one in 400 years. When this one arrived they were really happy to have one around. And the people flocked out to him, repented supposedly of their sin, went through a ceremonial cleansing symbolized by baptism...baptism was only the symbol and John baptized people as a symbol of their repentance and cleansing. And Israel was going to hear this prophet of God named John who was out in the wilderness dressed in camel's hair and eating grasshoppers and he was a unique person. But he was a devastating dynamic person, powerful preacher. And he had great following and most important, the people believed that he was a prophet. That's very important. They wanted a prophet, what they didn't think they needed was a Savior, see. They were looking for a king, not a Savior. They could take a prophet or a king, a Savior they wouldn't take.”

<http://www.gty.org/Resources/transcripts/1506B>

**Jn 3:25 An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing.**

We are not told the point of disagreement, just that a disagreement broke out over the issue of ceremonial washing.

Since John was baptizing and ceremonial washings were part of the Jewish tradition it is easy to imagine that this certain Jew (whoever he was) didn't agree with John's baptismal practices. John was baptizing Jews (not just converts to Judaism) symbolic of repentance.

If we look at chapter 4:1-3 we also see that even the Pharisees (like the one in 3:25) saw that Jesus was baptizing more disciples than John. Is it possible that one of those Pharisees went to John's disciples to sow discord? “Hey, your man is being overshadowed by this upstart from Galilee.”

**Jn 3:26 They came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him.”**

Apparently this argument in 3:25 prompted other thoughts among John's disciples – thoughts about Jesus' growing popularity.

3:23 said people were constantly coming to John but here his disciples caught up in jealousy exaggerate that everyone is going to him (Jesus).

“That man” is the translation of a word that means “he who” or “the one” – the emphasis is on a particular person, Jesus, “the one you testified about.”

The NIV “that man” may carry the right tone of voice of John's disciples.

As to the next verses 27-30:

Our place is determined by God v27

Our focus is on Christ and our role is to point people to him v28

Our joy is to see Jesus honored like a bridegroom v29

Our goal is to see Jesus take position of preeminence (as we recede). (Milne, 80-81)

Have you ever tried to walk through one of those large revolving barrels at an amusement park?

If you watch yourself or your immediate surroundings you will surely fall.

But if you focus your attention on a stationary object through and outside of the barrel you can keep your balance.

**Jn 3:27 To this John replied, “A man can receive only what is given him from heaven.**

1 Corinthians 4:7 “For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?”

Discontent with the role God gives us in life suggests unbelief in God's sovereignty and maybe worse yet an arrogance that we know better than God. (Carson, 211)

John was given a prophet's role – he was a forerunner of the main person.

**Jn 3:28 You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.'**

In this election season we know about campaign managers and surrogate campaigners – they all point to the candidate.

It was Cliff Barrows to Billy Graham

But John reminds them that he had already told them (probably repeatedly) that he is not the Messiah but the forerunner of the Messiah – the one who was to prepare the way. 1:20 “I am not the Christ.” 1:23 quoting from Isaiah, “I am the voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’”

John knew his place, his role and, as we will see in verse 29, he delighted in it.

He wanted people to see Jesus, to respond to Jesus, to follow Jesus. John’s greatest joy was seeing people turn to Jesus.

From Paul, Philippians 1:20-21 “I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ...”

Christ had become for him the motive of his actions, the goal of his life and ministry, and the source of his strength.

**Jn 3:29 The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete.**

This is clearly an analogy. John is the bridegroom and the people going over to Jesus are the bride.

In the analogy the friend of the bridegroom, the best man assists to make certain everything at the wedding proceeds as it should and his greatest joy is to serve his friend, the bridegroom.

And when the wedding successfully concludes the friend’s joy is complete.

John MacArthur “Now notice it says this, very, very interesting, it says, “He rejoiced greatly because of the bridegroom's voice.” Do you know the bridegroom in a Hebrew wedding couldn't speak until he had received the hand of the bride. And when he spoke, that signified the union. John says I put the hand there, I heard Him speak, I'm leaving. That's the end of my ministry. John says I'm fading out, that's all. It's all over. Are you sad, John? Sad? I'm blessed. I mean, what could be more wonderful than a fruitful ministry? I mean, God said, “John, turn the hearts of the people to God. John, bring them to Christ. John, point to Jesus.” I did it, they went, terrific. What else could I ask for? I'm ready to go. John was blessed. Oh the characteristic of a true minister who takes the people and hands them over to Jesus Christ, that's what it's all about, isn't it? He was glad.

<http://www.gty.org/Resources/transcripts/1506B>

It is my great joy to participate in the weddings of those who love the Lord Jesus. I get a front and center place to witness the joy. I know full well that I am not a principle in the proceedings, that place belongs to the groom and bride. I experience joy vicariously through their joy.

You participate in someone coming to faith in Christ and you rejoice, not in pride over being part of the process, but you rejoice in seeing the sinner and Savior drawn together.

This is what John has worked for his whole life and ministry and it is his great joy to see it come to pass; he sees his work completed.

**Jn 3:30 He must become greater; I must become less.**

This is not merely accepting fate, but rejoicing in his God-given role.

“You have no idea what poor opinion I have of myself...and how little I deserve it.” (From Gilbert and Sullivan *Ruddigore* in Boice, 309)

Someone else gets the promotion in your company.

Someone else is selected as captain of the team or president of the class. Someone else, rather than you, is recognized for their contribution to the project.

Content with the role God gives us and for the time he gives it.

Joseph was faithful in each new situation – in Potipher’s house, in prison and in the court of Pharaoh. He took each position as God’s will for him for that time and more than fulfilled his responsibilities with no guarantee of a change.

But we might take Joseph’s example to mean that if we are faithful in the present God will necessarily promote us later and then the world will see how important we really are.

Please remember John the Baptist – he did what God called him to do and then he was beheaded.

And yet Jesus said of him in Matthew 11:11 “I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist...”

If the approval of others is more important to us than God’s approval or if we believe this life is all there is, we will unlikely be able to respond the way John the Baptist did.

“Humility is not the product of direct cultivation, rather it is a by-product. The more I try to be humble, the less shall I attain unto humility. But if I am truly occupied with that One who was ‘meek and lowly in heart,’ if I am constantly beholding his glory in the mirror of God’s Word, then shall I be ‘changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord’ (2 Corinthians 3:18).” (A.W. Pink in Boice, 313)

This may be where the Apostle John begins his commentary on the incident in 3:22-30:

**Jn 3:31 “The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all.**

**Jn 3:12 I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?**

The “earthly” things here are most likely the new birth that Jesus has been explaining. It can’t be natural birth and wind, both of which Nicodemus and others would know. The heavenly things would be the things yet to come.

**Jn 3:13 No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.**

Verse 13 is closely connected to verse 12 to make sense of it. “except” might better be translated “but” or “but rather.”

Judaism of Jesus' day was rife with stories of people who had gone into to receive special insight into God's ways.

Jesus can speak of heavenly things (v12) because no one else has ever gone into heaven and knows what Jesus knows, Jesus who came from heaven.

**Jn 3:32 He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony.**

He (Jesus, v31 - the one who comes from heaven) testifies to what he alone could possibly know.

His witness is essential. We may hear from many (Prophets and Forefathers but in Jesus we have the exact representation of God – we have God himself telling us what to believe and do.

Jesus claims to present truth and truth from God.

In fact Jesus refers 23 times to himself as “sent” by God.

John 1:18 “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.

Hebrews 1:1-3a “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, <sup>Heb 1:2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. <sup>Heb 1:3</sup> The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.”

Jesus is not just a messenger, he is God himself, who has spoken.

Then John begins his contrast between those who don't accept (v32b) and those who do (v33).

**Jn 3:33 The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful.**

The one who trusts Jesus becomes another witness to the truth.

The one who accepts Jesus testimony about God is accepting the whole scope of truths about God – creation, redemption, even coming resurrection.

The man who accepts Jesus' words and Jesus is thereby acknowledging and giving credence to God's truthfulness

Conversely, the one who doesn't accept Jesus' testimony calls God a liar. And also: 1 John 5:10 "Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son.

**Jn 3:34 For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit.**

**Jn 3:35 The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands.**

"The one whom God has sent"

John 6:32-35 "Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." 34 "Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread." 35 Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.

John 6:46 "No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father.

Words of God.

Jesus speaks the words of God fully (without the limitations the prophets had with only sporadic visitation of the Spirit).

John 8:28-29 "So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. 29 The one who sent me is with me..."

Heb 1 "God... has in these last days spoken to us by his Son..."

**Holy Spirit given without limit.**

Luke 1:35 “The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

John 1:32 “Then John gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him.

### The Father loves the Son.

This relationship between Jesus and the Father is unique – the love is exceptional and Jesus’ authority is coextensive with the Father.

Matthew 3:16-17 “As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. Mt 3:17 And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

Matthew 17:5 “While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

John 1:14; 3:16 “one and only” sometimes translated, “only begotten.”

That word “begotten” confuses us because it suggests that Jesus had a beginning contrary to what John 1:1-2.

“one and only” translates the Greek word “monogenes.”

It is used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew “yahid” referring to an only child. We also find it in Hebrews 11:17 By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his (monogenes) **one and only son.**”

In Abraham’s case the word clearly can’t mean his only genetic heir because Abraham also fathered Ishmael.

When the LXX translates Genesis 22:2 where Isaac is called Abraham’s “yahid”, it uses the word transliterated into English as “beloved.”

That captures the connotation of “monogenes” as well – this is God’s one and only beloved son. It speaks of the uniqueness of Jesus and the intimacy and specialness of relationship – his beloved Son.

John 5:20 “The Father loves the Son and shows him all he does.”

John 15:10 “I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love.”



John 17:26 “I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

**“Has placed everything in his hands.”**

Colossians 1:15-20 “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. <sup>17</sup> He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. <sup>19</sup> For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”

**Jn 3:36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.”**

Is the substance of my faith a doctrine or a person?

See A.W. Tozer “Apprehending God.”

There are physical realities and also spiritual realities.

“Acknowledging reality” – I reckon or consider it to be so, I don’t imagine it to be so. Imagination creates an unreal “reality.” Reckoning, recognizes the real reality this is already there.

Who is Jesus? Do you have sufficient information to trust him? Will you?

God’s love (3:16) and God’s wrath (3:36) meet on the cross.

God will not be passive forever toward those who ignore his grace.

Psalm 2:12 “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

Hebrews 10:31 “It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Galatians 6:7-8 “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.<sup>8</sup> The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction...”

“rejects” = refuses to believe and disobeys.

Acts 19:9 “But some of them became obstinate; they **refused to believe** and publicly maligned the Way.”

In Luke 19:14 from a parable Jesus gave about people: “We will not have this man reign over us.” (KJV)

1 Peter 2:8 “They stumble because they **disobey** the message

Rejecting him is failure to trust him.

God’s wrath = his personal response to those who reject his Son and continue in their rebellious acts contrary to a holy God.

As we saw in 3:17-18 God didn’t send Jesus just to judge, but to offer life.

But understand that a holy God will not withhold judgment forever.

3:17-18 “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.

Romans 1:18 “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness...”

2 Thessalonians 1:8-10 “He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.<sup>9</sup> They will be punished with

everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power <sup>10</sup> on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed.

God will hold everyone accountable for the truth they have.

Those with only the knowledge of God from creation and conscience will be held accountable for that knowledge – they rejected it.

Those who have the knowledge of Jesus will be held accountable for that knowledge – they rejected it.

I want you to trust Jesus because I want Jesus to have the reward of his labor. I want to send you to Jesus, to connect you to him.

My joy is complete when Jesus experiences the joy of his work being complete.

### **“Aprehending God”**

#### **Chapter 4 of *The Pursuit of God* by A.W. Tozer**

##### **O taste and see. Ps. 34:8**

It was Canon Holmes, of India, who more than twenty-five years ago called attention to the inferential character of the average man's faith in God. To most people God is an inference, not a reality. He is a deduction from evidence which they consider adequate; but He remains personally unknown to the individual. ‘He must be,’ they say, ‘therefore we believe He is.’ Others do not go even so far as this; they know of Him only by hearsay. They have never bothered to think the matter out for themselves, but have heard about Him from others, and have put belief in Him into the back of their minds along with the various odds and ends that make up their total creed. To many others God is but an ideal, another name for goodness, or beauty, or truth; or He is law, or life, or the creative impulse back of the phenomena of existence. These notions about God are many and varied, but they who hold them have one thing in common: they do not know God in personal experience. The possibility of intimate acquaintance with Him has not entered their minds. While admitting His existence they do not think of Him as knowable in the sense that we know things or people.

Christians, to be sure, go further than this, at least in theory. Their creed requires them to believe in the personality of God, and they have been taught to pray, ‘Our Father, which art in heaven.’ Now personality and fatherhood carry with them the idea of the possibility of personal acquaintance. This is admitted, I say, in theory, but for millions of Christians, nevertheless, God is no more real than He is to the non-Christian. They go through life trying to love an ideal and be loyal to a mere principle.

Over against all this cloudy vagueness stands the clear scriptural doctrine that God can be known in personal experience. A loving Personality dominates the Bible, walking among the trees of the garden and breathing fragrance over every scene. Always a living Person is present, speaking, pleading, loving, working, and manifesting Himself whenever and wherever His people have the receptivity necessary to receive the manifestation.

The Bible assumes as a self-evident fact that men can know God with at least the same degree of immediacy as they know any other person or thing that comes within the field of their experience. The same terms are used to express the knowledge of God as are used to express knowledge of physical things. ‘O taste and see that the Lord is good.’ (Ps 34:8) ‘All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces.’ (Ps 45:8) ‘My sheep hear my voice.’ (Jn 10:27) ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.’ (Mt 5:8) These are but four of countless such passages from the Word of God. And more important than any proof text is the fact that the whole import of the Scripture is toward this belief.

What can all this mean except that we have in our hearts organs by means of which we can know God as certainly as we know material things through our familiar five senses? We apprehend the physical world by exercising the faculties given us for the purpose, and we possess spiritual faculties by means of which we can know God and the spiritual world if we will obey the Spirit's urge and begin to use them. That a saving work must first be done in the heart is taken for granted here. The spiritual faculties of the unregenerate man lie asleep in his nature, unused and for every purpose dead; that is the stroke which has fallen upon us by sin. They may be quickened to active life again by the operation of the Holy Spirit in regeneration; that is one of the immeasurable benefits which come to us through Christ's atoning work on the cross.

But the very ransomed children of God themselves: why do they know so little of that habitual conscious communion with God which the Scriptures seem to offer? The answer is our chronic unbelief. Faith enables our spiritual sense to function. Where faith is defective the result will be inward insensibility and numbness toward spiritual things. This is the condition of vast numbers of Christians today. No proof is necessary to support that statement. We have but to converse with the first Christian we meet or enter the first church we find open to acquire all the proof we need.

A spiritual kingdom lies all about us, enclosing us, embracing us, altogether within reach of our inner selves, waiting for us to recognize it. God Himself is here waiting our response to His Presence. This eternal world will come alive to us the moment we begin to reckon upon its reality.

I have just now used two words which demand definition; or if definition is impossible, I must at least make clear what I mean when I use them. They are 'reckon' and 'reality.' **What do I mean by reality? I mean that which has existence apart from any idea any mind may have of it, and which would exist if there were no mine anywhere to entertain a thought of it. That which is real has being in itself. It does not depend upon the observer for its validity.**

I am aware that there are those who love to poke fun at the plain man's idea of reality. **They are the idealists who spin endless proofs that nothing is real outside of the mind.** They are the relativists who like to show that there are no fixed points in the universe from which we can measure anything. They smile down upon us from their lofty intellectual peaks and settle us to their own satisfaction by fastening upon us the reproachful term 'absolutist.' The Christian is not put out of countenance by this show of contempt. He can smile right back at them, for he knows that there is only One who is Absolute, that is God. But he knows also that the Absolute One has made this world for man's uses, and, while there is nothing fixed or real in the last meaning of the words (the meaning as applied to God) for every purpose of human life we are permitted to act as if there were. And every man does act thus except the mentally sick. These unfortunates also have trouble with reality, but they are consistent; they insist upon living in accordance with their ideas of things. They are honest, and it is their very honesty that constitutes them a social problem.

The idealists and relativists are not mentally sick. They prove their soundness by living their lives according to the very notions of reality which they in theory repudiate and by counting upon the very fixed points which they prove are not there. They could earn a lot more respect for their notions if they were willing to live by them; but this they are careful not to do. Their ideas are brain-deep, not life-deep. Wherever life touches them they repudiate their theories and live like other men.

The Christian is too sincere to play with ideas for their own sake. He takes no pleasure in the mere spinning of gossamer webs for display. All his beliefs are practical. They are geared into his life. By them he lives or dies, stands or falls for this world and for all time to come. From the insincere man he turns away.

**The sincere plain man knows that the world is real.** He finds it here when he wakes to consciousness, and he knows that he did not think it into being. It was here waiting for him when he came, and he knows that when he prepares to leave this earthly scene it will be here still to bid him good-bye as he departs. By the deep wisdom of life he is wiser than a thousand men who doubt. He stands upon the earth and feels the wind and rain in his face and he knows that they are real. He sees the sun by day and the stars by night.

He sees the hot lightning play out of the dark thundercloud. He hears the sounds of nature and the cries of human joy and pain. These he knows are real. He lies down on the cool earth at night and has no fear that it will prove illusory or fail him while he sleeps. In the morning the firm ground will be under him, the blue sky above him and the rocks and trees around him as when he closed his eyes the night before. So he lives and rejoices in a world of reality. With his five senses he engages this real world. All things necessary to his physical existence he apprehends by the faculties with which he has been equipped by the God who created him and placed him in such a world as this.

**Now by our definition also God is real. He is real in the absolute and final sense that nothing else is. All other reality is contingent upon His. The great Reality is God who is the Author of that lower and dependent reality which makes up the sum of created things, including ourselves. God has objective existence independent of and apart from any notions which we may have concerning Him. The worshipping heart does not create its Object. It finds Him here when it wakes from its moral slumber in the morning of its regeneration.**

**Another word that must be cleared up is the word reckon.** This does not mean to visualize or imagine. Imagination is not faith. The two are not only different from, but stand in sharp opposition to, each other. **Imagination projects unreal images out of the mind and seeks to attach reality to them. Faith creates nothing; it simply reckons upon that which is already there.** God and the spiritual world are real. We can reckon upon them with as much assurance as we reckon upon the familiar world around us. Spiritual things are there (or rather we should say here) inviting our attention and challenging our trust.

Our trouble is that we have established bad thought habits. We habitually think of the visible world as real and doubt the reality of any other. We do not deny the existence of the spiritual world but we doubt that it is real in the accepted meaning of the word. The world of sense intrudes upon our attention day and night for the whole of our lifetime. It is clamorous, insistent and self-demonstrating. It does not appeal to our faith; it is here, assaulting our five senses, demanding to be accepted as real and final. But sin has so clouded the lenses of our hearts that we cannot see that other reality, the City of God, shining around us. The world of sense triumphs. The visible becomes the enemy of the invisible; the temporal, of the eternal. That is the curse inherited by every member of Adam's tragic race.

**At the root of the Christian life lies belief in the invisible. The object of the Christian's faith is unseen reality.** Our uncorrected thinking, influenced by the blindness of our natural hearts and the intrusive ubiquity of visible things, tends to draw a contrast between the spiritual and the real; but actually no such contrast exists. The antithesis lies elsewhere: between the real and the imaginary, between the spiritual and the material, between the temporal and the eternal; but between the spiritual and the real.

The spiritual is real. If we would rise into that region of light and power plainly beckoning us through the Scriptures of truth we must break the evil habit of ignoring the spiritual. We must shift our interest from the seen to the unseen. For the great unseen Reality is God. 'He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.' (Hebrews 11:6) This is basic in the life of faith. From there we can rise to unlimited heights. 'Ye believe in God,' said our Lord Jesus Christ, 'believe also in me.' (John 14:1) Without the first there can be no second.

If we truly want to follow God we must seek to be other-worldly. This I say knowing well that that word has been used with scorn by the sons of this world and applied to the Christian as a badge of reproach. So be it. Everyman must choose his world. If we who follow Christ, with all the facts before us and knowing what we are about, deliberately choose the Kingdom of God as our sphere of interest I see no reason why anyone should object. If we lose by it, the loss is our own; if we gain we rob no one by so doing.

The 'other world,' which is the object of this world's disdain and the subject of the drunkard's mocking song, is our carefully chosen goal and the object of our holiest longing. But we must avoid the common fault of pushing the 'other world' into the future. It is not future, but present. It parallels our familiar physical world, and the doors between the two worlds are open. 'Ye are come,' says the writer to the Hebrews (and the tense is plainly present), 'unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel' (Hebrews 12:22-24) All these things are contrasted with 'the mount that might be touched' and 'the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words' that might be heard. May we not safely conclude that, as the realities of Mount Sinai were apprehended by the senses, so the realities of Mount Zion are to be grasped by the soul? And this not by any trick of the imagination, but in downright actuality. The soul has eyes with which to see and ears with which to hear. Feeble they may be from long disuse, but by the life-giving touch of Christ alive now and capable of sharpest sight and most sensitive hearing.

As we begin to focus upon God the things of the spirit will take shape before our inner eyes. Obedience to the word of Christ will bring an inward revelation of the Godhead (John 14:21-23). It will give acute perception enabling us to see God even as is promised to the pure in heart. A new God-consciousness will seize upon us and we shall begin to taste and hear and inwardly feel the God who is our life and our all. There will be seen the constant shining of the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. (John 1:9) More and more, as our faculties grow sharper and more sure, God will become to us the great All, and His Presence the glory and wonder of our lives.

*O God, quicken to life every power within me, that I may lay hold on eternal things. Open my eyes that I may see; give me acute spiritual perception; enable me to taste Thee and know that Thou art good. Make heaven more real to me than any earthly thing has ever been. Amen.*