

**Find Life in the Son:
Christ Above All
John 3:22-36**

Introduction

Dictionary.com online poll re "the greatest word of all time"

"How could you possibly choose one single word as the 'greatest of all time'? But if you had to answer, what word would you choose? Which English word is most objectively important, useful, and irreplaceable? What word, if removed from the lexicon, would leave the biggest void?"

Greatest Word of All Time=LOVE

1 Corinthians 13:13b

The greatest of these is love.

John 13:34-35

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

At the very center of human history stands a cross, the cross of Christ, where the love of God the Father, Son, and Spirit was poured out for all the world to see. The cross of Christ established a crossroads for every one of us regarding who Jesus is and what Jesus has done.

Last Time: Crossroads

1. Faith or Unbelief (9-13)
2. Eternal Life or Condemnation (14-18)
3. Light or Darkness (19-21)

22 After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. **23** John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized **24** (for John had not yet been put in prison).

25 Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification.

26 And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him." **27** John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.

28 You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.' **29** The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. **30** He must increase, but I must decrease."

31 He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from

heaven is above all. ³² He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony. ³³ Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. ³⁴ For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. ³⁵ The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. ³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

1. Petty Jealousy (22-27)
2. Joyful Honor (28-30)
3. Heavenly Testimony (31-34)
4. Supreme Authority (35-36)

1. Petty Jealousy (22-27)

²² After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. ²³ John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized ²⁴ (for John had not yet been put in prison). ²⁵ Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. ²⁶ And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him." ²⁷ John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven."

The other Gospels pick up the ministry of Jesus after the imprisonment of John the Baptist. John's Gospel gives us a view into the brief period of time the ministries of John the Baptist and of Jesus overlapped.

Here John is baptizing in the region of Samaria at Aenon, which means "springs," so we're not surprised to see there was much water there.

The discussion between John's disciples and a Jew over purification rites led to their voicing concern that the one John and born witness to, namely Jesus, was baptizing more people than John was. "All are going to him."

They clearly are not happy about the development.

J. C. Ryle, British preacher from 150 years ago, comments, "The spirit exhibited in this complaint, is unhappily too common in the Churches of Christ. . . . There are never wanting religious professors who care far more for the increase of their own party, than for the increase of true Christianity; and who cannot rejoice in the spread of religion, if it spreads anywhere except within their own pale. . . . *Nothing so defiles Christianity and gives the enemies of truth such occasion to blaspheme, as jealousy and party-spirit*

among Christians. Wherever there is real grace, we should be ready and willing to acknowledge it, even though it may be outside our own pale" (*Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: John*, 170).

Jesus Himself confronted this spirit among His own disciples.

Luke 9:49-50

49 John answered, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us." **50** But Jesus said to him, "Do not stop him, for the one who is not against you is for you."

This problem was rife in the church in Corinth.

1 Corinthians 1:12-13

12 What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." **13** Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

Paul confronts this attitude as evidence not of spiritual maturity but of carnality.

1 Corinthians 3:3-7

3 For you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? **4** For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being

merely human? ⁵ What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. ⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷ So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

1 Corinthians 4:1, 7

¹ This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

⁷ For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

Paul reminds believers in Philippi to keep a Christ-centered focus, even when other preachers were using Paul's imprisonment for personal advantage.

Philippians 1:15-18

¹⁵ Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. ¹⁶ The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. ¹⁸ What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

John the apostle calls out selfish desire for prominence in 3 John 1:9
I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority.

John the Baptist corrects this spirit among his followers first by reminding them that ministry is a gift from God, not a measure of our own superiority.

John 3:27

John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven."

Why does one pastor preach to a congregation of 50 and another of 500 and another of 5,000? Sometimes it has to do with capacity, but often not so. There are times when a preacher becomes very popular for a time, only to sink into relative obscurity when some other gifted teacher comes on the scene or his health breaks or conflict and persecution arise.

One servant of the Lord serves into his or her 90's, while another dies of cancer at 35. James the brother of John was the first apostle to die—beheaded for Christ. John, his brother, was the last to die. No matter, both served Jesus faithfully. Those that compare themselves with others are not wise. Just do what God has called you to do. It's for God's

glory that you serve Christ, not your own glory, anyway.

Applications

- When are you tempted to resent the blessings others enjoy rather than being thankful for them?
- In what ways can you turn such occasions into opportunities to bow your heart to the rule of heaven on earth?

John goes on to instruct them on the importance of making much of Christ.

2. Joyful Honor (28-30)

²⁸ "You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.' ²⁹ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. ³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease."

John the Baptist is not jealous of Jesus, because John understands that his role all along was to introduce Jesus to the world and to make much of Him. *When we make much of Jesus, there is no room for jealous envy and party spirit. Wherever selfish ambition shows itself, it obscures the glory of Christ. And we are all the more unhappy for it. Joy comes from making much of Jesus instead of*

ourselves because that is our God-given purpose.

It would be downright weird for the best man to be jealous that the bridegroom took off with the bride after the ceremony. He's there for the sake of the bridegroom. He's there to assist the groom in his marriage of the bride.

John's whole ministry was to help people fall in love with Jesus, not himself. But in many a ministry context, it's not clear who's most important. There's far too much talk about us, our brand, our success, our goals, and far too little made of Christ. Too much focus on making your "brand" famous, and you'll end up producing a poison form of Christianity, not the real thing. It's happened throughout history. Get the focus right. *Make the big things big. Keep the small things small. And ignore what's irrelevant. All as measured by God's Word. Watch out for undue influence of tradition or trend. Look out for too much "I" and "we" and "our vision" instead of God and Christ and Scriptural truth.*

"He must increase, and I must decrease."
Write it on your mirror. Write it on your heart. Preach it to your ego. Teach it to your children and students. It's not about how distinctive we are compared to other churches and ministries and believers; it's about how amazing Christ is.

Applications

- In what ways do you remind yourself of what God's purpose is for you in this life?
- How has doing so helped you keep your attitude right when things don't seem to be going well for you?
- When's the last time you joyfully turned someone's attention to Jesus Christ?
- In what ways can you make more of Jesus Christ in your walk and talk?

3. Heavenly Testimony (31-34)

³¹ He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all. ³² He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony.

Jesus deserves preeminence because He has come from heaven, and heaven rules over the earth. His supremacy is intrinsic to His identity as the beloved Son of God in whom God the Father is well pleased and as the Son of man, to whom the Ancient of Days has given judgment at the end of the age and an everlasting kingdom of the saints.

His testimony is from firsthand experience of heaven and its realities. As the incarnate Son come from heaven, He has seen and heard

what is there. It is not academic theory or philosophical speculation or wishful thinking.

But the majority have refused to believe what Christ Jesus bore witness to. Even those whose reputation was loyalty to the Scriptures and separation from the world rejected His teaching. Remember Jesus' words to Nicodemus earlier in the chapter?
John 3:11-12

11 Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony.

12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?

John 3:33-34

33 Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. **34** For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.

Those who receive the firsthand testimony of Jesus show that they hold Him to be the Messiah that God promised throughout the centuries of the OT prophets. God has made good on His promises. He is true and reliable. If Jesus is indeed the promised Messiah, Son of God, then the words He speaks are the words of God.

John 5:37-40

37 And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, **38** and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. **39** You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, **40** yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

That life comes through the Holy Spirit that the Lord Jesus gives.

John 3:34b

For he gives the Spirit without measure.

Here is the secret Nicodemus was longing to know. How can one be born again from above by the Spirit and thus experience the kingdom of God?

Jesus gives the Spirit.

John 7:37-39

37 On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" **39** Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Here is the stark difference between religion and true Christianity. Christ gives life to those who belong to Him. The Holy Spirit indwells them. “The life of God in the soul of man.” The transformation that happens in a person who is truly born again cannot be attributed to personal ability, special formulas and techniques, sectarian loyalty, or ceremonial rituals. The change is a God thing. He gets the glory for how the person changes.

It is not uncommon for those devoted to their particular brand of Christianity to be utterly blind to the power and presence of God, along with the evidence of the Spirit’s work in the lives of people.

The Pharisees were notorious for this. They could not appreciate the mighty works of Jesus. Instead, they were obsessed with whether the disciples washed their hands according to the tradition of the elders. They tithed their spices but ignored weightier matters like justice, mercy, and faithfulness. They were clean outside and filthy inside. Whitewashed tombs—sparkling houses full of death.

Applications

- In what ways have you taken seriously the testimony Jesus Christ has given to the human race?

- Whom do you know that needs you to share Jesus' testimony with them?

4. Supreme Authority (35-36)

35 The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. **36** Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

God the Father loves God the Son. He is the Anointed King of the forever kingdom (Psalm 2). He has put the Anointed Son over everything.

Colossians 1:16

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.

You can't truly love God without loving Christ.

John 5:20-23

20 For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. **21** For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. **22** For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, **23** that all may honor the Son, just

as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.

That's why John 3:36 contrasts whoever "believes in" the Son and whoever "does not obey" the Son. Whoever believes into Him has eternal life here and now, extending into forever. Whoever does not obey Him shall not experience life at all. The wrath of God every human but Jesus deserves remains on him.

The only escape from the judgment of God is to transfer the full weight of your trust into the Son of God. *To believe into the Son is to trust Him enough to submit to Him and follow Him. According to Jesus, whoever wants to be His disciple must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Him. Saving faith in Jesus does not continue to resist Jesus.* John's not saying that a follower of Jesus stops sinning altogether in this life, but that the desire of his heart and the pattern of his life is to obey the Lord and Savior in whom he's put his trust.

Applications

- Since Christ is above all, how are you acknowledging that He rules all things?
- What other idols compete with your trust in Christ, your love for Christ, and your obedience to Him?

- What life from God are you experiencing right now?

Conclusion

The key to everything is gladly acknowledging that Christ is above all.

1. Forsake Petty Jealousy (22-27).
2. Give Him Joyful Honor (28-30).
3. Heed His Heavenly Testimony (31-34).
4. Bow to His Supreme Authority (35-36).

Applications Summary

- When are you tempted to resent the blessings others enjoy rather than being thankful for them?
- In what ways can you turn such occasions into opportunities to bow your heart to the rule of heaven on earth?
- In what ways do you remind yourself of what God's purpose is for you in this life?
- How has doing so helped you keep your attitude right when things don't seem to be going well for you?
- When's the last time you joyfully turned someone's attention to Jesus Christ?
- In what ways can you make more of Jesus Christ in your walk and talk?
- In what ways have you taken seriously the testimony Jesus Christ has given to the human race?

- Whom do you know that needs you to share Jesus' testimony with them?
- Since Christ is above all, how are you acknowledging that He rules all things?
- What other idols compete with your trust in Christ, your love for Christ, and your obedience to Him?
- What life from God are you experiencing right now?