

**John 23 – Above All****08/04/2024****Scripture 1: (Jn. 3:31-36 ESV)**

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. He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony. Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. 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.

## Sermon:

The conclusion to John's third chapter is a part of Scripture which we are all less familiar with than we like to admit. We are very familiar with its beginning, with Nicodemus' visit and with John 3:16 of course. We also all remember John's remark about Jesus, "*He must increase, but I must decrease.*" (Jn. 3:30 ESV), but the location and context within the Bible probably does not reside in the long-term memory for most of us. I admit it for myself that if we were not studying John's Gospel the way we are, I would not recognize this passage and although I would have remembered that the "increase/decrease" remark was made by John the Baptist, I would not have remembered that it was here in this Gospel.

This final paragraph is just rather odd. It feels "out of place". It seems like an interruption in the flow of the Evangelist's written thought, and it is not clear as to who is "speaking" at this point:

- was it still John the Baptist?; or,
- was it John the Evangelist?;

While it immediately follows the Baptist's response to his disciples about Jesus' ministry, neither the language: the verbiage and phraseology; nor the content appears related to that conversation. The "voice" of this statement, its "tone and tenor", its "language": its words and phrases; has more in common with John's first chapter than with the rest of the third.

- Like the first chapter, this part contains more "spiritual, metaphoric language", talking about: "*He who comes from above...*" and "*He who is of the earth...*" which are reminiscent of 1:2-3, "*He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*" (Jn. 1:2-3 ESV).
- Like the first chapter, this is more expressly descriptive of relationships within the Trinity; talking about how "*The Father loves the Son...*" and how God the Son "*...gives the Spirit without measure.*" reminiscent of 1:14, "*...glory as of the only Son from the Father...*" (Jn. 1:14 ESV).

So, although it is not directly specified, I suggest that this concluding paragraph is the work of the Evangelist, offering a final commentary on the beginning of Jesus' ministry, because following this, his Gospel transitions into more of a narrative flow than theological {not to say that it will not be theological}.

The Evangelist concludes this introduction as he began it, with the divine nature of Jesus Christ. {The first three chapters appear to have been constructed as a specific unit, leading some scholars to allege that "John" is a fusion or harmonization of two separate Gospel accounts: a more expansive narrative, like the Synoptics, and a so called "Signs Gospel" which is more theologically focused. However, there have been no divide manuscripts recovered (certainly none from antiquity) and no textual reason to suggest multiple authors nor any evidence of technical editing. It remains best, simplest, and most surely correct to accept the Gospel text both as received and with Apostolic writer-ship.} This conclusion is divided into four points, summarizing the meaning of all that he has previously said:

- the difference between the Creator and the creature, between divinity and humanity;
- the Christ's testimony (with that of the Baptist) and the people's response;
- the supremacy and authority of God the Son; and,
- the necessity of *pisteuo*, faith, along with the benefits or consequences of belief or unbelief.

His first point is that, “*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 begins with an expression of divine transcendence, describing our Either/Or relationship with the divine:

- there is the one “*who comes from above*”, God; and then,
- there is everyone and everything else.

There is a Creator and a creation, distinct from one another. There is God, the LORD, and then there is “stuff”. If you are “stuff”, then you cannot be God. If you are a creation, then you cannot become the Creator.

- A painter is not a painting, and the painting is not the painter.
- A painting cannot paint itself, even if it is a “self portrait” or a “self image”.

John emphasizes the division and vast difference which separates humanity from the LORD.

- The divine is greater than all
- The divine is holier than all.
- The divine is wiser and more knowledgeable than all.
- The divine is more powerful and capable than all.
- The divine is plainly just “more” in everything:
  - more just;
  - more righteous;
  - more mighty;
  - more wrathful;
  - more gracious;
  - more forgiving;
  - more merciful;
  - more glorious; and,
  - more loving.

Meanwhile, the divine also does not belong to the earth; instead, the earth belongs to the divine.

- Humanity, “*Adam*”, comes from the earth (Hebrew: *adamah*); therefore, we belong to the earth (apart from the regenerating intervention of the divine Holy Spirit). {“*...for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*” (Gen. 3:19 ESV)}
- So, humanity can only know of earthly things (apart from divine self-revelation), in earthly ways (apart from divinely provided prophetic gifts), and speak of earthly things.

However humanity, although less than the divine in every regard, still has been given great value and worth within ourselves because we are reflections or “images” of the divine. Our status as God's imagebearers is what gives us our value and elevates us somewhat above the earth, to which we belong; above all the lesser things of God's good creation (Genesis 1:26-30). Humanity is the pinnacle of creation, for it was only after creating us that God declared it “*very good*” (Gen 1:31). But, although humanity is at the top of the created “food chain”, we still remain beneath God our Creator; the Sovereign LORD who is “*above all*”.

The Evangelist's second point concerns Christ's testimony and His revelatory Word. “*He who comes from heaven is above all. He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony. Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true.*”. He speaks about humanity's general response to the Incarnation of Christ, the entrance of God the Son, the *Logos* who is *Theos* and *Andros* into the *Kosmos*: His creation. He declares humanity's sinfulness by our willful unfaithfulness to the divine King.

If the one who “*...comes from heaven is above all.*” and “*He bears witness to what he has seen and heard...*”, telling us about what He knows; giving us first hand information; telling us the truth about the universe He created; telling us the truth about ourselves: about who we are and who He created us to be and how He expects and commands us to live; but “*...no one receives his testimony.*”, then humanity is disbelieving the truth; disbelieving it from the very Source.

- We deny the truth and prefer falsehood.
  - We call the **King** a liar. We call **God** a liar.
- We fail to trust the only dependable one.
  - We fail to trust God. We fail to trust Jesus Christ.
- We willfully disbelieve and are unfaithful to the one to whom our allegiance is owed.
  - We sin against God, and we commit “cosmic treason” against the Holy and Divine Sovereign Who is “*above ALL*”!
- We revolt against His authority by trying to drag down the One who is “*above all*” and elevate ourselves into His rightful place instead.

God came down into the world to tell us about Himself and the plan He has for us. He came down, inviting us to join Him; calling us up to Himself; calling us to come into His Kingdom and to enjoy Him. He came to rescue us from ourselves, to forgive us for our transgressions against Him. He came speaking about love, beauty, and truth but sinful humanity did not want to hear it; so we rejected Him. We stubbornly refused to receive and welcome our Maker into the home that He built for us to live and work in (John 1:11), “*...no one receives his testimony.*”?

But, does nobody receive Him and His Word? Does nobody accept His witness?

If “*no one*” does, then '**Who** or what are we?' Perhaps we are, “some one” instead of “no one”?

John previously told us, “*...the world did not know him.*” (Jn. 1:10 ESV) and that “*He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.*” (Jn. 1:11 ESV); therefore, the world, the *kosmos*, did not know or receive Him nor did “His own people”: Israel, the Jews, the descendants of Jacob and children of Abraham; receive Him. They rejected Him instead. They cast Him aside and killed Him.

Yet the evidence proves that some hope remains because John {the two John: the Baptist and the Evangelist} received Him and testified to Him, and we receive Him and testify to Him, do we not? So, while “*no one*” receives Him, God has apparently still decreed that “someone” must, since “*Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true.*”. Therefore, those who receive Christ and His testimony, agree that the truth is true.

- They affirm that truth **IS**, that it is absolute and definite.
- They believe and trust the truth because the Sovereign One established it; God decreed it.
- They trust in the absoluteness of the truth and that the truth is a firm foundation; the only firm foundation upon which anything of substance can be built upon or drawn from.
- They hear the truth and they recognize it as the truth. Therefore, they listen and pay attention because the Truth is what matters most; because the Truth is “*above all*”.
- They are faithful and loyal to the One True King.
- They hold true to the truth.

Next, John third point explains “Why” those who receive Him, faithfully listen to Him, “*For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand.*”. Remember, “For” means “Because”; so, it is “because” of what follows, that those who “...[receive] His testimony...” will receive it.

- Because “*...he whom God has sent utters the words of God...*”, which means the one who “*comes from above*” is God's messenger.
  - He speaks with God's voice.
  - He proclaims God's Word, yet unlike the prophets of old, He does not say {thus saith the LORD...} but instead says, “*You have heard that it was said to those of old...But I say to you that...*” (Matt. 5:21-22 ESV).
  - He is not just a messenger. He is not merely a prophet. He is someone **more**. Yet, how do we know that?
- Because “*...he gives the Spirit without measure.*”.
  - He gives the Spirit: God's Holy Spirit.
  - The Holy Spirit is given by Him, proceeds from Him, and is sent by Him.
  - The Holy Spirit is given “*without measure*”.
    - That is not to say that the infinite, God the Holy Spirit is given by Him in an unlimited quantity or capacity, but that He gives the Spirit liberally (in the classical sense of the word).
    - He gives freely, without any restraint; without measurement. To everyone who is given, everyone who receives gets “enough”.
  - He is able to give the Spirit “*without measure*” because it is His Spirit and it is **His** to give.

- Why and How? Because “*The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand.*”. We are thus again reminded of the deity and equal Sovereignty of the Son with the Father.
  - The One who “*comes from above*” is “*above all*” because the Father has given Him and placed “*all things into His [the Son's] hand.*”
  - The Son is **more**, more than just a prophet, since the Word of God that He speaks is His Word. He is able to speak with authority (Matthew 7:28-29) because “*all things*” are in His hand; because He is above “*all things*”.

Therefore, God the Father sent down God the Son from heaven to earth to give God the Holy Spirit to everyone who receives Him and His testimony as the truth: as the Gospel truth; the Good News!

Which brings us to the Evangelist's fourth and final point, the ultimate message for which he wrote this Gospel is to proclaim that:

- “*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.*”.
- “*Whoever believes in the Son...*”; whoever has faith in the Son; whoever has *pisteuo* in the Son “*...has eternal life.*”.

But, what is belief? What is faith? What does *pisteuo* really mean? How does it actually work? Many people today will say that they “believe in God”, that they “believe in Jesus”, but do they? Many people do not act or live as if they believe that there is a Holy God who will one day judge between the righteous and wicked. Is there a reliable way for them and for us to know whether someone truly believes in God's Son?

Yes, there is because “belief” is more than just the affirmation or acceptance of facts. Belief and faith is something active and consequential. It is evident and observable.

Belief **in someone** is more than just admitting that they are.

- Consider the expression, “I believe **in** Santa Claus.”. When someone says that, they mean that they “believe” Santa Claus **is** or that the “spirit or the 'idea' of Santa Claus” **is**. They mean that they agree with what Santa Claus is publicly supposed to represent: kindness and generosity, gift giving as an expression of, as an exemplary teaching moment about God's gracious gift of His Son, Jesus, for us.

Belief **in something** is more than a hope or wishful thinking.

- Consider the expression, “I believe that the Browns will win the Super Bowl next year.”. We all know that that is an utterly fantastical hope, that it is only an example of wishful thinking without basis in fact or reality. I admit to the same problem as regards my team, the Miami Dolphins, so...<shrug>.

Nor does believing something make it necessarily true, simply because somebody believes it.

- There are people who believe that the Earth is flat instead of being a globe; an assumption that is easily disproved with photographs or even by flying high enough (altitude).
- There are people who believe that human astronauts did not land on the Moon; an assumption disproved by the unique rocks they returned with.
- There are people who believe America has been a racist country from before its inception; a false assumption that is disproved by historical writings preserved here and abroad.

- There are people who believe that Jews have never had a claim upon the territory of Israel; an assumption disproved by Scripture and archaeological evidence and other secular, historical documents {such as those written and preserved by the Babylonians, Greeks, and Romans}.
- There are people who believe that a man can become a woman, or a woman a man; but that is an assumption disproved by genetics, physiology (like bone structure), and other biologic aspects.

Our belief never determines what is true. Instead, the truth must always determine what we believe.

So now lastly, the Evangelist explains to his audience clearly, what *pisteuo*/faith/belief actually practically is:

- *Pisetou* is a positive response to the truth.
- To believe, to have *pisteou*, is to obey and to obey is to love, to *agape* God.
- Disbelieving God is disobedience and all disobedience is sin and to sin is to hate God.

John writes, “*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life...*” but “*whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life...*”.

- Life is qualified by our obedience or lack thereof, just as God told Adam, “*You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*” (Gen. 2:16-17 ESV) because “*...the wrath of God remains on [whoever does not obey the Son ]*”.
- Eternal life is therefore, the consequence of our obedience, because obedience to God is the consequence of belief; of *pisteuo* and the best expression of our love for Him.

If the one who “*comes from above*” **IS** “*above all*”, and He “*utters the words of God*” and He “*gives the Spirit without measure*” because God the Father loves Him and the Father has “*given all things into his hand*” **AND** you receive the Son's testimony by believing that “*God is true.*”, then you must and will obey Him: His words and His commandments. You will obey all of them without question, complaint, or comment because He, the Son, Jesus, is the Sovereign LORD and He is “*above all*”. Obedience is your duty, it is your right, and it is your privilege because He is above us and we are beneath Him.

If God is true, if Jesus Christ is true and you believe **in** Him, then you must believe Him and act accordingly! You must obey your King because anything else except obedience is treason, “cosmic treason” {thank you RC Sproul for that perfect expression!}.

But, we have a terrible problem as American Christians. We do not understand royalty. We do not know how to rightly respond to a king. We do not understand what it means for someone to be our “sovereign”; to possess full and absolute, unquestioned authority over us, as their subjects. We do not understand what it means to have Jesus Christ, God, as our King: as our LORD; as the King of kings {forever and ever} and Lord of lords {forever and ever, hallelujah, hallelujah!}.

- US Presidents come and go, but the scope of their authority is limited by our Constitution and their willingness to enforce it.
- Work bosses come and go, but their authority is limited by the law, by corporate policies and procedures, and only extends to whatever amount of authority over our lives, that we are otherwise willing to inappropriately cede them, beyond our work schedule.

- Parents have authority over their children, but it is limited by the law, by our faith, and by the passage of time; because a time of “maturity” comes when a parent's authority is no longer respected by their child.
- However, the true King has “All Glory, Laud, and Honor”. He alone is owed our full allegiance and complete obedience and He will be right and just to punish us for our failure in either. So, let us thank the LORD for His grace and mercy in forgiving us our past transgressions through Christ Jesus.

If you think that your past sins, or that continuing to sin is somehow still “OK”, or if you think that perhaps some sins are just “not that bad”, then what you are really thinking is that God is wrong, or that He is a liar, or that you “know better” than God; that you are wiser or more knowledgeable than the LORD. If you think that, then you are claiming to be more than God. You are suggesting that you are greater than God and denying that He is “*above all*” things and that He possesses “*all things*”. Through those kind of thoughts and actions, a person proves that they do not believe God; that they do not believe in God or in His Son, Jesus Christ, no matter what else they may say.

But, if you believe and trust in God, then you will know and confess that your sins are wicked; that we are all duty-bound to repent of our sins and mortify our sin and our sinful desires; then you do affirm that Christ is true.

If you believe that Jesus Christ is true, then you will obey Him and all of His commandments in love, merely because He has given them. Therefore,

- To believe in (to have *pisteuo* in) Christ, is to obey Christ.
- To obey Christ, is to love (to *agape*) Christ.

Obedience to our rightful sovereign is our duty of *agape*. Obedience is an act of self sacrificing devotion. We Christians, joyfully sacrifice our own wants and desires to Christ's command; subordinating our wills to His divine will, plan, and purpose. We obey God because we believe in and trust God's promise that all those who love Him will have eternal life, while those who hate Him will receive His just wrath.

If Scripture is true; if it is true concerning all that it says, then it must be believed and obeyed. It cannot be ignored, changed, or reduced in its social relevance by those who claim to receive and affirm it.

If we believe that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit truly are “*above all*”, then we will have no choice except to obey and love Christ, because He has been given “*all things*” and He is the Sovereign LORD.

But, if we do not believe that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit truly are “*above all*”, if we believe that they are wrong, incomplete, or lying, then Scripture holds no value to us except as the rule by which we are justly condemned.

So, if you believe that Christ is “*above all*”, if you believe in Him (the He is true and trustworthy), then you shall obey Him in fidelity and love because He has given you the faith to receive and to believe and you may be confident that He is also giving you an everlasting life in which to worship and enjoy Him, forever. This is the good new of the Gospel, Jesus Christ is God the Son, and if you believe in and trust Him, then on account of all that He has done for you, then you will be given life eternal and your sins are forgiven.

**AMEN**