

Christ is Above All

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.

John 3:31-36

John has made explicit what his aim is for us through the writing of his gospel:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

John 3:31-36

This is John the Apostle's singular aim, his all-consuming focus, his passion: that you would hear about Jesus and so believe him for all of who he is! The Christ, the Son of God. The answer to your deepest problems. The one for whom you've longed after by a name you did not know. And so that by believing in his person and work, you may have life!

Church, Jesus Christ is everything to us. It's not about any other name than His. He alone is worthy. He alone is worth it. He is the reason we gather. If we lose everything- our building, our sound system, our coffee, our homes, our jobs, and we still have him, we are rich. If we gain the whole world and this building was stacked to the ceiling with gold bars, but we lost him we would be the poorest of the poor.

John closes chapter 3 wrapping together this masterful chapter declaring who Christ is, with the aim that we would believe in him and so have true life in his name.

Now, you may notice the quotation marks end at v31. It is not entirely clear if this was the continuation of John the Baptist's speech or John the Evangelist's closing commentary. Most scholars seem to suggest that this is John the Evangelist commenting on all we've heard and seen so far. I think that's a good suggestion. What is clearest to me is that while language we've heard in the conversation with Nicodemus and speech of John the Baptist remains, both characters fade to the background and in these six verses, we're left with beholding Christ alone.

If you are skeptical about the claims of Christ, this is a perfect sermon for you to hear the truth of who he is.

If you are a Christian on the way, but struggling, you will find fresh strength and courage as you look upon your God again.

Believe on Christ because

1. He is above all

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.

John 3:31

To humble ourselves is to view ourselves rightly before him.

Christ is above all. In his origin, he is without beginning. In his positioning, he is supreme in all ways. In his wisdom, his is infinitely greater than ours. In his claims, he is more than one option among many.

“Christ comes straight from the heart of God. We come straight from the local hospital. He speaks the very Word of God; we speak our all-too-earthly language.” -Frederick Dale Bruner

Christ is from heaven. We're all from the dust.
Christ lives and reigns forever seated in heaven. We'll need to pick a plot to be buried in.

Does Christ rule your heart?

-is his love and approval enough for you

-can you sleep well at night knowing you are right with him?

-have you heard and understood the words of Christ or have you heard only earthly wisdom?

2. He can speak authoritatively about the things of heaven because he's been there

He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony.
John 3:32

Surely, here John is speaking in hyperbole. No one? - we saw John the Baptist receive his testimony and he'll speak of the free offer to receive his testimony in the next verse. These words call to mind the prologue of John, spec. v11-13

He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.
John 1:11-13

And so the same is still true: the world, as a whole, has not received the testimony of Christ.

The world wants to emend the testimony of Christ: Christ with a more “modern” view of gender and sexuality, Christ who doesn't say salvation is found only in repenting and trusting in him, Christ who wouldn't ask me to take up my cross and follow him, but wants to help us fulfill the dream we have.

“A God without wrath brought men without sin into a Kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a Cross.” -H. Richard Niebuhr

But think this language of testimony. A prosecutor in a court of law cannot thank a witness for their testimony and then emend what they said: you accept the testimony from the person or you don't!

But it's not just the world who struggles with the testimony of Christ.

How do we respond to our loved ones when they tell us, it's great that we have a relationship with Christ, but they don't think it's the only way? When they say there are many ways to God, that each person needs to figure out what works for them?

Brother, sister, if you have heard the testimony of Christ, hear this part as well: John 15:26-27

“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.”
John 15:26-27

We are meant to bear witness to the uniqueness of Jesus. Christ alone came from heaven. Christ alone has returned to heaven. No one else has legitimate testimony about the things of God apart from Christ.

Christ has saved us by his grace, so we are humble as we talk about the things of God, but it is God who has saved us, so we are sure of what we have heard. We know him whom we have believed!

Christ is after something better than letting us create a Savior in our image; he wants to give us himself.

What is the testimony?

3. He is the way to God

Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true.
John 3:33

This is to say, what you do with Jesus is what you do with God.

Jesus is God. He is the image of the invisible God. There is not any sort of salvation, wisdom, or access to God outside of Jesus Christ.

What is it to set a seal to something? We've seen this in Genesis 41:
-where Pharaoh gave Joseph a signet ring. it is approval and acceptance
-all things are said to be in the hand of Joseph, giving to him from his master
-whatever Joseph sets the ring to, Pharaoh approves of and accepts. Sovereign decree.

Receiving the testimony of Christ

- that he came to save sinners
- that he alone has the power to forgive sins
- that he is God
- that he is the Son of God
- that no one comes to the Father except through him
- and it is to treasure him for all He is revealed to be in the Scriptures! It has been said that the OT is Christ anticipation, the Gospels Christ manifestation, the Epistles Christ explication, and Revelation Christ consummation¹

To accept Christ's testimony is to accept God.
To reject Christ's testimony is to reject God.

To quote CS Lewis, “Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important.”-CS Lewis

Jesus raises the stakes and the claims to the highest level.

¹ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/every-book-of-the-bible-in-one-word/>

4. He utters only the words of God because he has the Spirit without measure

For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.
John 3:34

Throughout the OT, a prophet of God would receive a portion of the Spirit of God. What was astounding was when Elisha received a double portion of the Spirit of God.

It is the Spirit of God that led men to be able to speak God's Word, write Holy Scripture, be empowered to do miracles, and prophesy what was yet to come.

Here, we are told that Jesus utters the words of God. How? Why? Is he unique? John tells us,

“He whom God has sent utters the words of God, FOR he gives the Spirit without measure.”

Now I've heard that verse before and I thought it was talking about God giving us, believers, the Spirit without measure.

But as we read the Scripture in context, we realize it is the Father who gives the Spirit to Christ without measure. This is the reason whenever Jesus speaks, he is uttering the words of God.

Because all the fullness of deity dwells in him bodily.

“The Spirit was not in Christ as in a vessel, but as in a fountain, as in a bottomless ocean.” -Matthew Henry

Now, God does fill us believers again and again with his Holy Spirit, but to us, “grace has been given as Christ apportioned it” (Eph. 4:7). We don't possess every gift of the Spirit, but Christ does. We must be filled again and again, Christ possessed the Spirit without a measure.

Here, we must marvel at the God man. He is more than a prophet. He is more than a Spirit-empowered human. He is the Word made flesh.

And as we begin to be drawn into this beautiful mystery, v35 pulls us into the undertow of the essence itself for all that is good, true, and beautiful. That is to say that

5. His relationship with the Father is fountain and foundation of God's love for us

The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand.
John 3:35

It is as if everything else starts to blur and this altogether sublime thought becomes clear for John: The Father loves the Son.

“The evangelist speaks about this subject just as if he did not consider any other subject worthy preaching about. He brushes all else aside and looks solely upon the Son of God. This what we, too, must do...;we should keep the great miracle in sight, regarding all else as chaff compared with the Son of God.” -Martin Luther

We are well-acquainted with the idea that God loves us. We've heard it before. It is of course, terribly difficult for it to penetrate the bottom of our heart, but we know the thought.

What we also must know is that God is not loving because he loves us (if this were the case, God was not loving before we existed), but he loves us because forever the Father has loved the Son.

Here we approach great mystery, but here is the God whom Jesus gives us the deepest revealing into: The God who has forever been Father. And if he has forever been Father, there has forever been the Son. And this Father has forever loved the Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.
John 17:24

The whole reason Christ came into the world was the nature and essence of our great God: That the Father loved the Son and gave all things into his hands.

Christ is the one with all power. He is the one who has brought salvation. His call to repent is a call into the live of the Beloved.

6. This is an eternal, life and death matter

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.
John 3:36

John 3 ends with a dire warning. The word wrath pops off the pages of our Bible. And there is no way to sugarcoat this passage. Neither does Jesus seem given to sugarcoating. He ends his Sermon on the Mount with great warning.

Because God's love is so great, because his sacrifice so unimaginable, how we respond is solemnly serious.

There are two options. Either believe or disobey.

Believe Jesus Christ died the death you deserved to die on the cross, taking the wrath of God and imputing to you his righteousness and eternal life is yours, starting now.

Or disobey. It's interesting the Bible doesn't say whoever does not believe, but instead whoever does not obey. We must ask then, what does it look like to obey?

Obey Jesus' call to repent and believe.

This is not a call to merit salvation!

"Merit enough it is to know that merits are not enough."-Bernard of Clairvaux

What's the obedience you need? An obedience that says, my obedience could never be enough. Or as the Apostle Paul says, the obedience of faith. To believe that Jesus is who he says he is- "The Savior of the world."

God's wrath abides on all who have not obeyed the Son. God's grace, mercy, and eternal life are on all who believe in him.

People recoil at the mention of God's wrath, but here it is for us in Holy Scripture. A God without wrath is not worthy. A God who does not hate evil and will not do justice is not a God you can trust. The unsettling truth is the greatest evil is to reject the Son whom he sent to save us. People will tell us that we are narrow-minded and insistent upon our own truth. We must humbly, prayerfully, and boldly reply that this is God's truth. The warning is here to turn us from our wicked ways. The call and mercy of today is that we can find forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

Christ came into the world not to condemn the world. This must shape the tone and tenor of our evangelism and preaching. And still, we cannot ignore or act ignorant of the warnings of Holy Scripture. To do so is truly unloving. Christ will never cast out any who come to him.

JC Ryle captures what we must take from John 3:

“We can never make too much of Christ... We can never have too big thoughts about Christ, can never love him too much, trust Him too implicitly, lay too much weight upon Him, and speak too highly in His praise. He is worthy of all the honor that we can give Him. He will be all in heaven. Let us see to it, that He is all in our hearts on earth.” -JC Ryle²

Christ is above all
Christ has been to heaven and back
Christ has spoken the words of God to us
Christ has forgiven our sins
Christ is the Beloved of the Father- given for us, His Spirit poured out upon us

How can we ever get over all of who he is?

² J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: John*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1999), 1:174, quoted in Richard Phillips commentary on John, 215.