

Mission Accomplished John 3:22-36

July 6,2008

Many of you will recall when our President stood on the deck of the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln and the sign in the background read, "Mission Accomplished". Saddam was ousted. That mission was accomplished, but the mission of a stable and safe Iraq is still a work in progress. John the Baptist had a mission of a much greater nature. Instead of liberating 27 million people from a tyrannical despot and giving them freedom, his mission was to point the nation of Israel to a Savior who could deliver the world from the tyranny of sin and our evil nature. (John 1:29) His mission was to prepare the way in the hearts of the people for the coming of this One. (John 1:23)

After the first Passover of Jesus' ministry, He and the first disciples were headed back to the region of Galilee, but on the way, they stopped to baptize people in the Judean countryside. We don't know if there was a difference in the baptisms or if it was a continuation of John's ministry of preparing people for the unveiling of the Messiah. They were baptizing in the same region as John, probably not many miles apart. Someone who had come from the site where Jesus' disciples were baptizing went to John the Baptist's disciples. ²⁵ *An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing.* The Scripture doesn't tell us what the argument was about. Was he trying to tell them that pointing to the Messiah was no longer necessary since the Messiah's disciples were baptizing? John the Beloved's use of the word "Jew" leads me to think this was more of a legalistic argument about the difference in style or purpose. John the Baptist's and his disciples are Jews, but when John the Beloved uses the term "Jew" or "Jews", he is usually referring to their legalism and failure to see spiritual truth. (John 2:18)

As they argued, part of the argument must have included an account of how many were going to Jesus. Jesus' converts were growing in number as John's diminished. 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."* John's disciples felt they were losing the numbers game. Too often we measure success as the world does, by outward success, by recognition of others, which usually is related to fame or wealth. But please hear me when I say that success that really matters has nothing to do with numbers of people or dollars. Success is faithfulness to obey God moment by moment, as we love Him with our all and our neighbor as ourselves! (Matthew 22:37-39) That is success in the eyes of heaven, in the eternal realm. (Jeremiah 1:18) And when it is all said and done, what else really matters?

John the Baptist knew this. It was his life. He shunned wealth, and when popularity came, he held it loosely. ²⁷ *To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven.* John knew that the only reason people had flocked to him in the wilderness to be baptized was that God had given him that mission and sent the people. It wasn't his great oratory skills. "Repent, and prepare the way of the Lord!" It wasn't miracles. It wasn't his wardrobe. It was God! (1Corinthians 4:7) God sent all of Judea out to him to the extent that it caused a stir among the religious

Commented [notes1]: 29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

John 1:29 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 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.'" John 1:23 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: 18 Then the Jews demanded of him, "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" John 2:18 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: 37 Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." Matt 22:37-40 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: 18 Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land--against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. Jer 1:18 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: 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? 1 Cor 4:7 (NIV)

leaders. Now the crowd was starting to go to Jesus and John knew it was the sovereign will of Almighty God.

What a great truth to keep us from jealousy and strife. Why is that person popular or that church growing in numbers? It's because God willed it to be so. Why does that person have such a gift? It's because God gave it to him. (Numbers 11:26-29) If you don't like it, take it up with God. Life isn't a competition to see who can outperform others. It isn't about getting to the top of anything. Life is knowing God and His great love for us! Life is glorifying God and enjoying Him forever.

John the Baptist went on to say,²⁸ *You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.'* John knew what his calling entailed and what it did not entail. He was sent before the One. He was not the One. So when the One came, it is only right that the people go to Him! If only everyone could learn this lesson John understood so well. It's not about me! It is about Jesus. (Matthew 11:11)

I'm not a Christian because I get anything out of it. I do get a great deal, much more than the world has to offer, but that isn't why I am a Christian. I'm a Christian because Jesus is worthy of my worship and commitment to Him. I'm a Christ follower because that is what He made me to be and anything else is rebellion against an all powerful, all-knowing and loving God. I'm not the Christ. Are you? But sometimes we act like it. We want it to be about us, when it is all about Jesus. (Revelation 5:12)

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.* Without an understanding of a Jewish marriage in that day, we can't understand what John the Baptist was saying. I'm going to let the New American Commentary explain this to you in its own delicate terms.

To clarify for his disciples what he meant, therefore, the Baptizer used a typical Jewish type of parable, drawn from Jewish marriage customs. At that time the bridegroom normally selected one or two close friends to escort the bride to the bridegroom's marriage chamber and to wait outside the room or tent for the bridegroom's shout and often for receipt of tokens that the marriage had been consummated with his virgin bride. Such friends of the bridegroom were thus able to certify to the wedding guests that the consummation of the marriage had taken place and the joyous festivities could continue (cf. 3:29). John gladly accepted his role as a friend of the bridegroom. Just as he had earlier willingly turned over his disciples to Jesus in a self-giving act (1:35-37), here he expressed his genuine joy that Jesus was being accepted by the people. This brief parable, therefore, serves as a powerful illustration. — New American Commentary

John the Baptist was telling his disciples, "Look, this is how it is supposed to be. The bride does not belong to the best man. I'm just glad to be around to hear of the consummation of the marriage."

Commented [notes7]: 26 However, two men, whose names were Eldad and Medad, had remained in the camp. They were listed among the elders, but did not go out to the Tent. Yet the Spirit also rested on them, and they prophesied in the camp.
27 A young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp."
28 Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses' aide since youth, spoke up and said, "Moses, my lord, stop them!"
29 But Moses replied, "Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!"
Num 11:26-29 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: [The Westminster Shorter Catechism](#)

Commented [notes9]: 11 I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.
Matt 11:11 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: 12 In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"
Rev 5:12 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: 35 The next day John was there again with two of his disciples.
36 When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"
37 When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus.
John 1:35-37 (NIV)

The analogy of God as the groom and the people as His bride was not new. It came right out of the Old Testament. (Isaiah 54:5) The book of Hosea was to point out the unfaithfulness of Israel as God's bride, and the patient, loving, faithfulness of God (the groom) to continue to give Israel (the bride) another chance. (Hosea 1:2) It is no wonder then that this analogy is used by John and later by the Apostle Paul in describing Jesus as the groom and the church as His bride. (Ephesians 5:25)

Commented [notes12]: 5 For your Maker is your husband-- the LORD Almighty is his name-- the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth.
Isaiah 54:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: 2 When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, "Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD."
Hosea 1:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her
Eph 5:25 (NIV)

John the Baptist summed up his response with this final statement, ³⁰ *He must become greater; I must become less.* He is the Christ; I am not. He is the groom; the bride should go to Him. John knew that as people went directly to Jesus, his job was winding down. There was no longer a need to point to Jesus. The people got the message already. John was successful. His mission was accomplished, but as long as he had life, he would continue to prepare people to meet Jesus. The numbers would be less and less as more and more people learned of Jesus, but that was God's call on his life. The age of prophets was drawing to a close, and the kingdom of Christ was dawning. (Luke 16:16)

Commented [notes15]: 16 "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it.
Luke 16:16 (NIV)

John's statement is true of any person in ministry. The hope of every pastor should be to see those in his flock learn to feed themselves from the word of God. We want you to learn to go directly to Jesus. We want you to depend less on us and more on Jesus. As Jesus becomes more to you, you depend on the pastor less. Then Sunday worship is more of a time of praising God for what He has spoken into your life throughout the week, instead of the one good spiritual meal you've had all week. Some pastors want a co-dependent congregation. That is the beginning of a cult. We want to see a Jesus dependent congregation! Amen? (Colossians 1:28)

Commented [notes16]: 28 We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.
Col 1:28 (NIV)

A wonderful example of this can be seen in the life of William Carey. He was an early 19th century missionary to India and translated the Bible into Sanskrit, Bengali, and numerous other languages and dialects. He is known as the father of modern missions. Four colleges are named after him. *As William Carey lay dying, he turned to a friend and said, "When I am gone, don't talk about William Carey; talk about William Carey's Savior. I desire that Christ alone might be magnified."*— Preaching the Word – He understood that it was all about Jesus!

We can also see his statement true in our spiritual life as we mature in Christ. Our personal desires, plans, and dreams become less and less important in direct proportion to our adoration of Jesus and communion with Him. The more you know Him, the less you think about yourself. As He increases, you decrease. How much has Jesus increased in your heart and mind? It is a good spiritual gauge. And if He hasn't increased lately, it means you are not growing spiritually. How important are His desires as compared to your own personal ones? He'll be working on this in each of our lives until we see Him face to face and then you and I will experience the great increase. (1John 3:2) Then we will cry out with Thomas, "My Lord, and my God!" and Jesus will be everything to us. (John 20:28)

Commented [notes17]: 2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.
1 John 3:2 (NIV)

John the Beloved now concludes this account of Nicodemus and John the Baptist with some powerful statements of summary. 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.* Jesus is from

Commented [notes18]: 28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"
John 20:28 (NIV)

heaven. His words are the words that matter. Man is of the earth. He belongs to the earth. He speaks from this world's perspective. What we really need is to listen to heaven in the words of the One that came from heaven.

Mohammed didn't claim to have come from heaven, and neither did Buddha, Krishna, or any of the founders of the major religions of the world. Only Jesus claimed and backed with powerful signs that showed He was from above. All others who have claimed to be from heaven we recognize as lunatics or egomaniacs. Try as people may, they can't make those labels fit Jesus of Nazareth.

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

³³ *The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful.* We can see that John's use of "no one" is not meant to be taken literally, because in the following verse he speaks of those that do accept Jesus' testimony. He did the same thing in the first chapter when he said the world does not receive him, but to those who do receive Him He gives the right to become children of God. (1:10-12) He is expressing the sad fact that most people will not accept Jesus' words or receive Him as Savior. It sounds like John is amazed at how stubborn and hardhearted man is.

The implication of verse 33 is that those who refuse to accept Jesus' words believe that God is a liar. (Acts 14:2) Humanist don't believe God has spoken at all. They would say either Jesus lied or John distorted what He said. But anyone who does accept Jesus' testimony is certifying (setting their seal) that God is truthful. The Message translates the verse like this: ³³ *But anyone who examines this evidence will come to stake his life on this: that God himself is the truth.* If you look at the miracles and claims of Jesus, consider His death and resurrection, and are honest with your self, you will come to the conclusion that Jesus declared the message of heaven, the very truth of God.

³⁴ *For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit.* Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit and yielded Himself completely to the Holy Spirit. His words were God's words. They are absolute truth. You might misinterpret those words, but what He said was the very truth of God. Since John had this conviction, imagine how careful John was to write down what Jesus said. God gives us His Spirit without limit also because we are in Jesus. The main difference is that we do not yield ourselves completely to Him. (John 7:37-39)

³⁵ *The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands.* In these first three chapters of John we have learned that Jesus is the Word of God made flesh, that He has always been with the Father, ever toward one another, at the Father's side (1:18). Now John is saying that God so loves the Son that He has put everything in His hands. Jesus has been given all power and authority. (Matthew 28:18) Of course it is safe for God to do so, because they have the same heart.

This is the verse behind the song, *He's Got the Whole World in His Hands*. When you begin to realize the great love that Jesus has for us, and when you start to grasp His goodness and faithfulness, you realize that everything couldn't be in better hands. What assurance we should have, in the midst of life's trials, when we realize that everything is in His hands. Allstate my have good hands for life insurance, but

Commented [notes19]: 10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.

11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God -

John 1:10-12 (NIV)

Commented [notes20]: 2 But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.

Acts 14:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: 37 On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.

38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."

39 By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

John 7:37-39 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Matt 28:18 (NIV)

when it comes to life assurance, there are no better hands than those of Jesus. Man will sin. People will choose evil, the innocent will suffer, but ultimately it is all in Jesus' hands and righteousness and truth will prevail.

John closed his comments on the conversations with Nicodemus and the testimony of John with this summary statement. 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.*" It is another of John's "either or" statements. If you believe in the Son you have passed from death to life. You are no longer going to have to pay for your sins. Justice was served for our sins on the cross. But if you reject God's loving provision for your sin, the just wrath of God remains upon you. (Romans 5:9)

God will not be unjust. If you reject what Christ did for you, you will have to face the justice of God toward your rebellion against God. This last week I have heard more ranting from those who reject God. One of their most vocal claims is the intolerance of Christianity. They say our insistence on Jesus as the way to God is mean spirited. I don't understand how Jesus' open arms to the world, the "whoever" is intolerant or mean. I can't understand how Jesus' willingness to take our punishment upon Himself is barbaric. I can't understand how the love of God paying for our crimes can be perceived as intolerant. Christianity is the most open armed religion in the world because it is based on what Jesus did for all people not what we can do or attain.

As a matter of fact, isn't it arrogant to say God can't decide how people come to Him? What our culture is failing to be honest with is that the law of non-contradiction applies to all truth claims. If two truth claims contradict each other, they cannot both be true. If Buddhism claims the way to God is through denial of your desires, and Hinduism claims it is through infinite reincarnations, and Islam believes it is through living its five pillars or dying as a martyr, and Christianity claims it is through believing in Jesus taking your punishment for you, they can't all be true. They all claim to have a corner on truth. They each claim an exclusive way to God. They each contradict all the others. Either one of them is true or none of them are. The humanist says none of them are but can't come up with a reason to go on living or for the universal hunger in the heart of man to know God.

Have you done as John suggested in verse 32, examined the evidence and seen that God is truthful. In the person of Jesus, He did not lie, but He did make a way for you to come to Him. (Matthew 11:28) Examine His words and make your decision. Everyone of us will fit into John's "either or" category. We will believe and accept the testimony of Jesus and have eternal life. Or we will refuse to believe and reject Jesus' words and God's wrath will remain over us, waiting for the Day of Judgment. You can't say you never heard or didn't know. Everyone will fall in one group or the other. God has placed that choice in our hands. What have you done with it? (Joshua 24:15)

Commented [notes23]: Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!
Romans 5:9 (NIV)

Commented [notes24]: 28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.
Matt 11:28 (NIV)

Commented [notes25]: 15 But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."
Josh 24:15 (NIV)