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NO GREATER

LOVE

EXPERIENCING
THE HEART OF JESUS
THROUGH THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

A.W. TOZER

COMPILED AND EDITED BY JAMES L. SNYDER

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Introduction

Many of us tend to think of love as a sentimental or emotional thing, not stopping to explore the true depths of it. Perhaps that is why this subject never gets its due coverage.

I don't think anybody would ever accuse A.W. Tozer of being sentimental. When he deals with a subject, he takes it right on, face-to-face. I think that is what people like about reading a Tozer book.

Tozer spent over fifty sermons preaching through the gospel of John, and this book presents his insights on God's love for us, drawn from this gospel.

Listening to Tozer preach these sermons is quite an experience. When preaching, Tozer never followed a word-by-word script or even a detailed outline. He would fold a piece of paper in two, put notes on the left-hand side and on the right-hand side, and tuck it into his Bible.

Keep in mind, those notes were carefully and prayerfully prepared. To him, it was almost an act of worship. I have many of his sermon notes and the audio sermons that go

with them. It is quite interesting to follow the notes as he is preaching.

Although I say that his notes were somewhat of an “act of worship,” he never worshiped the notes. The preparation might have been an act of worship, but the notes themselves were simply a tool to preach a sermon that God would bless.

One of the wonderful things to me about listening to Tozer’s sermons is the rabbit trails he often took. He would be going down one line of thought and, out of thin air, would seemingly change topics. More often than not, those rabbit trails are fascinating, and many are included in this book.

When preaching, Tozer was not glued to his notes. He was concerned about allowing the Holy Spirit to lead him in the delivery of that message. If it involved rabbit trails, that was good enough for him.

In this book, I have tried to keep the feel of a sermon. Not an essay in itself, but a sermon that would emphasize Tozer’s real commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ.

I believe the title *No Greater Love* solidifies what Tozer is saying. In fact, his treatment of John 3:16 is most interesting. These sermons were being preached toward the latter part of his life, and what he says about John 3:16 reveals Tozer’s character and nature.

He testifies that he had never before preached on this one verse in his entire ministry. He had quoted it when preaching and also in his prayers, but he had never focused a sermon on that one verse. It is clear that John 3:16 was so important to him, and Tozer carried with him a burden of God’s love in his life.

One phrase Tozer uses that is so powerful is “I am the most important person in God’s eyes.” What a powerful statement.

We like to say that God loves everybody. However, Tozer points out that God does not focus on groups of people, but rather on individuals. God sees the individual and treats them as though they were the only one in the world.

After listening to that sermon, I had to stop and think about that. It took me several days before I could get back to working on this manuscript. I do not think many people really appreciate the love that God has for us, and we take for granted what it really means.

In reading this book, you will see that Tozer came at this subject from a variety of ways. I believe the more you get into this book, the more you will be fascinated by the awesomeness of God’s love and how that love is channeled individually.

There are times when Tozer is rather harsh, especially toward religion. He says the problem with Christianity today is that the Pharisees are running it. Pharisees, especially in Jesus’ day, were more interested in law than they were in love. They would put law upon law upon law until the weight of the whole thing came crashing down on the hearts of the people.

Very strongly, Tozer puts these religious leaders in their place. He firmly believed that the laws of religion were really keeping people from experiencing the love of God.

He agreed that those Pharisees could explain and talk about it for days on end, defining it in the most intimate way. The problem, as Tozer saw it, was they believed in God’s love but had never experienced it themselves. That is the problem with religion today.

We can explain everything in the Bible, but we have yet to experience the truth in the Word of God. This was Tozer’s

passion: It does no good to know the truth unless you also have experienced the truth.

Another interesting element of this book is Tozer's discussion of the unpardonable sin in one chapter. Not too many people talk about this. Those who do talk about it often seem to misunderstand. Tozer gives a wonderful definition of the unpardonable sin and how we as Christians today can deal with it. If we do not know what it is and how it affects us, it will damage and compromise Christianity for us.

My greatest challenge in putting this book together was deciding what not to include. These sermons on the gospel of John are some of the best of Tozer's. Because he was coming to the end of his ministry in Chicago, he poured into each sermon wisdom he received from God along with the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

Some may not agree with everything Tozer says here—Tozer himself would not want them to—but going through this book and thinking through it chapter by chapter will point you in the right direction.

I suggest you read one chapter and then think about what you just read. Reading a Tozer book is not a competition to see how fast you can read it. It is experiencing the truth as he experienced it, and you will come away different than when you started.

James L. Snyder

1

Christ's Focused Love

O Father, the love of Christ is the most amazing thing that I could ever experience. I praise Thee Christ has focused His love on me and brought me into Thy kingdom. May my life daily give testimony of Thy love. Amen.

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Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

—John 3:7

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Sometimes we can go too far and exaggerate, making statements by using a superlative. However, it is quite difficult to exaggerate the vital importance of the teaching of our Lord in the opening verses of John 3. It is wholly revolutionary.

It is sharply classifying; it excludes and includes, it divides and distinguishes human beings from each other. It differs from all other religious teaching and is more than religious teaching. It did not originate with the teacher. It is not a pattern of truth woven out of many threads, as most religious teaching is. It is not anything like that.

Simply put, it is practical reporting.

When a reporter goes out on assignment, he sends back what he has seen and heard. We do not consider it the teaching of that reporter. We simply say it is factual reporting.

This is what Jesus is doing: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness” (John 3:11).

Here, Jesus takes on himself the character of a reporter, and to put it in language we understand, He says, “I am reporting to you what I know and have seen.” This is not pieced-out teaching—it is reporting. It is a report to men on earth of what He, the Lord of heaven, saw and heard and knew while He was in heaven. “And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven” (v. 13).

Jesus understood that many people would not accept his report: “If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven” (vv. 12–13).

That was his explanation when Nicodemus asked, “How can these things be?” (v. 9).

Jesus says people will not believe what He is telling them or what He saw. They will even reject it. There are two main reasons behind this.

First, people love the earth and sin too much, and second, they have no confidence in the One who is reporting. It is simply unbelief in the Savior, the Son of God.

Unbelief is not a weakness or failure of the mind. Rather, it is an opinion. When we do not believe in Jesus, we have an opinion of Jesus, which prevents us from believing.

A reporter goes to Washington, DC, and writes what he saw and heard. We sometimes shrug off his story not because we are unable to understand it, nor because we have

some psychological weakness. It is simply because we have no confidence in the reporter.

There are those who accept that God is true when they believe His message. But there are those who deny that God is true, or at least that Jesus Christ is God's Son, and they doubt the veracity of the reporter and refuse to accept the record.

What is it that our Lord is saying?

There are basic contrasts emphasized here by our Savior and taught by the apostles elsewhere in the Bible.

First, there are two heads of the human race. There is the first Adam, the head of the natural race, the forefather of us all but in whom all have died. As 1 Corinthians 15:22 says, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."

Then there is Christ, the last Adam, the head of the redeemed human race, and we read about Him in many places, such as 1 Corinthians 15:44–45: "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, the first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit."

There you have the contrast between the two heads of the human race. Adam, the head of the natural race, and Christ, the head of the spiritual human race, for He was and is a quickening spirit. "The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven" (v. 47).

These two human races are coexisting and comingling. The ones that belong to the first Adam are human beings everywhere, and the ones belonging to the other are the new ones created in Christ Jesus unto good works. "If any man

be in Christ,” Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “he is a new creature,” and thus he has a new head, which is Jesus Christ the Lord. Adam is no longer his head. He does not go back to Adam; he goes back to Christ. He does not take his life from Adam; he takes his life from Christ and gets his likeness from Christ. Christ is the new head of the new creation and of those who are born of the Spirit.

Here is where the real trouble begins; these two human races coexist in the world. That is the reason for persecution and religious trouble in every city.

This comingling and coexisting is seen in the fact that redeemed people live in cities, eat food, go to work, drive automobiles, talk on telephones, pay bills, and do everything that the old Adam’s race does. But, lo and behold, the mystery of mysteries, something wonderful has happened to that one group. They look like the others, but they are not like them. They can hardly be distinguished, but they are different from the others in that though they are born of Adam’s seed they have been rescued from Adam’s seed and born into the kingdom of God. That leads us to the two kingdoms coexisting: the kingdom of the flesh and the kingdom of the Spirit, which is also called the kingdom of God.

I believe in the brotherhood of man. I believe there is a universal brotherhood of the once born, and then I believe in a universal brotherhood of the twice born. Where our modernistic and liberal friends make their mistake is that they do not distinguish between the once born and the twice born. They make a universal brotherhood and say everybody is in. Jesus Christ makes a universal brotherhood and says everybody is out except those who are born

again. The liberal might say, "I believe in the brotherhood of man and that all in the universal brotherhood are children of God." Jesus says there is a universal brotherhood of the flesh: "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:5–6).

I believe in the universal brotherhood of fallen man and in the fatherhood of God.

Not the fatherhood of God over the whole race of Adam, for that is not so. Rather, the fatherhood of God over them born anew, who are saved. Christians have God for a father. The man in the old world was born of Adam and has Adam for his father, not God. God created Adam, Adam had progeny, the whole world is populated by the progeny of Adam, and our universal brothers descended from one ancient father, but not so with the children of God.

When we enter the kingdom of God, we become children of the Most High, and then we enter this new brotherhood of the redeemed, of whom God is the Father and Jesus Christ is the head.

There are two kingdoms; the kingdom of the flesh is inhabited by Adam's descendants. The human race is united by blood and common origin, and as we see it scattered over the world it is separated by color and language. They are sons of Adam, all of one blood, and they inhabit the face of the earth.

There are differences on the cultural level, on the educational level, and in the advancements of scientific achievement

and degrees of civilization. There is what they called the Stone Age, when the only weapons and machinery they had were made of stones. Then came the age of steel. Now we come to the age of the atom, but it is all Adam's race nevertheless.

He can ride in a plane or in a wheelbarrow; it is the same old son of Adam. He is just the same even though he has improved over what he was before. There are differences among the sons of Adam, but they are all one in that they inhabit the kingdom of the flesh.

Then there is the kingdom of the Spirit, which is sometimes referred to as the kingdom of God and is inhabited by the Spirit-born people. They are separated just as we have separation in Adam's kingdom, the kingdom of the flesh, which is separated by language and color and so on. Therefore, we have in the kingdom of God certain separations too.

We are divided by language barriers and distance, which keep God's people apart.

On the day of Pentecost, they were all of one accord in one place. That would be impossible today to get all the church together in one place—there are simply too many of us. No stadium in the world is big enough to hold all the redeemed people of God; a company no man can number, you cannot get them into one space. It is impossible to get all of God's people together, and furthermore, we do not live together in time. Some are already dead; some have been dead a long time; some Christians are not yet born; so there is a time division and a space separation.

We also have little incidental separations.

For instance, a born-again Lutheran was brought up as a Christian in the Lutheran church and by a certain narrow,

limited view of things does not know there are any other kinds of Christians. And a Baptist in the South says, "I never have gone to any other church in my life except a Baptist church." He just does not know what he is missing.

Then we have the kingdom of the Spirit. Some say all Christians are supposed to be together in one denomination. Divisions are terrible between Christians, but it's impossible not to have some disagreements. We are scattered all over the face of the earth. But in spite of those temporary and surface separations we're all one, united by birth out of one Spirit, baptized into one Spirit, members in one body with one Father and one Savior and one Lord and one Bridegroom and one heaven toward which we are moving.

Instead of sneering at the hymn that says, "We are not divided. All one body we," let us just thank God it is true. Let us thank God that it's true and that there is a kingdom composed of those who belong to the spiritual world, and they are all one, undivided, and Jesus said that they all may be one and so we are, just as the human race is one.

We have two kingdoms and two births. What does Jesus say about that which is born of the flesh?

That which is born of the flesh can never be anything but flesh and can never cross over into the kingdom of the Spirit on its own. All the religious education you can get will not enable you to cross over into the kingdom of the Spirit. All of the disciples' teaching and instruction and education will not make Spirit followers out of us.

We have all the reasoning of a Plato; flesh still remains flesh. We have all the art of a Michelangelo; flesh is still flesh. We have all the music of a Beethoven; flesh is still flesh. Though

we have the genius of an Einstein, flesh is still flesh. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and you cannot by any means known to mortal man bring the flesh across into the Spirit's kingdom.

There is the birth that makes us flesh, puts us in the body of Adam, and makes us inhabitants of the kingdom of Adam. There is also a birth, which is of the Spirit, that puts us into the kingdom of God and makes God our father and Christ our head. That which is born of the flesh remains flesh, and that which is of the Spirit has another destiny altogether.

The destiny of the twice born is eternal life in heaven presided over by the Lord of life and surrounded by the light of God. This is the destiny of the twice born.

I must understand that there are those who are of old Adam, brothers in a fallen race; Scripture says shame and everlasting contempt is theirs in the day when they rise from the dust of the earth. They who now inhabit the old kingdom have the money, have a good bit of education, and usually run things, but these are the sons of Adam.

We just have to wait until the day when God will judge the heart of every man by His gospel, but in the meantime, we are living in another world. We live on two levels at once: the level of Adam and the level of Christ. We were born up into another level, the level of the Spirit, and there we meet and mingle with all the good saints down the years. I believe in the communion of saints, as the Apostles' Creed says. It means that I have a level in my life where I am one with all who have gone before me.

I must understand that if I am in the kingdom of God rather than the kingdom of the world, the focus of Christ's

love is on me. Those in the kingdom of the world cannot accept or appreciate the love Christ has for them.

In this kingdom of God, I have the ability to receive from Christ the love He has for me. I must understand that the focus of all of God's love is on His people, because they are the ones who can receive it and believe it.