

-“ CHRIST GREATER.....ME LESS”

Scripture Reading - John 3:22-36

Text – John 3:30.

Related verses relevant to this exposition on John are found in John 1:19-34. Matthew 3:11-12

Introduction

A New York telephone company analyzed 500 telephone conversations and discovered that the most frequently used word was “I.” It was used more than 4,000 times in those 500 short conversations. By nature we are that way. We put “I” at the center. What we do is determined by what we want.”

John the Baptist in the Gospel of John chapter 3 v. 30. testifies to an entirely different mind-set, and he expresses it clearly definitely and with deep conviction in the words, “He (Jesus) must be become greater; I must become less.” These are striking and impressive words spoken by one of the most significant personalities of the New Testament. They are impressive because they are self-effacing, and they are striking because of who spoke them. It is an unusual man who is willing to fade into the background, when He has been in the limelight and at the center of attention, for the crowds had been following him and listening to his message. But John the Baptist was a man sent from God. He was both appointed and anointed to be the forerunner of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is clear John knew who he was, and what his mission was. He also knew what his place and position was in relation to the Lord Jesus Christ. He knew that Jesus was greater than he was, and that he was not worthy to untie the laces of His sandals. And what is important here, is that John did not try to usurp the place of Jesus. Not at all! he made it

clear, “He(Jesus) must become greater; I must become less” John 3:30.

All great men in ancient times had forerunners who would precede them to prepare and announce their arrival. George Goodman informs us that there were 3 basic responsibilities of the forerunner each of which were found in John. The forerunner was,

i. To clear the way before Jesus came. He was to remove from the hearts and lives of the people, obstacles to the progress of the Messiah. Interesting analogies are used. The crooked places must be straightened, impassable mountains leveled, low places filled and the crude things eliminated. This was a fulfillment of prophecy. He was also;

ii. To Prepare the Way for Jesus. The road must be prepared and put in order. Nothing less than national repentance would clear the way for the coming of the Messiah. The nation must bring forth fruit compatible with repentance. When he was finished with his mission, he was to;

iii. To Get Out of the Way. Having removed the obstacles, the forerunner must not himself become the obstacle. When John the Baptist had completed his task and Jesus arrived on the scene to begin His ministry on earth. It was time for Him to get out of the way so that Jesus could get on with His work. John was spiritually discerning enough to recognize this, and declared that Jesus must become greater, while he must decrease. It is clear that John accepted the fact that the purposes of God in and through the Lord Jesus Christ, were more important than his own position in purposes of God. It was time for him retreat into the background, and let Jesus fulfill His Father’s design for His life. John did



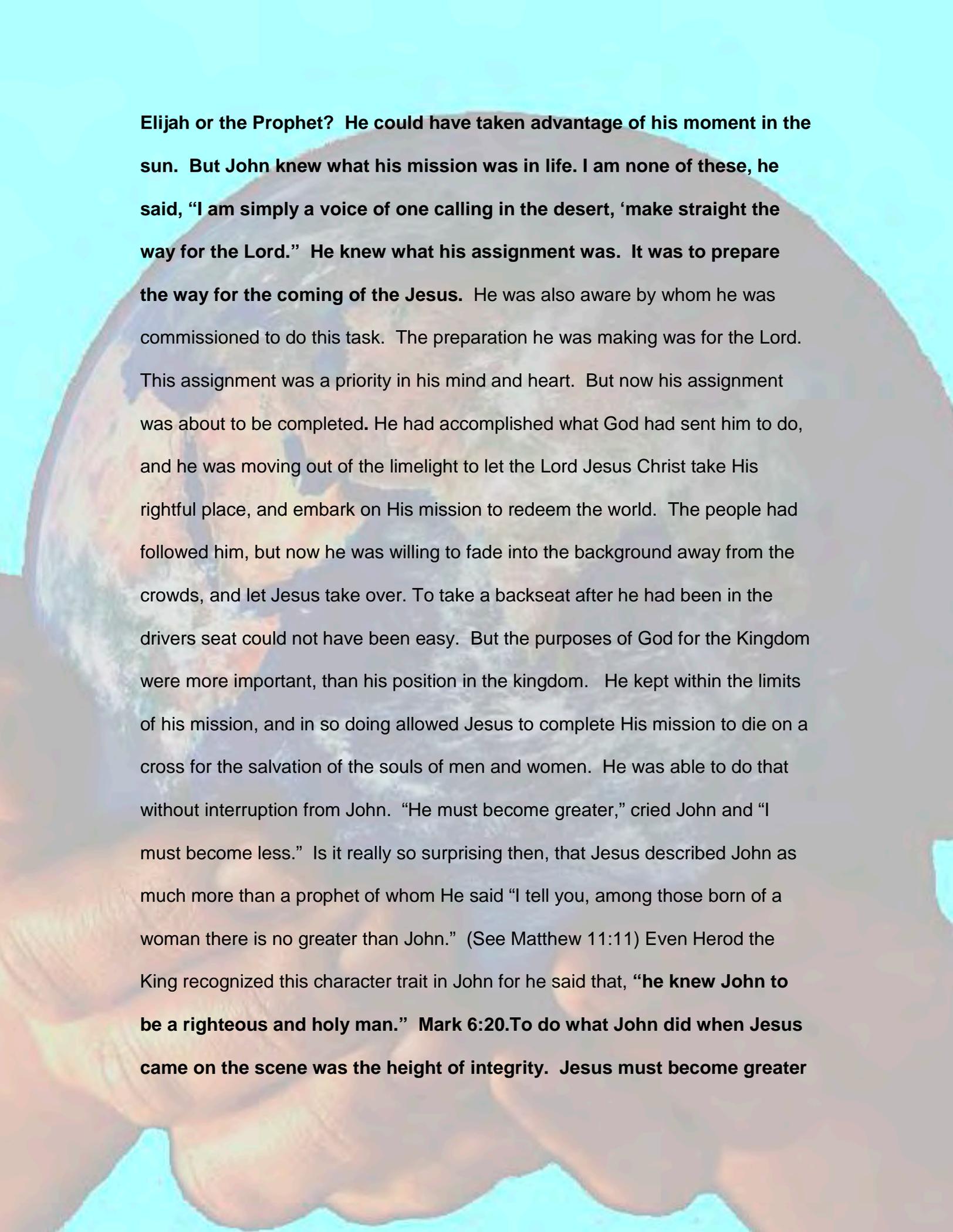
not want to be an obstacle in the way of Jesus. This attitude should not be considered extraordinary in the life of the Christian. It is the same spirit that Paul described in Galatians 2:20. “Not I but Christ. This is not a spirit that should characterize the great servants of God alone, it should be the desire of every child of God who claims to be part of Christ. This should be the normal response in living for God. It means the crucifixion of sinful self-will and the enthronement of Jesus as Lord in our lives. This is the way we will live when the Holy Spirit is having His way in our wills, our hearts and our lives. It is that condition of the heart and soul, where sinful self has been crucified with Christ and Jesus reigns as Lord. How significant John’s testimony is. “He must increase and I must decrease. Now this testimony indicates that which was,

1. THE PRIORITY IN HIS LIFE. John 3:30. Matthew 3:3-4, 3:15.

It is a priority that is self-evident. The priority in John’s life was the Lord Jesus Christ. This is significant because his whole life was directed, influenced and impacted by it. Everything he did, he did in relation to that one supreme priority. “Christ must be greater and He must become less.” Since Jesus was a priority in his life, how did it manifest itself in him? It revealed itself in

a. THE INTEGRITY OF HIS CHARACTER. John 3:30.

“He must become greater; I must become less.” This man who had been the center of attention among the people must decrease. His ministry was of such power that they speculated as to who he was. Was he one of the prophets or maybe he was the promised Messiah? Was he the Christ or



Elijah or the Prophet? He could have taken advantage of his moment in the sun. But John knew what his mission was in life. I am none of these, he said, "I am simply a voice of one calling in the desert, 'make straight the way for the Lord.'" He knew what his assignment was. It was to prepare the way for the coming of the Jesus. He was also aware by whom he was commissioned to do this task. The preparation he was making was for the Lord. This assignment was a priority in his mind and heart. But now his assignment was about to be completed. He had accomplished what God had sent him to do, and he was moving out of the limelight to let the Lord Jesus Christ take His rightful place, and embark on His mission to redeem the world. The people had followed him, but now he was willing to fade into the background away from the crowds, and let Jesus take over. To take a backseat after he had been in the drivers seat could not have been easy. But the purposes of God for the Kingdom were more important, than his position in the kingdom. He kept within the limits of his mission, and in so doing allowed Jesus to complete His mission to die on a cross for the salvation of the souls of men and women. He was able to do that without interruption from John. "He must become greater," cried John and "I must become less." Is it really so surprising then, that Jesus described John as much more than a prophet of whom He said "I tell you, among those born of a woman there is no greater than John." (See Matthew 11:11) Even Herod the King recognized this character trait in John for he said that, "**he knew John to be a righteous and holy man.**" **Mark 6:20.**To do what John did when Jesus came on the scene was the height of integrity. **Jesus must become greater**

and I must become less.

The second ingredient in his established priority was,

b. THE FIDELITY OF HIS COMMITMENT. JOHN 3:30. Matthew 3:4. Matthew

3:15. The faithfulness of John to his mission is self-evident. He was ,

“John was committed to Christ not himself. Furthermore he lived a

disciplined life in order to more effectively accomplish the assignment that

God had given to him. Mathew tells us that John’s clothes were made of

camel’s hair and he had leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and

wild honey. There was strength, a resoluteness and determination about John

that did not go unnoticed by Jesus. On one occasion Jesus asked the

surrounding crowds concerning John “**what did you do out in the desert to**

see. A reed swayed by the wind? If you not, what did you go out to see? A

man dressed in fine clothes? NO those who wear fine clothes and indulge

in luxury are in palaces.” Matthew 11:7-8. This man John was a rugged

man not softened by the delicacies of the prosperous life. He was tough

man who lived in the desert and whose life-style was determined by the priority

of his mission. His commitment to Christ did not waver or flinch in the hardships

of life. He was faithful to his commitment. But not only do we see the fidelity of

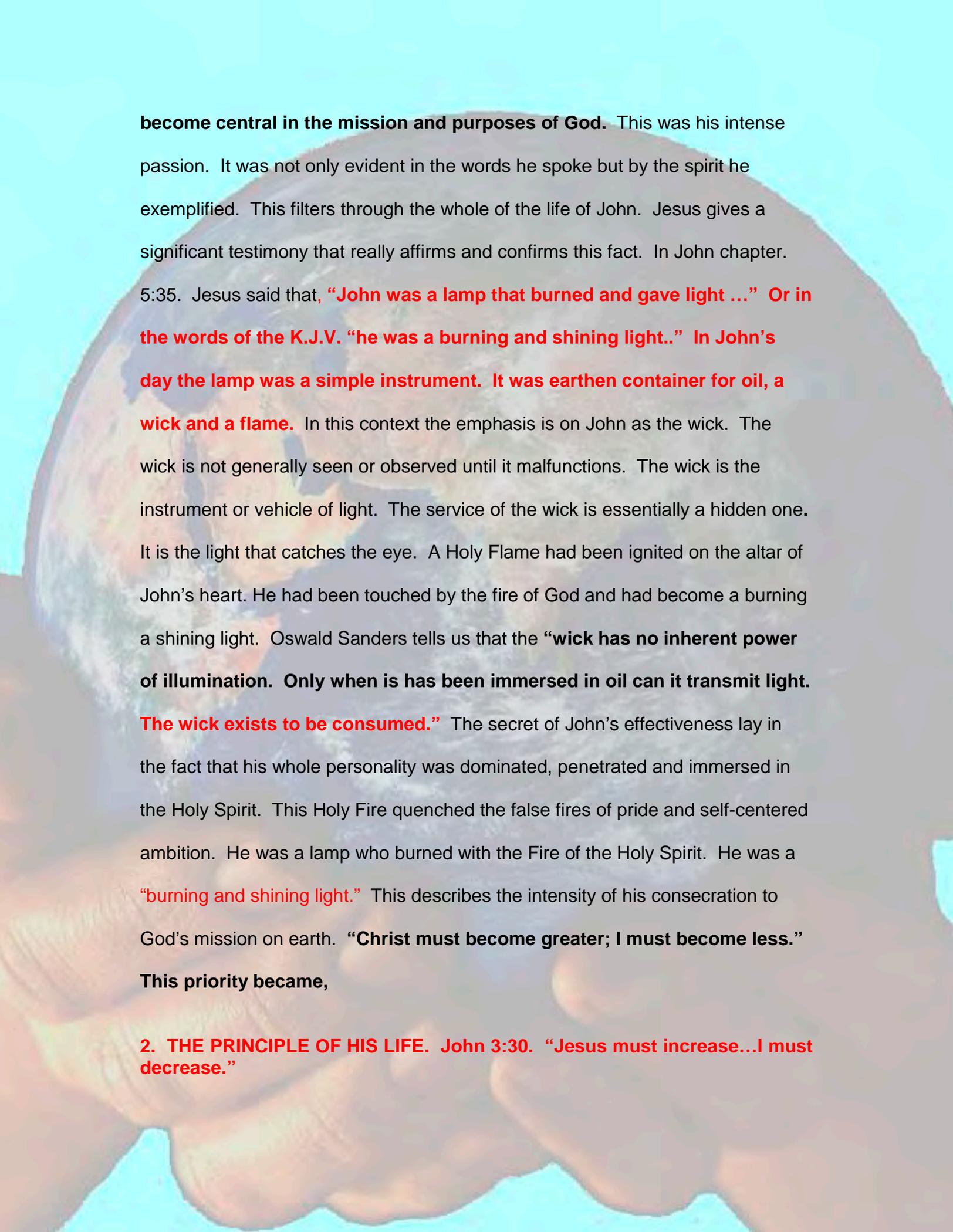
his commitment but,

c. THE INTENSITY OF HIS CONSECRATION. John 3:30. Jesus “**must**

become greater; I must become less.” He was passionately concerned

about the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ. Self and self-exaltation did

not play a part in his life. He had stepped aside so that Christ could



become central in the mission and purposes of God. This was his intense passion. It was not only evident in the words he spoke but by the spirit he exemplified. This filters through the whole of the life of John. Jesus gives a significant testimony that really affirms and confirms this fact. In John chapter 5:35. Jesus said that, **“John was a lamp that burned and gave light ...”** Or in the words of the K.J.V. **“he was a burning and shining light..”** In John’s day the lamp was a simple instrument. It was earthen container for oil, a **wick and a flame.** In this context the emphasis is on John as the wick. The wick is not generally seen or observed until it malfunctions. The wick is the instrument or vehicle of light. The service of the wick is essentially a hidden one. It is the light that catches the eye. A Holy Flame had been ignited on the altar of John’s heart. He had been touched by the fire of God and had become a burning a shining light. Oswald Sanders tells us that the **“wick has no inherent power of illumination. Only when is has been immersed in oil can it transmit light. The wick exists to be consumed.”** The secret of John’s effectiveness lay in the fact that his whole personality was dominated, penetrated and immersed in the Holy Spirit. This Holy Fire quenched the false fires of pride and self-centered ambition. He was a lamp who burned with the Fire of the Holy Spirit. He was a **“burning and shining light.”** This describes the intensity of his consecration to God’s mission on earth. **“Christ must become greater; I must become less.”** **This priority became,**

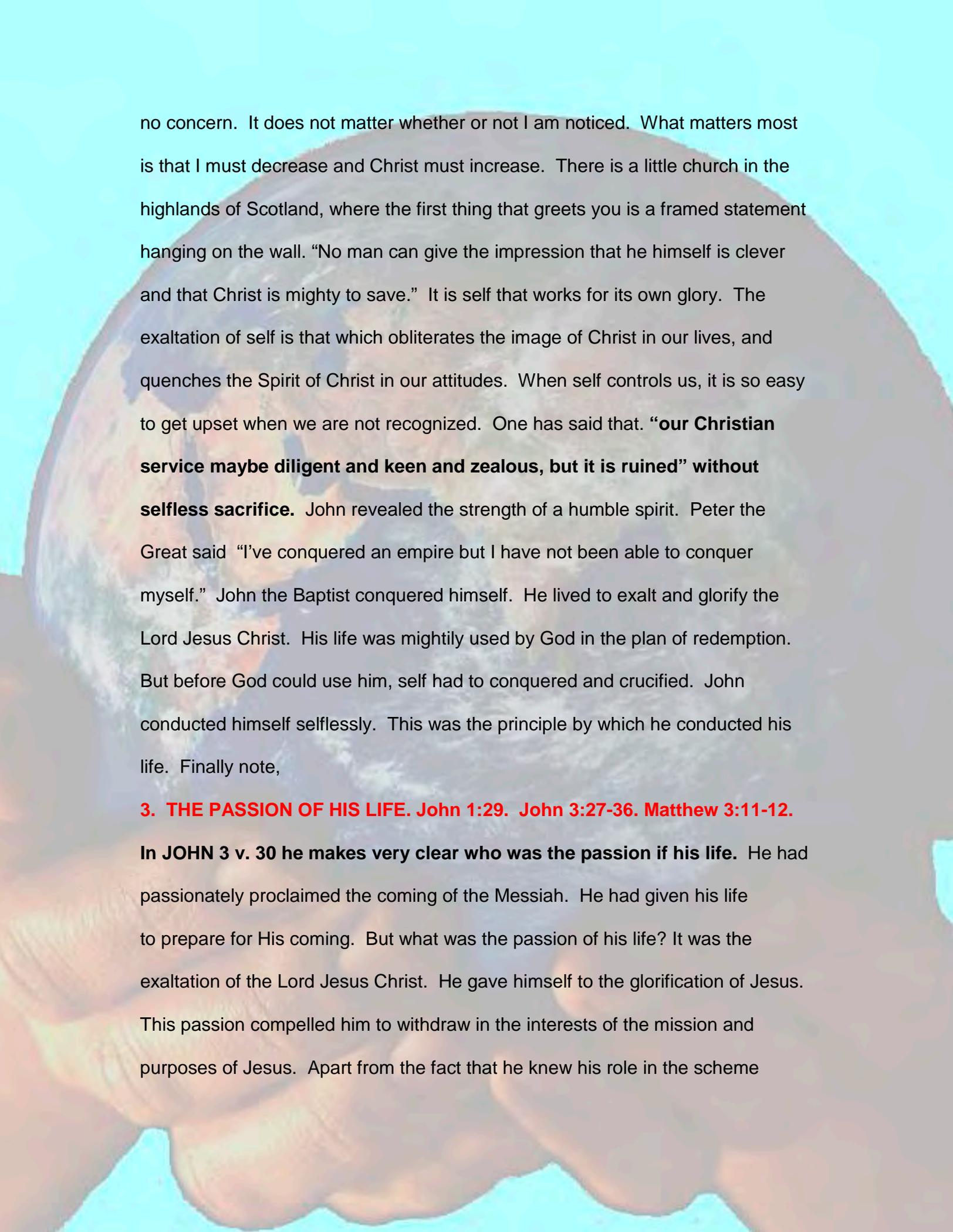
2. THE PRINCIPLE OF HIS LIFE. John 3:30. “Jesus must increase...I must decrease.”

Everything that John did revolved around this principle. He viewed all of life in the light of exalting the Lord Jesus Christ. Now what does it say about John? What does it reveal about the way in which he conducted himself? **Firstly he,**

a. HE CONDUCTED HIMSELF WITH HUMILITY. John 3:30. The intrinsic greatness of John was his genuine humility. The greatness and the importance of his task did not inflate his ego. When asked “What do you say about yourself?” He had an opportunity to exalt himself and give a glowing report of his ministry, his achievements and successes. But he denied that he was the Christ or even Elijah the prophet, instead he pointed away from himself to Jesus and said “**there is one among who stands, and you do not know, He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to unloose.**” He described himself as a **voice** calling in the desert. John 1:23. “**I am just a voice,**” he said. **Just a voice! I crave no position – I am not interested in status – wealth is not my goal – notoriety is not my ambition.** His focus was mission, not position – proclamation not power – exalting Christ not exalting self. He conducted himself with humility. Furthermore,

b. HE CONDUCTED HIMSELF SELFLESSLY. John 3:30. Matthew 3:11-12

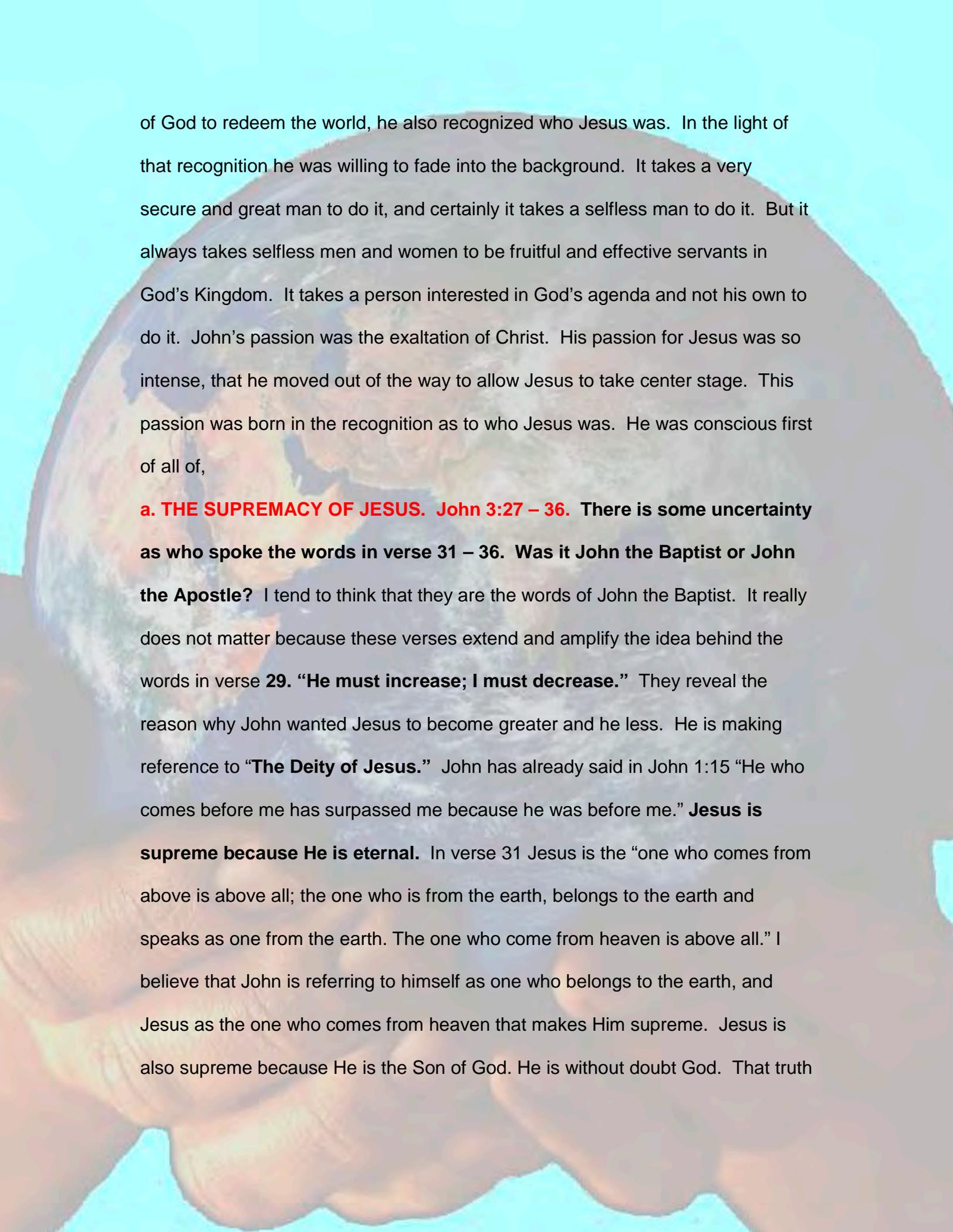
“Christ must become greater; I must become less.” The glory and the exaltation of Jesus meant more to him than his own glory. **It was Dr. J Stewart who said so well “that John had the grace to see that it did not matter WHO did the work as long as the work was done.” What does this mean?** It means that my name in neon lights does not matter. My prestige is of

A faint background image of a globe with a hand holding it. The globe is centered and slightly tilted, showing the Americas. A hand is visible at the bottom, holding the globe. The overall image has a soft, ethereal quality with a light blue and white color palette.

no concern. It does not matter whether or not I am noticed. What matters most is that I must decrease and Christ must increase. There is a little church in the highlands of Scotland, where the first thing that greets you is a framed statement hanging on the wall. "No man can give the impression that he himself is clever and that Christ is mighty to save." It is self that works for its own glory. The exaltation of self is that which obliterates the image of Christ in our lives, and quenches the Spirit of Christ in our attitudes. When self controls us, it is so easy to get upset when we are not recognized. One has said that. **"our Christian service maybe diligent and keen and zealous, but it is ruined" without selfless sacrifice.** John revealed the strength of a humble spirit. Peter the Great said "I've conquered an empire but I have not been able to conquer myself." John the Baptist conquered himself. He lived to exalt and glorify the Lord Jesus Christ. His life was mightily used by God in the plan of redemption. But before God could use him, self had to be conquered and crucified. John conducted himself selflessly. This was the principle by which he conducted his life. Finally note,

3. THE PASSION OF HIS LIFE. John 1:29. John 3:27-36. Matthew 3:11-12.

In JOHN 3 v. 30 he makes very clear who was the passion of his life. He had passionately proclaimed the coming of the Messiah. He had given his life to prepare for His coming. But what was the passion of his life? It was the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ. He gave himself to the glorification of Jesus. This passion compelled him to withdraw in the interests of the mission and purposes of Jesus. Apart from the fact that he knew his role in the scheme

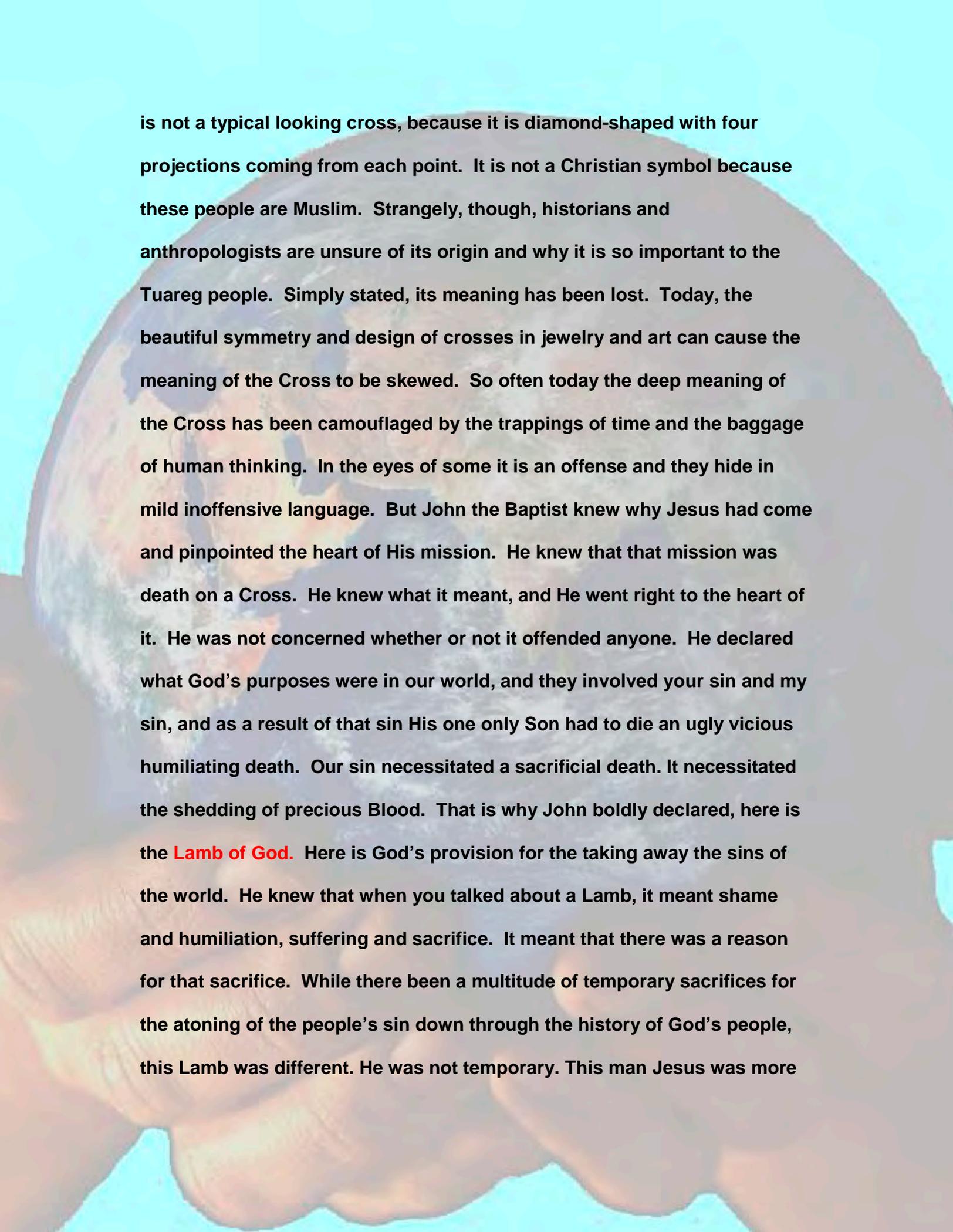


of God to redeem the world, he also recognized who Jesus was. In the light of that recognition he was willing to fade into the background. It takes a very secure and great man to do it, and certainly it takes a selfless man to do it. But it always takes selfless men and women to be fruitful and effective servants in God's Kingdom. It takes a person interested in God's agenda and not his own to do it. John's passion was the exaltation of Christ. His passion for Jesus was so intense, that he moved out of the way to allow Jesus to take center stage. This passion was born in the recognition as to who Jesus was. He was conscious first of all of,

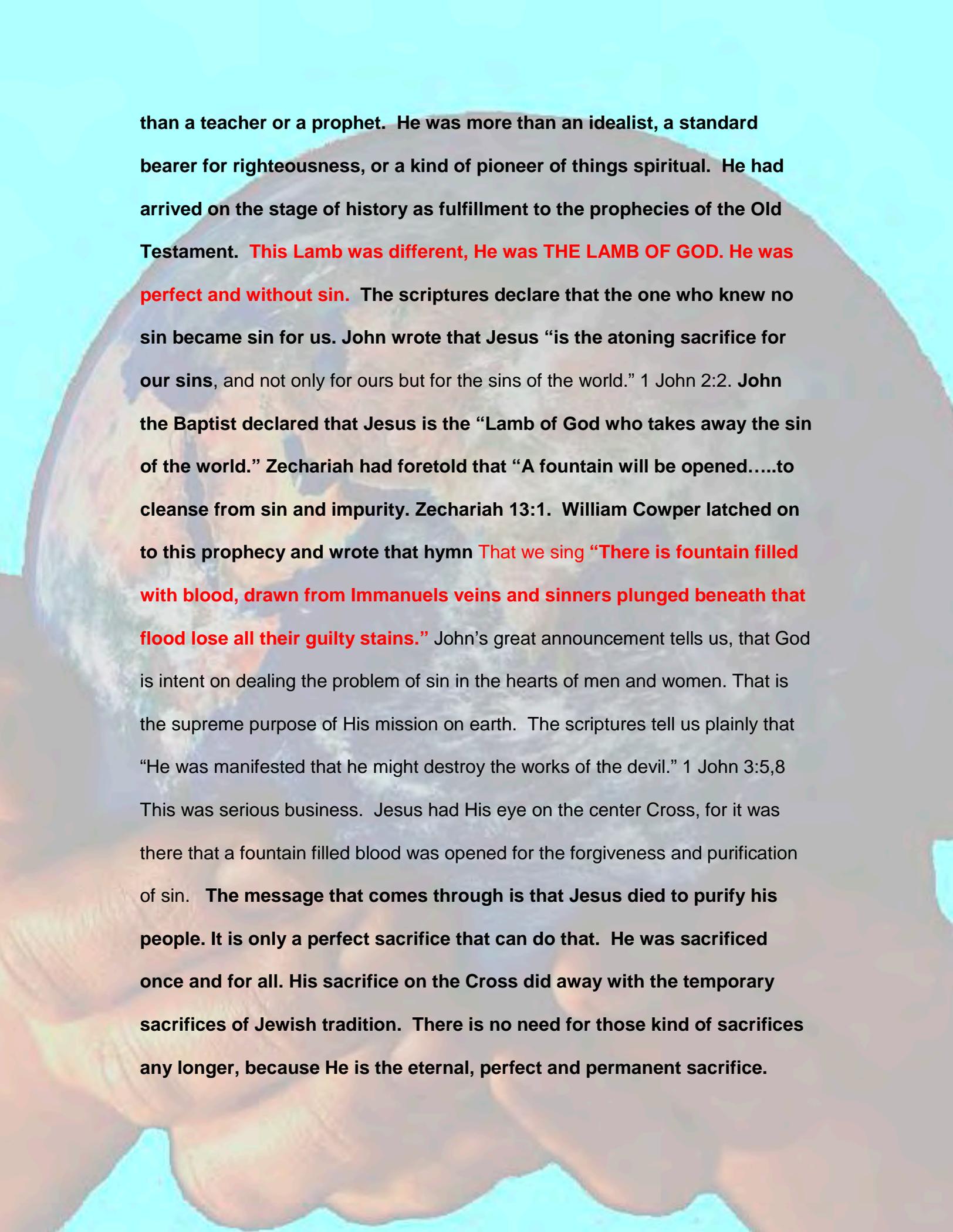
a. THE SUPREMACY OF JESUS. John 3:27 – 36. There is some uncertainty as to who spoke the words in verse 31 – 36. Was it John the Baptist or John the Apostle? I tend to think that they are the words of John the Baptist. It really does not matter because these verses extend and amplify the idea behind the words in verse 29. **“He must increase; I must decrease.”** They reveal the reason why John wanted Jesus to become greater and he less. He is making reference to **“The Deity of Jesus.”** John has already said in John 1:15 “He who comes before me has surpassed me because he was before me.” **Jesus is supreme because He is eternal.** In verse 31 Jesus is 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 come from heaven is above all.” I believe that John is referring to himself as one who belongs to the earth, and Jesus as the one who comes from heaven that makes Him supreme. Jesus is also supreme because He is the Son of God. He is without doubt God. That truth

in itself seals and ratifies His supremacy.. John the Baptist in John 1:34 testifies about Jesus **“I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.** Jesus is the eternal Son of God. He is convinced of the greatness of Jesus. He recognizes His supremacy. John is also conscious of,

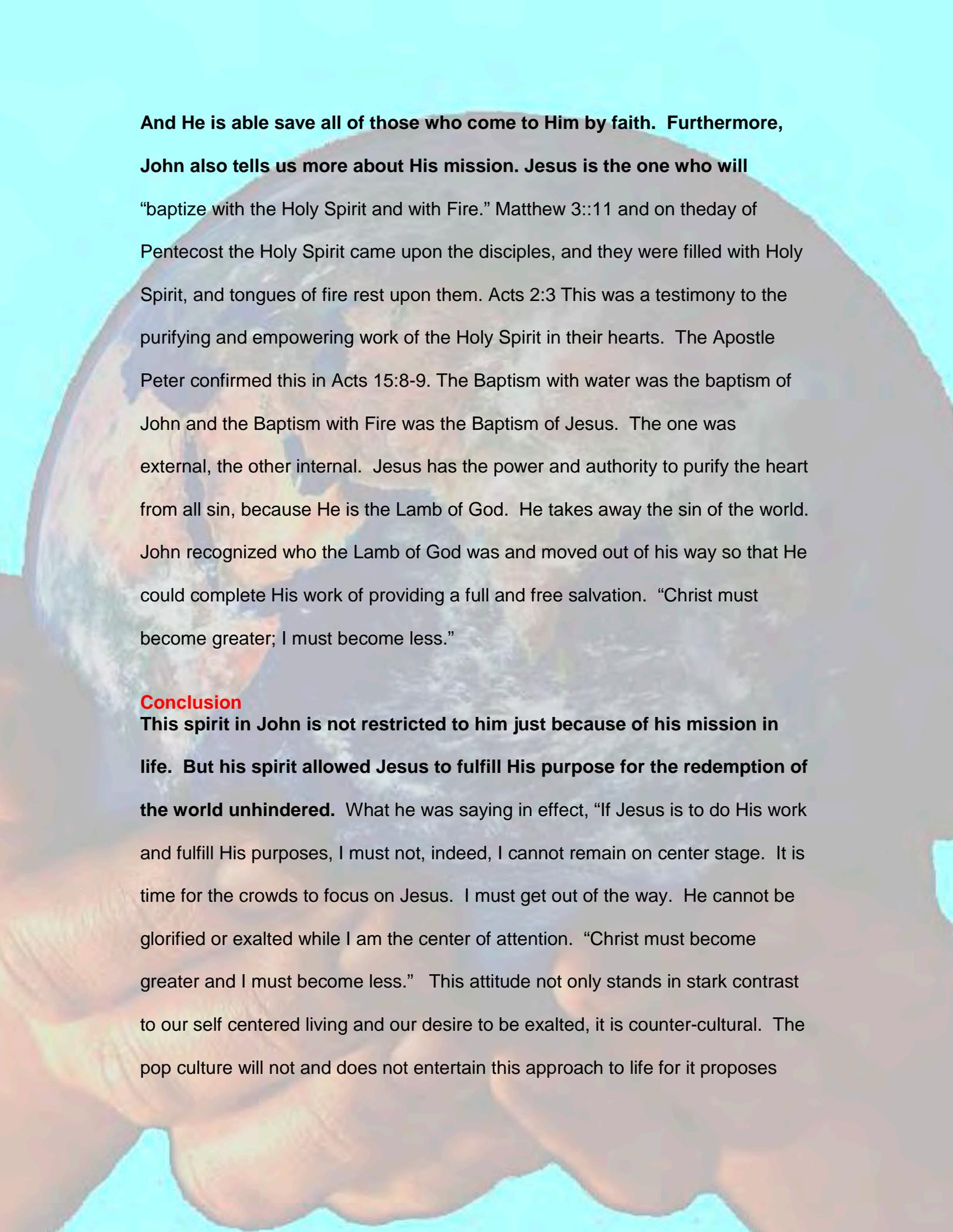
b. THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS. John 1:29. Matthew 3:11-12. John has already established that Jesus is the God. There is no greater authority than that. There is no one who has greater power than God. John sees in Jesus the promise of the ages. The promised Messiah is with us. He testified that Jesus is the Son of God. And in the midst of his ministry of baptizing he sees Jess coming toward Him and said in John 1:29, **“Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the World.** And again later he seems to confirm this truth as Jesus was passing by one day he said in verse 36 **“Look the Lamb of God.”** He is recognized as the Son of God and the **“Lamb of God.”** The Son of God became the Lamb of God. At the beginning of His ministry Jesus is revealed as God’s perfect provision for the salvation of men and women from sin. He does not suppress it, excuse it, hide it or minimize it. John makes it plain. The Lamb of God **TAKES AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD.** He has the power to completely cleanse our lives. At the very outset of the ministry of Jesus, John presents the sacrifice of the Cross. He understands the central meaning of the Cross. The mind of the Jew would understand the significance of John’s reference to the Lamb and sin. There is a nomadic people in the Sahara Desert known as the Tuareg. The Tuareg cross is their symbol. It



is not a typical looking cross, because it is diamond-shaped with four projections coming from each point. It is not a Christian symbol because these people are Muslim. Strangely, though, historians and anthropologists are unsure of its origin and why it is so important to the Tuareg people. Simply stated, its meaning has been lost. Today, the beautiful symmetry and design of crosses in jewelry and art can cause the meaning of the Cross to be skewed. So often today the deep meaning of the Cross has been camouflaged by the trappings of time and the baggage of human thinking. In the eyes of some it is an offense and they hide in mild inoffensive language. But John the Baptist knew why Jesus had come and pinpointed the heart of His mission. He knew that that mission was death on a Cross. He knew what it meant, and He went right to the heart of it. He was not concerned whether or not it offended anyone. He declared what God's purposes were in our world, and they involved your sin and my sin, and as a result of that sin His one only Son had to die an ugly vicious humiliating death. Our sin necessitated a sacrificial death. It necessitated the shedding of precious Blood. That is why John boldly declared, here is the **Lamb of God**. Here is God's provision for the taking away the sins of the world. He knew that when you talked about a Lamb, it meant shame and humiliation, suffering and sacrifice. It meant that there was a reason for that sacrifice. While there been a multitude of temporary sacrifices for the atoning of the people's sin down through the history of God's people, this Lamb was different. He was not temporary. This man Jesus was more



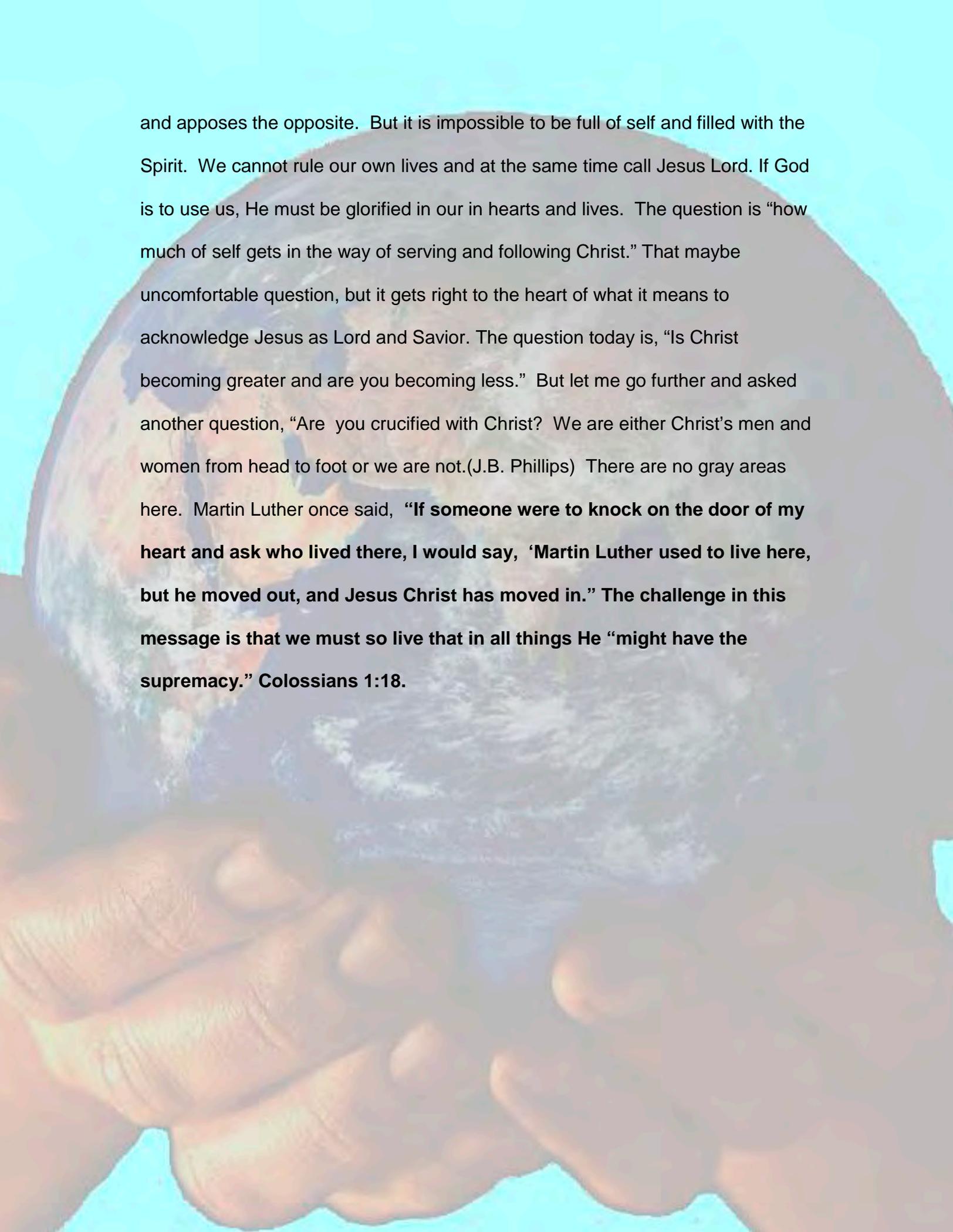
than a teacher or a prophet. He was more than an idealist, a standard bearer for righteousness, or a kind of pioneer of things spiritual. He had arrived on the stage of history as fulfillment to the prophecies of the Old Testament. **This Lamb was different, He was THE LAMB OF GOD. He was perfect and without sin.** The scriptures declare that the one who knew no sin became sin for us. John wrote that Jesus “is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but for the sins of the world.” 1 John 2:2. John the Baptist declared that Jesus is the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Zechariah had foretold that “A fountain will be opened.....to cleanse from sin and impurity. Zechariah 13:1. William Cowper latched on to this prophecy and wrote that hymn **That we sing “There is fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel’s veins and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.”** John’s great announcement tells us, that God is intent on dealing the problem of sin in the hearts of men and women. That is the supreme purpose of His mission on earth. The scriptures tell us plainly that “He was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil.” 1 John 3:5,8 This was serious business. Jesus had His eye on the center Cross, for it was there that a fountain filled blood was opened for the forgiveness and purification of sin. **The message that comes through is that Jesus died to purify his people. It is only a perfect sacrifice that can do that. He was sacrificed once and for all. His sacrifice on the Cross did away with the temporary sacrifices of Jewish tradition. There is no need for those kind of sacrifices any longer, because He is the eternal, perfect and permanent sacrifice.**



And He is able save all of those who come to Him by faith. Furthermore, John also tells us more about His mission. Jesus is the one who will “baptize with the Holy Spirit and with Fire.” Matthew 3:11 and on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, and they were filled with Holy Spirit, and tongues of fire rest upon them. Acts 2:3 This was a testimony to the purifying and empowering work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. The Apostle Peter confirmed this in Acts 15:8-9. The Baptism with water was the baptism of John and the Baptism with Fire was the Baptism of Jesus. The one was external, the other internal. Jesus has the power and authority to purify the heart from all sin, because He is the Lamb of God. He takes away the sin of the world. John recognized who the Lamb of God was and moved out of his way so that He could complete His work of providing a full and free salvation. “Christ must become greater; I must become less.”

Conclusion

This spirit in John is not restricted to him just because of his mission in life. But his spirit allowed Jesus to fulfill His purpose for the redemption of the world unhindered. What he was saying in effect, “If Jesus is to do His work and fulfill His purposes, I must not, indeed, I cannot remain on center stage. It is time for the crowds to focus on Jesus. I must get out of the way. He cannot be glorified or exalted while I am the center of attention. “Christ must become greater and I must become less.” This attitude not only stands in stark contrast to our self centered living and our desire to be exalted, it is counter-cultural. The pop culture will not and does not entertain this approach to life for it proposes



and apposes the opposite. But it is impossible to be full of self and filled with the Spirit. We cannot rule our own lives and at the same time call Jesus Lord. If God is to use us, He must be glorified in our hearts and lives. The question is “how much of self gets in the way of serving and following Christ.” That maybe uncomfortable question, but it gets right to the heart of what it means to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and Savior. The question today is, “Is Christ becoming greater and are you becoming less.” But let me go further and asked another question, “Are you crucified with Christ? We are either Christ’s men and women from head to foot or we are not.(J.B. Phillips) There are no gray areas here. Martin Luther once said, **“If someone were to knock on the door of my heart and ask who lived there, I would say, ‘Martin Luther used to live here, but he moved out, and Jesus Christ has moved in.’”** The challenge in this message is that we must so live that in all things He “might have the supremacy.” Colossians 1:18.