

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

A.W. TOZER'S

AND HE DWELT AMONG US: TEACHINGS FROM THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

A Book Critique

Submitted to Dr. Tom Campbell

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Completion of

The Gospel of John (NBST 615-D03 LUO)

By

Matthew McNutt

April 21, 2015

CONTENTS

Bibliographical Entry	3
Author Information	3
Introduction	4
Analysis	5
Conclusion	9

Bibliographical Entry

Tozer, Aiden W., and James L. Snyder. *And He Dwelt Among Us: Teachings from the Gospel of John*. Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2014.

Author Information

Aiden Wilson Tozer was an evangelical pastor, speaker, author, and editor. Regarded as one of the most prominent evangelists of the twentieth century, he served with the Christian and Missionary Alliance denomination where he became widely known as a respected and powerful leader in the church. He was born in western Pennsylvania in 1897, and passed away in 1963. While he did not have the training other leaders in the church had, as a man in his early twenties he accepted his first pastoral position at a church in Virginia, and through years of study and self-education he grew both as a pastor in CMA churches in Chicago and Toronto, and as a writer, producing a number of critical works. In particular, he is known for his books, “The Pursuit of God” and “The Knowledge of the Holy.”¹

James L. Snyder compiled and edited the book, *And He Dwelt Among Us: Teachings from the Gospel of John*, taking sermons Tozer gave on the book of John and creating this book. Snyder is a respected expert on the life and ministry of Tozer. Like Tozer, he is also a pastor with the Christian and Missionary Alliance. He has been published in over 80 periodicals, as well as written, or co-written, 34 books including an award winning book on the life of Tozer.²

¹ http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/1082290.A_W_Tozer (accessed April 21, 2015).

² <http://www.jamessnyderministries.com/page/page/5762374.htm> (accessed April 21, 2015).

Introduction

During his ministry as a pastor in Chicago, Dr. Tozer spent more than a year preaching his way through the gospel of John. While he did not lay out an outline or plan for the series before beginning it, he instead focused on where the Spirit would lead him each week, whether it was a specific passage, verse, or even a word.³ Throughout the series, Tozer's goal was to introduce people to Christ, and the response was significant. More came to Christ through this series than any other time in his career in Chicago.

Tozer was fascinated by the Mysticism of John, regarding him as the best of the mystical thinkers.⁴ He paired that with a deep, doctrinal foundation, to discover what he found to be the beauty in John. In addition, he was tremendously concerned with what he labeled "spiritual boredom."⁵ In other words, when believers were so distracted by the busyness and activities of the world around them that they lost sight of the pursuit of God. Tozer challenged his listeners to a deeper maturity through his sermons on John with the goal of moving them away from this spiritual boredom and into the presence of God.

Snyder's goal in compiling these 13 chapters and messages is not so much to form a commentary on John as some have labeled this book, but to honor Tozer's underlying purposes in his original delivery of the sermon series; (1) to foster "a deep appreciation of the unique nature of Christ",⁶ which he refers to as mystical, and (2) to move his listeners, and now readers,

³ A.W. Tozer, *And He Dwelt Among Us: Teachings from the Gospel of John*, ed. James L. Snyder (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2014), 7.

⁴ *Ibid*, 8.

⁵ *Ibid*, 8.

⁶ *Ibid*, 15.

to a deeper maturity and away from the spiritual boredom mentioned earlier. Towards that end, Synder has not included every message, but instead formed this book from a handful of selections that particularly achieve those goals.

Analysis

Tozer leads off this collection of sermons with the first chapter of John, in particular John 1:1, explaining his views on the mystical and its appropriate usage in the context of Christianity. From there he uses the Old Testament to connect with John's opening statements, making the point that Christ's divine nature has been since the beginning of time and will never end, a concept that the Apostle John knew and believed and opened his gospel with. From God creating man in His own image, to the longing for immortality all find themselves with, Christ is the ultimate fulfillment and Savior.⁷

Chapter two continues the examination of the first chapter of John, looking at verses three through five. Through it, God is seen as Creator, infinite, without end, therefore giving humanity the opportunity to be in relationship and fellowship with the infinite.⁸ As such, Tozer sees eternity and salvation through Christ as the only thing that truly matters; in light of that knowledge, all that is known and experienced on earth is "dirty," "sordid," and "cheap."⁹

From there he moves into an exposition on John 1:10, the incarnation of Christ, and the definition of the world as humanity. On the one hand he notes its description of humanity, but also that the word "world" can refer to the orderly arrangement of creation. While this one word

⁷ Ibid, 17.

⁸ Ibid, 37.

⁹ Ibid, 43.

can be used to point to the negative, it also points to power of an amazing God who creates order, who creates good; God is the source of beauty. At the same time, it also refers to humanity, for which God sent His Son to save.

He then explores the “tragic side of Christ becoming flesh” in the fourth chapter, looking in particular at John 1:11.¹⁰ Tozer points out that most focus on the exciting gift that Christ coming in the flesh represented, forgetting the cost, the pity, the mercy and redeeming love that that action represents. And in seeing that cost, Tozer confronts those who are unwilling to take up the cross, pointing out that few have that kind of seriousness about God and faith.¹¹

Chapter five examines John 1:14, and the amazing mystery – what Tozer calls “the most profound mystery of human thought” – of Christ coming to man and the incarnation.¹² How could such a thing be conceived? How could it come to pass? Tozer calls out the arrogance that takes such an incredible action for granted. Through this gift, man sees God and experiences the Father.

Having laid the foundation in the early chapters of Christ’s incarnation, the word made flesh, Tozer then compares the Old Testament Messiah with the Christ found in John 1:29-37. Tozer points out that John sees in Christ the direct fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and teachings, another clear sign of Christ’s divine nature and equal status with God.

Chapter seven explores what Tozer considers to be the essential part of the entire New Testament, a text that he claims is too big for him to be able to address: John 3:16. In an

¹⁰ Ibid, 61.

¹¹ Ibid, 72.

¹² Ibid, 77.

incredible message, he examines what it means, the gift of God, Satan's lie that God is not concerned with humanity, and the incredible reality of God's desire for people to come to Him as they are, broken and imperfect.¹³

Chapter eight then focuses on John 3:17 and the personal application of Jesus coming into the world. To him, this is an extraordinary proclamation, unmatched by anything in the world.¹⁴ He calls for the listener, and now reader, to forget about everyone else and see how this directly connects to them and to act on that invitation to accept Christ.

John 5:19 is the next focal point, with a closer look at the Trinity. Tozer maintains that John is clear in his belief that all three parts of the Trinity are equal with each other and eternal, that within Them is perfect harmony, through which is completed God's perfect plan. In this message he again uses the word mystery, acknowledging the difficulty imperfect man has in grasping the concept of the Trinity.

Chapter ten continues with John 5:22-29, with Tozer teaching on the concept that Christ is not just Savior, but Judge as well. He explores some of the incorrect concepts of judgement that people tend to have before moving into the idea that man is accountable to God, a righteous, impartial, and all-knowing judge.¹⁵

Chapter eleven examines John 6:1-13, with Tozer leading with his frustration that so many take so much of the Bible for granted and do not take the time to fully learn and

¹³ Ibid, 108.

¹⁴ Ibid, 128.

¹⁵ Ibid, 162.

understand it. To Tozer, God is the ultimate artist, with His fingerprints all over creation.¹⁶ He sees God as with mankind, searching and rescuing all that He can. The idea that God would identify with, and reach out to, man is astounding to Tozer, something impossible to fully understand or appreciate.

With chapter twelve, Tozer begins building to the conclusion of the book by looking at John 5:24 and teaching his listeners about the concept of living in victory in two kingdoms; the kingdom of this world, and the kingdom of the spiritual. Having established salvation and the call to faith, Tozer is now diving in to what it means to live as a believer in the light of Christ's status as God, both practically and spiritually.

Chapter thirteen closes out the book with John 14:7-11. This message in particular deals with the two purposes stated in the introduction; Tozer proclaims the true nature of God and man's relationship with Him, and the call to action, away from spiritual boredom into life fully devoted to God.

Tozer was clearly a gifted theologian and communicator. This book triggers a desire in the reader to have been present when the messages were given. He is brilliant in his ability to use all of scripture to explain and connect with the passages he explores in John. When the reader realizes Tozer's lack of formal education and training, it becomes that much more impressive – much like those that were impressed with the uneducated disciples incredible speaking and leadership ability who could only explain it as them having been with Jesus (Acts 4:13), the

¹⁶ Ibid, 173.

reader comes away with the realization that Tozer's gifting can only be explained through his faith in Christ.

Another strength in this work is its timelessness; it is easy for the reader to forget that these sermons are from a very different time in American culture and history. Tozer's ability to focus on the bigger picture issues, the ones that relate to people in all time, make his messages something that are still powerful today and able to be used effectively.

The only real weakness in the book is its limited nature. Represented within it are only a fraction of the sermons Tozer gave during that year in Chicago when he was working his way through John. Perhaps had they all been included it could be considered a pastoral or preaching commentary on John. As it is, it only actually focuses on a small portion of John, and the bulk of that within the first quarter of the gospel.

Conclusion

Snyder has done an incredible job in transferring Tozer's messages into print form. It would be interesting to see the original sources, but for the average reader not necessary. The true value in the book is its universal approachability; both leaders and lay people can benefit from it tremendously. For Pastors and students of ministry, it becomes a great resource and model for teaching God's word. For the spiritually young or immature, it is easily understood, with very practical messages and calls to spiritual maturity.