

GOSPEL OF JOHN: THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE

“Second”

John 3:22-36

Open your Bibles to the Gospel of John Chapter 3. We are going to finish the chapter at this time. Let's read our text and then take a look at it line upon line. Beginning at verse 22 John the Apostle writes:

²²After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized. ²³Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized. ²⁴For John had not yet been thrown into prison.

²⁵Then there arose a dispute between *some* of John's disciples and the Jews about purification. ²⁶And they came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified—behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!”

²⁷John answered and said, “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven. ²⁸You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent before Him.’ ²⁹He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. ³⁰He must increase, but I *must* decrease. ³¹He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. ³²And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. ³³He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true. ³⁴For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure. ³⁵The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. ³⁶He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

Studies show that most people will make some 3,000 decisions a day. Most of them are inconsequential, but there are some things that we must do. And while most of these do not have eternal ramifications, some do. Three times in John Chapter 3 the apostle uses the word **“must”** to show us things that are absolutely, eternally necessary and essential.

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This word *dei* in the Greek means *something necessary, binding, needed, must*. The first two “**must**” passages we have already talked about. In verse 7 Jesus says this to our friend Nicodemus:

Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.

Because all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, it is necessary to have our spirit renewed. When Adam and Eve ate of the fruit in the Garden, they died spiritually; and every person born since has suffered the same fate. We are all born spiritually dead. The only remedy for this is to be born from above or, as we call it, experience the second birth. But something had to happen for this miracle of God to take place. Man could not do what was needed to be reconciled to God. He needed a Savior. And that is what the second “**must**” is all about. I am going to read verses 14–17 for context. John writes:

¹⁴And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁶For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁷For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

Because man needs a Savior, the Son of Man, Jesus, **must ... be lifted up**. The only way that man can have eternal life is to believe that Jesus **must** die in their place. He alone is able to pay the price for man’s sin. He alone is what man *needed*.

So we first have the sinner, then we have the Savior, and for the rest of the chapter we are going to talk about the servant.

Because Jesus came and died in our place, what must we do?

John is going to tell us by bringing back someone we met at the beginning of the book — John the Baptist. Look at verses 22-24:

²²After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized. ²³Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized. ²⁴For John had not yet been thrown into prison.

Here John gives us a time stamp. This happened early in the ministry of Jesus — before John the Baptist was thrown into prison. Having finished the work He did — overturning

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the tables in the Temple, doing miracles, and ministering to Nicodemus — Jesus and His disciples head to Judea.

The word “**remained**” speaks of *tabernacling*. Jesus and His disciples set up shop and began baptizing. I think this was meant to be a time when the disciples began *their* ministry. We will find out in chapter 4 that the boys, and not Jesus, were doing the baptizing. Twenty miles away, John and his disciples were doing the same thing.

This isn’t the baptism that we as Christians do, as we said earlier when John baptized Jesus. John’s baptism was one of repentance — in preparation for the Messiah.

Our baptism is a way that we identify with what Jesus has done for us. It is an outward expression of what has happened to us inside, the change that occurred when we were born from above.

What John and Jesus were doing was different. Two things stick out here:

First, it says that John was baptizing in this particular place because there was an abundance of water there.

Why is this important?

This shows us that we do ministry wherever the Lord leads us. When you go fishing, as Mark King said last week, you go where the fish are. You have to have water to baptize, especially if you are immersing people. So often we make finding the will of God so difficult. John just went to where the water was.

Second, Jews did not typically fully immerse when they performed a ritual cleansing. That was what happened when someone converted to Judaism. Remember we talked about this when Jesus changed the water into wine, and then again when John baptized the Lord. So there was some friction about what John was doing. Maybe that is what caused what we see next to happen. Look at verse 25:

Then there arose a dispute between *some* of John’s disciples and the Jews about purification.

We don’t know for sure, but it could be that this dispute was over immersion. We will get into this more later, but John’s baptism started with a person’s recognition of being a sinner who needed to repent. Matthew tells us that John came along saying, “**Repent for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand**” (Matthew 3:2). The Jews believed they were already going to Heaven.

John — and Jesus — were saying that everyone needed a complete spiritual cleansing by God. This probably did not go over well with the Jewish leaders. It may be that during

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this discussion, the work Jesus was doing was brought up. And He was drawing large crowds. So what began as a discussion of doctrine moved to personal grounds. Look at verse 26:

And they came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified—behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!”

This passage brought up memories for me. When we were in Williamsport, the Calvary Chapel church we were planting was struggling to stay afloat. But just a few miles south in Sunbury, a Calvary was beginning to take off. We even had a few people who were migrating over there to check things out. After much prayer Julie and I decided to head back to Reno, and many of the people we had in our church ended up in Sunbury. And that church is still in operation and continues to grow. We could have gotten all jealous and wondered why God was blessing them and not us, but we didn't. You never know what God is going to do, and He is sovereign.

This thing we call *ministry* is not a competition. It is a work of God. John the Baptist knew this. Listen to his response to these zealous disciples (verse 27):

John answered and said, “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from Heaven.

What humility John exhibited here. He understood exactly where his calling came from and what it was about. Any gifts, abilities or ministry he possessed came directly from God. If anything good came from it, He alone gets the glory. This is true of us as well.

The Holy Spirit gives us the spiritual gifts we use to do ministry. If we excel, it is because God sovereignly gave us the gifts and desires to do the good work in and through us. In fact, the Bible says that He prepared these good works for us to walk in, and He did so beforehand (Ephesians 2:10). All we need to do is to let Him lead. He uses us, not because of who we are, but in spite of who we are! Listen to what the Apostle Paul told the Corinthians about who God uses (1 Corinthians 1:26-29):

²⁶For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. ²⁷But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; ²⁸and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, ²⁹that no flesh should glory in His presence.

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John understood Who the glory goes to. He was perfectly happy to be SECOND to Jesus. Look what he says next (verses 28-29):

²⁸You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent before Him.’ ²⁹He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.

Many of these disciples were there when the Jewish leaders came to ask John who he was. They heard him tell them that he was not Messiah. He was just the “**voice of one crying out in the wilderness**,” as Isaiah had foretold. He was not the Bridegroom. In fact, he was not even the bride. That is us, New Testament believers. John was the best man, the friend of the Bridegroom. And that made him happy.

There was a man involved with Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa, CA, named L. E. Romaine. He was there during the Jesus Movement — when all these young men were being sent out to start churches all across the nation. But he never felt called to head out and start a work. He was content to stay at Costa Mesa and be Pastor Chuck Smith’s associate pastor. He eventually wrote a book called *Second: Humbly Assisting Those in Leadership*. If you want to be involved in church leadership, I suggest you get this book.

Not everyone can lead from the front. But that doesn’t mean you are not a leader. The point is, even if you are the lead pastor, you are still *second*. Jesus is the Head of the church. It is all about Him.

That is how John looked at his ministry. And like a good best friend, John did what he was called to do. He invited people to the wedding. He made preparations by getting people to understand their sinful state. Then these people looked to Jesus, and He eventually became their Groom. And this gave John great joy. It caused him to say this, the last of our three “**must**” statements. Look at verse 30:

He must increase, but I must decrease.

Jon Courson, in his commentary, said that these are “*seven words which capture the essence of true ministry.*”

This was the life verse for John the Baptist. It is also a good verse for us to adopt as well.

Have you ever noticed that there are riddles to resolve when it comes to our walk with Jesus?

- You must decrease to increase Him.

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- Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for Jesus will find it (Matthew 16:25).
- He who is least among us will be great (Luke 9:48).
- The Lord uses us because we are foolish things and not the wise.

And all of these things are designed to give Him all the glory. You see, our new life in Christ is supposed to be radically different from those who dwell upon the earth. They place themselves at the center of their world. We place others first — esteeming them above ourselves (Philippians 2:3). We are supposed to be a reflection of Jesus (Colossians 1:27). And here is the hard part:

In order to decrease, we have to accept these opposites.

Because of this, the world opposes us. They hate us because they hate Jesus and what He represents. That is why He promised us that if we lean into and follow Him, we will face tribulation.

And the biggest paradox of all in this thought is that it should bring us joy. Jesus also said to **“be of good cheer”** because He has overcome the world. I think of the apostles after Jesus was crucified and rose again and how they were beaten for sharing the Gospel.

They didn’t cower or give in. They considered it an honor to suffer for His name. Their whole lives became centered on bringing Jesus to others and others to Jesus. I pray all the time that Jesus would empty me of me and fill me with Him. He must increase and I must decrease.

Next we have a section of John’s Gospel where we are not sure who is speaking. Some believe John the Baptist was speaking in verses 31-36. Others believe that it was simply a commentary by John the apostle. Either way, it is a wonderful testimony. Look at verse 31:

He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from Heaven is above all

As Jesus told us earlier in the chapter, He came from above. We, like John the Baptist and John the apostle, are **“of the earth.”** That is one of the reasons we need to decrease.

Whose witness are we going to listen to, some man (even if he is an important man), or Jesus?

Here is the point in what John is saying:

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Jesus was not simply called from Heaven or empowered from Heaven. He *came* from Heaven. That is why He is above all.

It was this claim that the Jews had trouble with (as do many in our time). As Nicodemus said, they knew from His work that Jesus was most likely sent from God. In other words, they might even agree that He was a prophet. But ... they could not believe that He was God come in the flesh. They rejected His claim that He was from above.

Why?

Because, if Jesus came from Heaven, He represents the Father. And, as we shall see later in John's Gospel, to reject His witness is to reject the Father (John 5:23). Listen to what John says about Him in verse 32:

And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony.

Jesus did not speak theoretically. He spoke experientially.

- When the world was created, Jesus was there.
- When Moses lifted up the brass snake, Jesus was there.
- When Ezekiel prophesied to the wind, He was there.
- When Abraham went to sacrifice Isaac his Son, Jesus was there on the very mountain where He would die for you and me.

His witness is not second-hand information.

He was, and is, and is to come.

But man has trouble coming to grips with this truth. We get all caught up in earthly things and cannot accept the things of Heaven. But for those who do, verse 33 is their testimony. John writes:

He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true.

When we accept the teachings of Jesus, we testify that God is true. On the other hand, to reject it is to make God a liar. In his first epistle John wrote this (1 John 5:10):

He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son.

What exactly is this testimony that God has given us?

Look at verse 34:

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For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure

Do you see why Jesus is a uniquely reliable revelation?

He speaks the words of God.

He has the Holy Spirit without measure. The Jewish rabbis taught that God only gave His Spirit to the prophets – by measure. But this is not so with Jesus. There was never a moment in His life where Jesus was not led and filled with the Holy Spirit. He was completely and totally Spirit-filled. God did not send Him into the world without the resources He needed. Think about it like this:

When we are born again, the Spirit gives us spiritual gifts with which we do the work God has called us to do. But Jesus had all of these gifts all the time. That is how, even as a man, He always did the will of the Father.

How much more should we be dependent on the Holy Spirit in our walk?

We cannot be Spirit-filled at all times as Jesus was. But, as we talked about some weeks ago, we can ask the Father to enable us to do the work He has called us to do. God sent Jesus to do a good work for Him, and Jesus sent us into the world to continue what He began. (By the way, God “sending” the Son is a recurring theme in John’s Gospel. Some 39 times the apostle references this fact.)

When Jesus came, He had a purpose. He came in love. Look at verse 35:

The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand.

God so loved the world, right?

But can you imagine what His love for Jesus is like?

Jesus is the Father’s “**Beloved Son.**” And because of this love, He has given “**all things**” to Jesus. It is all about Him. Jesus is the testimony of the Father to the world. Listen to how John the evangelist finishes chapter 3 (verse 36):

He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

This is John’s altar call. He calls on people throughout the ages to either receive or reject Jesus. Believe and you are guaranteed everlasting life, both in quantity and quality. That is what God revealed to the world when He sent Jesus to the Cross.

But one day soon, He is going to be revealed in a very different manner. That is why John writes that if you don’t believe, the wrath of God is on you. The final book of the

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Bible, written by John the Apostle, is the very “**Revelation of Jesus Christ.**” If you have never read it very carefully, you should. It tells us a lot about the world we live in and what is going to take place very soon.

As those who have been chosen to bring this message to the world, we must decrease so Jesus can increase. We must set self aside and become *second* so that people can see the Savior. But like John, we can have joy in the knowledge that we are doing exactly what the Father called us to do.

Isn't it wonderful that He has chosen for us to live in such a time as this?

Let's pray.

SING THE REVELATION SONG