

“I Must Decrease”
John 3:22-30
(Preached at Trinity, December 27, 2017)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. **Verse 19 of Chapter 1** began the first week of our Lord's ministry ending with the Wedding Feast at Cana. **Chapter 2** opened with the account of this wedding and Jesus changing the water into wine.
2. **Chapter 2:12** begins, “after this” signifying a change. Jesus has left Cana of Galilee and has gone down to Capernaum with the entire group that had attended the wedding – Jesus, His mother and brothers, and His disciples. Capernaum was a large city about a day's journey from Cana.
3. They remained in Capernaum for a few days and then left for Jerusalem for the Passover.
 - A. Jesus entered the Temple and cast out those who were defiling God's house with their commercial transactions.
 - B. **Chapter 3** opens with Jesus still at Jerusalem and in the evening Nicodemus came to Him marveling at His teaching and miracles. Jesus opened his understanding regarding the work of the Savior and the need of a new heart to comprehend it.
4. **Verse 22** signifies another change: “After these things.” John likes this expression, using it six times.
 - A. Jesus and His disciples have now left Jerusalem and traveled to the land of Judea. The ESV and NIV translate it “Judean countryside.” It probably referred to the area not far from Jericho near the Jordan.
 - B. The text implies that He remained there for some time with His disciples baptizing. We might read this and assume that it was Jesus doing the baptizing, but John clarifies his statement in **Chapter 4** telling us that it was actually the disciples baptizing under Jesus' authority and authorization.
John 4:1-2 NAU - "Therefore when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John ² (although Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were),"
5. **Verse 23** tells us that while Jesus and His disciples were baptizing in the region of Judea, John the Baptist was baptizing farther to the north near Salim. The exact location isn't sure—these places are not mentioned elsewhere. But it is signified as having “much water” which implies baptism by immersion.
6. People were coming to John to be baptized, but more and more people were turning from him to Jesus.
 - A. John's disciples were concerned about the apparent loss of disciples by John. There is an obvious indication of envy.
John 3:26 NAU - "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him."

- B. They used literary figure of speech known as hyperbole – a exaggeration. “all are coming to Him.” – It was hyperbole, but it was clear that John was losing followers to Jesus and his disciples were genuinely upset about it.
- C. Their words almost sound like a rebuke – “to whom you have testified.” “You testified of Him and drew attention to Him and now look what is happening!”
- D. John’s disciples were manifesting competitiveness and envy as if John should have a monopoly on baptism. Such competitiveness threatens the heart of all of us. It can happen in families or in the workplace, but it is particularly dangerous among God’s people. We have to guard our hearts against competing against other churches. If we desire more members why not be more zealous bringing the Gospel to the world. We can’t complain about being small if our lives aren’t consumed with taking the Gospel to lost people.
7. John answers them with a bold statement. He basically tells them, “I’m not the Christ. I am following what God called me to do.”
Verse 28 - "I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent ahead of Him."
John 1:23 NAS - "He said, "I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as Isaiah the prophet said."
8. That was John’s life. It was his calling. He was not to be about seeking that of which God had not appointed him nor equipped him.
- A. John had a keen sense of God’s sovereignty over a man’s vocation. No man can receive more than what God has given.
John 3:27 NAU - "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven."
 We should all consider this as we leap forward in blind ambition. What would God have you to do with your life? All work must have the stamp of God’s approval. It is possible to embark on work we consider God’s work only to discover God is not in it.
- B. John also knew that if people were turning to Christ it was because God willed it. John was pleased to accept this with joy.
9. In **Verse 29** John displays the heart of his life and work using the example of a wedding.
- A. In the plans and preparation for a wedding the best man (and the maid of honor) labor hard. This was especially true in first century weddings. The best man isn’t the focus of attention. His joy is in seeing all attention upon the bridegroom and in seeing the bridegroom receive his bride.
- B. John the Baptist was chosen by God to direct attention to Jesus. He carried out his task with boldness and singlemindedness. It brought him great joy to see the advancement of Christ. John knew the bride belongs to the Bridegroom. If John’s purpose in life was to announce the arrival of the Christ what good would it be for him to seek to draw disciples after him? They belonged to the Bridegroom.
10. John the Baptist knew his priority was to turn all eyes upon Christ. In **Verse 30** he makes a statement that must be the theme of our life:
 "He must increase, but I must decrease."
 Grammar:
- a. John uses a demonstrative adjective/pronoun ἐκεῖνον – “that one” – as if to say to his disciples, “‘That one’ that you are so easily seeking to diminish and overcome is the very one God has chosen and sent from above.”
 “He must increase”

- b. He also uses the word δέῃ which expresses necessity, compulsion –
 "He must increase, but I must decrease."
 In other words, it isn't an option.
11. John is stating two axioms for the Christian life. These are absolutes that must characterize our lives.
1. Jesus must continually increase in significance.
 2. We must continually decrease in significance.
- These two truths are inseparable. You cannot have one without the other. And where one exists the other will surely follow.
12. It is the opposite focus of the lost man. The lost man says, "I must increase" while he seeks to diminish God.
Romans 1:21-22 NAU - "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. ²² Professing to be wise, they became fools."
13. Tonight I want us to focus on these two axioms:
- I. He must increase
 - II. I must decrease
14. In the immediate context, it is referring to the ministry of Jesus increasing while John's ministry fades away. But these words must apply to every area of our lives.
- I. He must increase
- A. Jesus Christ is God
 1. He exists in the infinite existence of deity
 2. The Psalms continually exalt the infinite greatness of God
Psalm 113:4-5 KJV - "The LORD *is* high above all nations, *and* his glory above the heavens. ⁵ Who *is* like unto the LORD our God"
Psalm 114:7 KJV - "Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord"
Psalm 71:19 KJV - "Thy righteousness also, O God, *is* very high, who hast done great things: O God, who *is* like unto thee!"
 3. In terms of our Lord's Divine essence He cannot increase. He is altogether infinite. He cannot become greater than He already is.
 - B. John is not claiming to increase the Divine essence of Christ. He is declaring the necessity of seeing Him as He is – "He **MUST** increase"
 1. Our problem is we don't contemplate His greatness. His infinite greatness doesn't shape how we live, what we do, how we think.
 2. Many who profess to know Christ live as if He did not exist. He doesn't hold a place of preeminence in their lives. They go through the outward motions of religion but their heart is not consumed with Christ. They seldom pray, seldom read their Bibles or give serious contemplation of God's Word.
 3. I've often described "practical atheism." What is the difference between denying God's existence and living as if He did not exist?
 4. John is saying, "This is the One sent from above. He must eclipse everything else. All men must flee to Him."
 - C. If we recognized the reality of the greatness of Christ it would change everything.
 1. We would truly seek holiness
 2. Our worship would take on a whole new character

3. We would serve Him with joy.
4. Our Lord's words in **Matthew 6** would become a reality in our lives.
Matthew 6:33 KJV - "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."
5. What place does Christ have in your life?
6. Matthew Henry – "The shining forth of the glory of Christ eclipses the lustre of all other glory. The glory that stands in *competition* with Christ, that of the world and the flesh, decreases and loses ground in the soul as the knowledge and love of Christ increase and get ground."¹

II. I must decrease

- A. John is describing the true humility that can only come through Christian conversion
 1. Coming to Christ demands confessing our rebellious heart that has led us to continual sin against God.
 2. Coming to Christ demands the end of every self-made effort to solve our sin problem; our guilt and condemnation. We confess our spiritual bankruptcy. We trust in the cross of Christ alone.
 3. Coming to Christ demands turning from our sin to Christ and a commitment to follow Him in holiness. We confess Christ as Lord.
 4. Coming to Christ is the end of self as we are overtaken by His greatness.
- B. God's transforming grace begins the process of taking away our pride and increasing our humility.
 1. This gives weightiness to John's words, "I must decrease"
 2. As we see Christ as infinitely grand we see ourselves as increasingly small.
 3. The fundamental problem with all humanity is an elevated opinion of self. Every human being naturally thinks his life is the most important, his opinions are the most significant, his labors are the most valued.
 4. Christianity turns such thinking on its head.
Romans 12:3 NAU - "For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith."
Philippians 2:3-4 NAU - "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; ⁴ do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."
 5. One glance at the person of Christ humbles us and makes us see ourselves in the proper perspective.
The greatest of men are insignificant as they stand before God. The wise man humbly bows.

¹ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 1933.

6. **Psalm 115** contains words that must describe our heart
Psalm 115:1 KJV - "Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory"
- C. This is what was happening in the life of John the Baptist
1. John was growing in popularity. He had multitudes coming to him and he was attracting many disciples. And yet, he was willing to humble himself before Christ and see Christ rise infinitely above him.
 2. John revealed his reverence for Christ in **Chapter 1**
John 1:26-27 NAU - "John answered them saying, "I baptize in water, *but* among you stands One whom you do not know. ²⁷ "It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie."
 3. John was humbled by the infinite greatness of Christ
 4. As we stand before the infinite greatness of Christ we can't help but see our own unworthiness.

Conclusion:

1. Humility is a virtue we must all desire but it is a virtue we cannot obtain through any human effort, for as soon as we begin to strive for humility our selfish pride corrupts it. Humility can only come as Christ increases in our sight.
A.W. Pink aptly said: "Humility is not the product of direct cultivation, rather it is a by-product. The more I try to be humble, the less shall I attain unto humility. But if I am truly occupied with that One who was 'meek and lowly in heart,' if I am constantly beholding *His* glory in the mirror of God's Word, then shall I be 'changed into *the same image* from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord'" ²
2. As we stand before Him we appear tiny and small. Only then will He give us the grace of humility.
1 Peter 5:5 NAS - "You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

² James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 255–256.