

**John 3: 22-30; “The Way of Humility”, Sermon # 21 in the series – “That All May Honor the Son”, A Communion Sermon delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on January 26th, 2014, in the Morning Worship Service.**

I wonder how much you have thought about the meaning of water baptism? Have you thought about it carefully? Have you understood that it is the will of God for you to be baptized if you have believed in Jesus Christ for your salvation? The reason that I say this, is because it is evident, from a careful reading of the Scriptures that when you come to see that you should be baptized with water baptism, you also hopefully have seen that you are committing yourself to become Jesus’ disciple; His learner and His follower. This is what I would like to have us think about this morning. Here in verse 22 we read about Jesus and His disciples “coming into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them, and baptized.” In John Chapter 4, verse 2 we read that it was not Jesus Himself who was actually doing the work of baptizing, but rather it was His disciples. Really, when you think about it, being baptized by John the Baptist during the time of our Lord Jesus’ earthly ministry, was not all that different than what it means for a person to be baptized with believer’s baptism today; except that in being baptized by John you were looking forward to Jesus’ ministry and all of the tangible spiritual benefits of salvation which He would bring to you by the power of His Holy Spirit. The focus of both John’s baptism and Jesus’ baptism is Christ Himself. John preached and told the people to repent and believe in the One who was coming after him; even Christ Jesus. (Acts 19: 4) When you apply to a church to be baptized today, it means you are willing to publicly confess Christ and declare what He has done for your soul in salvation. You have believed in His finished work on your behalf; His righteous life (the fulfilling of God’s holy law on your behalf), His sacrificial death (His going to the cross and paying the punishment which was due your sins), and His glorious resurrection, (Your having believed in Him as having been raised from the dead in order to give you new life to do what pleases God.) He has baptized you with His Spirit, and now you would declare it.

But this morning I want to attempt to show you something further about what it means to have been baptized. I want to show you what John the Baptist came to know, during the time of his ministry of being Christ’s forerunner. He learned the underlying meaning of baptism. He learned that being baptized is saying to God that you want to, in every way, promote Christ’s glory and His kingdom by following Him, in being willing to learn the way of humility. Baptism’s underlying meaning is that you will not live for yourself, but for Him who died and rose again on your behalf. We need to remember that even though John the Baptist was the last of the Old Testament prophets and the forerunner of Christ, he was also ultimately a disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ. When Jesus came to him to be baptized, John tried to prevent Him, saying, “I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?” You see, John knew that he had things to learn from Christ. He especially had things to learn in relation to His ministry on Christ’s behalf. He needed to learn the way of humility in ministry. And so do you; and so do I. Let me ask you now, whether you are willing to learn the way of humility in the 3 ways that John did, during the time of his ministry? Let me share them with you. 1<sup>st</sup> of all – John learned humility by refusing to compete with Jesus. 2<sup>nd</sup> – John learned humility by confessing His dependence upon God and his willingness to accept His appointments. And 3<sup>rd</sup> John learned humility by insisting upon Christ’s ministry increasing, even while his own decreased. Let us pray that these truths will come experientially to our hearts with power as we contemplate our observance of the Lord’s Supper.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – John learned humility by refusing to compete with the Lord Jesus in his ministry.** (verses 22-26)

“After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized.” “Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there.” “And they came and were baptized.” “For John had not yet been thrown into prison.” “Then there arose a dispute between some of John’s disciples and the Jews about purification.” “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!’” Ah, it seems as if John’s disciples were very concerned for the prosperity of his ministry. John’s disciples did not yet recognize the difference between their master and Jesus. They thought that they were disciples of a man who was the best of teachers, and the greatest of prophets. And in some ways they were right; if they were just thinking that Jesus was just another human teacher. But Jesus is not just another human teacher. Things had been going so well; so many people had come to John at Bethabara, beyond the Jordan, that he felt that he should expand his ministry geographically, to include more sites. He and his disciples went over to Aenon near Salim because there was much water there. Now it does not appear that Jesus had yet begun His public ministry when John was baptizing at the River Jordan, outside of Jerusalem. But Jesus had come over to visit John while John was baptizing there, in order to reveal Himself to John, that John might recognize Him as the promised Messiah. And John did. In John 1: 27, he said, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” “This is He of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who is preferred before me.’” “I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water.”

Notice that John declares that this was the whole reason that John came baptizing with water; in order that Jesus might be revealed. And here he confesses that as great as his disciples thought him to be, Jesus was preferred before him. That is God had placed Jesus in the highest rank, over all other great men. God preferred Jesus before John in this holy way. And you and I ought to see God preferring Jesus before all other men as well; for His Son is eternal, and His Son is God, and He alone can save. This is the way it is for ourselves when we baptize people, and bring them into the church. Christ has given His Church this ordinance in order that Christ’s ability to save, and His Lordship in relation to their life might be revealed to many other people. Although baptism is a church ordinance, and should only be administered by the elders of a local church, the object of baptizing believers is not so much that the church might be seen; it is that Christ might be seen as the One who by His saving grace, has cleansed the heart and conscience by faith. In Mark 1: 4 and Luke 3: 3 we are told that John was preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. In Matthew 3: 3 we read that John’s particular calling was to go out into the wilderness outside of Jerusalem, and from that vantage point to cry out as a prophet, saying that people should repent, for the kingdom of heaven was at hand!” “Prepare the way of the Lord!” “Make His ways straight!” In Mark 1: 5 it says: “Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.”

But what I want you to focus on in relation to this 1<sup>st</sup> point is that John steadfastly refused, in his ministry, to compete with the Lord Jesus or to see himself as somebody great. John’s message was repentance, but his attitude was humility toward our Lord. He could say to the multitudes (a good number of scribes and Pharisees among them) that came out to be baptized by him, “Brood of vipers!” “Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” He could say to those whom he suspected of hypocrisy or duplicity, “Bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’” “For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. But when the people were in expectation about him, whether he was the Christ, or not, John answered, saying to all, “I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose.” “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” At every point he acknowledged

the Lord Jesus to be the one who was higher than he was in rank, and he thought of Jesus' ministry as far more important and significant than his own. We see here in verse 24 of our text that John had not yet been thrown into prison. And it appears that Jesus did not begin to preach, Himself, until after John's voice had been stopped. And when Jesus did begin preaching, it says in Matthew 4: 17, that he had the same message as John the Baptist: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Our text in verse 25 states that "there arose a dispute between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purification." The Jews being mentioned here are probably the unbelieving Jews who had many ceremonies of purification that they engaged in so that they would be ceremonially clean. Probably the dispute was about whether these ceremonial washings of theirs, or the baptism of John, or now the baptism of Jesus, cleansed the heart. John's disciples were saying, "No, these outward ceremonial observances did not cleanse the heart." "Only having dealings with God in prayer and repentance would cleanse the heart." And the unbelieving Jews, seeing that Jesus was making and baptizing almost as many disciples as John, were asking them what the difference was, between John's ministry and Jesus'. Let us understand that the baptism of John was a baptism for the remission of sins. Luke 3: 3 mentions this fact specifically. "And John went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." To remit means to pay the debt and forgive the sins. To repent is a grace which comes through Jesus Christ our Lord. God grants repentance to all those who will turn from their sins and believe in Christ.

However, the attempts that any sinner makes to repent, as a work coming from themselves, by their own power and strength, will not save the soul. Turning over a new leaf; trying in your own strength to put away your sin and do what God commands you; this will not avail for the cleansing and the purifying of your heart. But faith in Christ will. And so, those who came to John with the full intention not to trust in themselves and their own determination to put away what was evil and learn to do what was right, but rather believing in their hearts in the One who was coming, even Christ; these indeed received remission of their sins. John preached a baptism of repentance, but only Jesus could baptize with the Holy Spirit and give grace which would lead to a repentance not to be repented of. John exercised the grace of humility here, knowing that he could only baptize with water, whereas Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit. Let us learn, as Christians, to exercise the grace of humility in this same way as well. We can preach and teach and point people to Christ, but we cannot change or purify their hearts. Only Christ can do this mighty work. We should understand that baptism as a ceremony can save no one. But the appeal to God for a good conscience in relation to the work of Jesus Christ always will. 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 3: 21 – "There is an anti-type which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." This is what we will remember in a few minutes as we partake of the Lord's Supper. The water of baptism did not save us; the righteousness and blood of Christ saved us. Baptism shows forth our having believed in what Christ has done for us.

**2<sup>nd</sup> – John learned humility by confessing His dependence upon God and his willingness to accept His appointments.** (verses 26-26)

"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!'" "John answered and said, 'A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven.'" "You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ,' but, I have been sent before Him." Now I want you to notice here that true humility comes from being able to recognize God's sovereignty in all of His appointments and to acquiesce in them. "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven." To acquiesce means to go along with them, to consent to them without fighting against them. Do you see the sovereignty of God in relation to

your life? Do you see it in relation to your calling; the work that God has given you to do? John did. He didn't mind playing second-fiddle to Jesus. He was content to be his forerunner and carrying the banner of truth before Him like an armor-bearer would do. He was content to be in the forefront of the battle, even though he knew that it was a dangerous position to be preaching out in the open air, declaring people's sins to them and calling them to repentance. He was willing to bear the burden and the heat of the day, because he was a humble man. A proud man would have competed with Jesus for position. A proud man would refuse to play second-fiddle to any man. A proud man loves the times of being popular, and will do anything to keep himself in the limelight of people's being impressed with him more than other people around him. But John had none of these attitudes. Indeed he rejoiced to play second-fiddle to Christ, and one of the main reasons that he could do all of this was because he believed in God's sovereign appointments in relation to all things; especially positions that are held in relation to Church or State; the positions which are all-important to men. A proud man does not want to be under any man's authority in church or state. He is his own authority and will attempt to manipulate people who are in authority over him to get them to do what he wants them to do. But a humble man does not need to do anything like this because he trusts in the appointments of God and in His providentially ordering all things after the counsel of His will, for His own glory, and for the good of each and every one of His people. Let me ask you if you believe in this blessed truth; "a man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven?"

John believed it, but sometimes he was tempted to question God's appointments when things did not go in the way that he thought that they should. Turn with me over to Luke Chapter 7, verse 18. The context here is that Jesus had been doing great and mighty miracles of healing the sick and raising the dead, and yet John the Baptist was still in prison. "Then the disciples of John reported to him concerning all these things." "And John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to Jesus, saying, 'Are you the Coming One, or do we look for another?'" Wow, this is really a great doubt being exercised by John the Baptist. He had already declared so many wonderful truths about Jesus being the Christ, humbly recognizing God's appointments. And now he appears to be questioning it all. Let me pause for a moment, here, and tell you what I think that John was thinking. He had been faithful to God and to Christ in being the Lord Jesus' forerunner; preaching the truth of repentance and faith in Christ unsparingly. He was thinking, surely if Jesus is the Christ, He has the power to deliver me out of this prison and let me fulfill my ministry. Surely if this Jesus is the Christ, God will free me, and vindicate me, and honor me, while I am yet alive here upon the earth. I think that John was hoping, along with many people in Israel, that if Jesus was the Christ that He would exercise His sovereign power in conjunction with the will and providential ordering of God His Father, to deliver him out of prison. Did Jesus really have the sovereign power to do this? Yes, He really did; if it would have been the Father's will, and the Father's purpose to do so, He certainly could have. But do you remember what Jesus said to Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane after Peter had cut off the high priest servant's ear, trying to save Jesus from being taken prisoner by the temple guard? He said to Peter, "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword." "Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide me with more than twelve legions of angels?" But, you will understand, will you not, in all humility, that Jesus had to go to the cross and suffer for our sins? And even so, it was not God's purpose that John escape the cruel sword. God's sovereign appointments for His people do not always include earthly deliverance from death at the hands of those who oppose them. But let us understand that even this brings glory to God and to Christ.

Listen now to how Jesus answered John's question at this time. Verse 20 – "When the men had come to Him, they said, 'John the Baptist has sent us to You, saying, 'Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?'" "And that very hour Jesus cured many of infirmities,

afflictions, and evil spirits; and to many blind He gave sight.” “Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Go and tell John things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them.’” “And blessed is he who is not offended because of me.” You see, Jesus was telling John, “You can see that I do have the power to deliver men out of all of their afflictions and illnesses, but in the process, I teach them two things: My sovereignty, and the way of humility. The way of humility is learning to accept God’s sovereign appointments in life and death. This does not mean that we accept other people’s sinning against us or others around us. It simply means that God has much greater plans for us and others around us, than simply our being delivered out of every threatening or dangerous situation. “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.” (Psalm 34: 19) But sometimes laying down your life for Christ does involve the possibility in the sovereign will of God, of a violent death. “Blessed is the person who is not offended because of Me,” Jesus says. Consider, dear Christian, whether there might be some area of the Lord’s sovereign dealings with you, that you have stumbled over, and repent. Before you partake of the Supper in just a few minutes now, pray and ask God’s forgiveness for being offended at the way that He does His work. God does “cause all things to work together for good, to those who love God, for those who are called according to His purpose.” It is good that John the Baptist did not stumble over our Lord on this occasion. He learned humility through submitting to God’s sovereign providentially ordered appointments, even as His Master did when He went to the cross. Let us come down front now, and gather together to partake of the Lord’s Supper.

**3<sup>rd</sup> - John learned humility by insisting upon Christ’s ministry increasing, even while his own decreased.**

Verse 29 - “He 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.” “He must increase, but I must decrease.” Truly this saying is a marvelous saying – “He must increase, but I must decrease.” How could John say this? He could say it because he was continually rejoicing in what the Lord was doing to build His Church and to advance His own kingdom of glory. Are you able to say, even as John said, “He must increase, but I must decrease?” Are you learning the way of humility? Is this what you can pray as a prayer in your heart today? I think that you and I ought to often be praying these words of John as a prayer – “Lord, may You increase, and I decrease”. May people see you in my life, and not my sinful self. May the glory of Your grace and the glory of Your kingdom increase, even if it seems like my ability to minister and do anything great for you actually decreases. I pray that you would be glorified even in my weakness. O, that is the way to pray, dear Christian; not, Lord let me great, but Lord may you be great, and may your kingdom advanced as people behold how I face my difficulties by the power of Your grace in me. I like that hymn that we sing sometimes; by Anna L. Waring - #444 in the Trinity Hymnal. “Father, I know that all my life is portioned out for me; the changes that are sure to come, I do not fear to see; I ask thee for a present mind, intent on pleasing Thee.” “I would not have the restless will that hurries to and fro, seeking for some great thing to do, or secret thing to know; I would be treated like a child, and guided where I go.” I think that John the Baptist learned to pray this kind of a prayer while he was in prison. Indeed, he had the very spirit and essence of it in his heart and upon his lips when his own disciples came to him and told him that Jesus was making more disciples than he was, and his disciples were baptizing more disciples than they were. Now focus on these last 2 verses of Anna Warring’s hymn with me. “I ask Thee for the daily strength, to none that ask denied, a mind to blend with outward life, while keeping at Thy side, Content to fill a little space, if Thou be glorified.” Well, a jail cell is a little space. Can a Christian glorify God and be joyful even in a

jail cell; a little space. I think that by the grace of Christ, they can. Dear Samuel Rutherford did. He called his jail cell, "Christ's palace", when wicked religious men placed him there.

John endured all these things that he suffered by remembering what God had done for him, in letting him be the friend of the Bridegroom, his Lord Jesus Christ. He knew the love of Christ, even though Christ had not yet gone to the cross. Oh, my dear friends, I hope that you have such a relationship with Christ that you are able to see Him not only as Savior and Lord, but as your heavenly Bridegroom, or at least the friend of the Bridegroom, as John did. He said, "He 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." I hope, my dear friends, that you have grown enough in grace that you are able to behold Christ as your heavenly Bridegroom in your heart; to see that He has a mystical spiritual body which is His Church, Old Testament and New, which He calls His Bride. A whole book of the Bible, written by Solomon, speaks of this. He who has the Bride, the Church, is the Bridegroom, Christ. He who stands and hears Him, rejoices greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice." "Therefore this joy of mine, John says, is fulfilled. Where, dear believer, do you find your fulfillment, if you do not find it in hearing the voice of the Bridegroom speak to your heart, through His blessed word; whether you read it in secret as a love letter, or hear it preached from the pulpit as an authoritative word from your God? This is where you must find all of your joy, in this kind of a relationship with Christ. He and His grace and kingdom must increase in your heart, and it will if you are humble enough to accept all of His appointments. Let me close with a small portion of one of Samuel Rutherford's letters. # 130. "What power and strength are in Christ's love!" "I am persuaded it can climb a steep hill, with hell upon its back; and swim through water and not drown; and sing in the fire, and find no pain; and triumph in losses, prisons, sorrows, exile, disgrace, and laugh and rejoice in death. O for a year's lease of the sense of His love without a cloud, to try what Christ is!" "O for the coming of the Bridegroom!" "Oh, when shall I see the Bridegroom and the Bride meet in the clouds, and kiss each other?" "Oh, when will we get our day, and heart's fill of that love!" "Oh, if it were lawful to complain of the famine of that love, and want of the immediate vision of God!" "O time, time!" "How dost thou torment the souls of those who would be swallowed up of Christ's love, because thou movest so slowly!" "Oh, if He would pity a poor prisoner, and blow love upon me, and give a prisoner a taste of draught of that sweetness, which is glory as it were begun, to be a confirmation that Christ and I shall have our fill of each other forever!" (End of quote) John the Baptist could rejoice that day so long ago when his ministry was decreasing, when he would soon go to prison and to death, because he joy in being the friend of the Bridegroom. What about you? Are you married to Christ? Are you a part of the mystical Bride of Christ? Do you have longings to come out of the prison of this world, to have full fellowship with Christ in the beatific vision of His glory? These desires will be fulfilled for all who are willing to learn the way of humility.