

He Must Increase
John 3:22-36
Reading: Romans 8:9-17

Bethany Baptist Church
April 19, 202

...pray...

It hasn't been long since we last read about the *John the Baptist*.

The Jews came to Him (Ch.1) to *determine His identity and challenge His baptizing authority*.

John's answer was simple: "*I'm **not** the Christ, but I'm His forerunner.*"

Then Jesus of Nazareth stepped out of the crowd and John exclaimed: "*Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.*"

And John *humbly*, almost *reluctantly*, baptized the Messiah. The *Heavens* opened, the *Holy Spirit* descended, and *God* thundered, "***You are My beloved Son, in You I am well pleased.***"

The next day, John *unselfishly* pointed **two** of his disciples to Jesus, *Andrew* the brother of Peter, and *John*, the author of our Gospel. He repeated those powerful words: "*Behold, the Lamb of God!*"

FF a few weeks, just past the Passover, and the stories of the Baptizer and the Messiah *intersect* again!

Join me in the Gospel of John, 3:22-24, as John comes back to the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus the Messiah. (Read)

1. Soon after Passover, Jesus and His disciples *left* Jerusalem and *moved* out into the Judean countryside.
 - a. The **Gr.** *vocabulary* undergirding v.22 hints that their stay could have stretched out from *weeks* to a *few months*.
 - b. Jesus was *strengthening* His relationship with His newly minted disciples, and *teaching* them.
 - i. I *love* the possibilities behind that phrase: "*there He was spending time with them!*"
 - ii. Can you image a one month *countryside retreat* with Jesus, where He pours *truth* your mind and *love* into your heart! 😊

- c. He must also have been preaching to *crowds* of people, because...
 - d. His disciples (4:2) were *baptizing* everyone who responded.
 - e. **Mark 1:15** records that Jesus' early ministry was marked by a compelling message: "*The **time** is fulfilled and the **Kingdom of God** is at hand; **repent** and **believe** in the Gospel!*" Repent & believe...
2. But Jesus was **not** the only one in the neighborhood, *preaching* and *baptizing* and *attracting* big crowds!
- a. Not *too* far off, in *Aenon* near *Salim*, John the Baptist was still *preaching* and *baptizing*, accompanied by his own *disciples*.
 - i. **Aenon** meant "*springs*" and **Salim** meant "*peace*." It was probably in *Samaria*.
 - ii. And as the idea of "*springs*" suggests, there was a lot of water, a great place for **John the Baptist** to preach and baptize.
 - iii. **Matt 3:2** sums up John's message like this: "**Repent**, for the *kingdom of heaven is at hand*."
 - b. That little detail in v.24 assumes the early readers of the *Gospel of John* had *also* read *Matthew*, *Mark* & *Luke*! It *clarifies* that Jesus started preaching *before* John the Baptist was *imprisoned/beheaded* by Herod Agrippa. (A fact **not** evident in the **three Synoptic gospels**.)
3. But our author's *big point* is the Baptizer's consistent, humble *testimony* of the *superiority* of his *Messiah*.

Let's keep reading v.25 – 36. You could call this "*A Tale of Two Baptizers*"!

...TURN THE PAGE AS YOU READ....

According to **v.23**, **John's** ministry continued to pull *big crowds*....

But maybe **not quite as big** as they had been **before** Passover....

... Before **Jesus** started preaching!

My **outline** for this account:

The Baptizer makes way for the Messiah (we'll unpack this by comparing **three pairs of people**).

1. **vv.25-30** **The Bridegroom and His Best Man** (John's illustration of Jesus and John)
2. **vv.31-35** **The Heavenly Man and the Earthly Man** (the *earthly man's* not bad, but he's **not** Jesus!)
3. **v.36** **The Believing Man and the Judged Man** (don't forget that this entire Gospel's goal is *faith in Jesus*!)

John's *jealous friends* prompt a compelling *wedding day* illustration!

1. There is nothing like a *loyal friend*, but *loyalty can* be *blind*!
 - a. In the midst of their ministry, John's followers got into a *discussion* w/an *unnamed Jew*. Someone interested in *John's ministry*, and in *Jesus'*.
 - i. The *point* of the debate is a little *vague*, but the reference (25) to "*purification*" suggests the discussion started out comparing *Jewish purification rituals* to the *meaning of John's baptism*.
 - ii. And *eventually* it got around to Jesus!
 - b. I wonder if they were *jealous* because their *baptism numbers* were *down*!
 - i. And *clearly*, the Baptizer's friends **were** *jealous*!
 1. "**Jealousy**" – *the fear of being replaced*. **Shakespeare** called it the "*Green Eyed Monster*"!
 2. Let's see it again in **v.26 (read)**!
 - ii. Here is a *flashback* to John 1, when the *Baptizer* baptized the *Messiah*.
 1. These men were clearly *there*, but you notice they **don't** call Jesus by name.
 2. And they seem kind of *indignant*: **He** *who was with you, to whom you have testified, all are coming to Him!* (Which is clearly **not true**!)
 3. **As if to say**: How can that Guy be so *ungrateful* as to *out-baptize* you!

2. John *humbly* (and I'm sure *lovingly*) ... *turned their eyes upon Jesus*.
 - a. He started with a spiritual principle (27): *a man can receive **nothing** (spiritual blessing/fruit) unless it has been given him from heaven*.
 - i. In **James 1** we read, "*Every **good thing** given and every **perfect gift** is from above, coming down from the Father of lights.*"
 - ii. John was simply *affirming* that Jesus has *God's blessing* because Jesus is *God's Son*.
 - b. The **Baptizer** *reminded* his friends that they were *there* when he told the *Jews* that He was **not** the Messiah, but rather Messiah's *prophesized forerunner*.
 - i. **1:23** – [John] *said*, "*I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the LORD,' as Isaiah the prophet said.*"
3. Then John underscored his *point* with a compelling *wedding* illustration (**read 29**).
 - a. **The groom gets the girl – first prize on the big day!**
 - b. "*The friend of the bridegroom*" was a lot like the modern *best man*.
 - i. His job was to *arrange details*, be *master of ceremonies*, and (during the ceremony) to bring the bride to the groom.
 - ii. And **ANE** law forbade the *best friend* from ever *marrying* the *bride*, even if the *groom* left her *standing at the altar!*
 - c. Many Bible teachers (**Kostenberger, MacArthur**) see Scripture possibly declaring a *deeper truth* through John's *wedding picture*.
 - i. The Bible (OT/NT) refers to *God's People* as *Messiah's Bride*.
 - ii. And so perhaps the *underlying truth* is that the *Baptizer* is the *herald* and *best man* of the *Messiah-Groom*; *his job* is to bring *Christ's Bride* to *Her Beloved!*

- d. Yet *first* this is an illustration of John's *genuine joy* that God is *blessing* Jesus in His ministry (29), the *best man rejoices* greatly, and John says *his joy has been made full*.
4. But perhaps the most *powerful principle* of all is John's *final declaration* in **v.30**: "*He must increase, but I must decrease...!*"
- a. I think this statement (~maxim) is the *key* to the *entire passage*.
- b. Do you recall John's earlier testimonies and actions (John 1)..."
- i. *I am not even worthy to kneel down, unlace His sandals, and wash His feet.*
- ii. And **this** is *John the Baptist*, who's preaching *emptied Jerusalem* and drew the attention of the *Sanhedrin!*
- iii. Jesus called John the *greatest man* who ever lived!
1. **Mt 11:11** - "*Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone **greater** than John the Baptist!*"
- iv. Yet His *very success* **demanded** His *inevitable decrease*.
1. "**Must**" (30) – that word speaks of *Divine decree*; this principle is *non-negotiable* and *unstoppable*.
2. God designed John's ministry with a *specific shelf-life*. A ministry that ended at the *edge of Herod Agrippa's blade....*
5. I want to briefly make a *very careful application*. The *big truth* of this account is **Jesus' ascent** as the **Son of God**. With **John the Baptist's** repeated, joyful, humble *testimony*: **He must increase, but I must decrease**.
- a. But we can/should carefully *apply* John's principle to *ourselves*.
- b. Is Christ *increasing* in your life? *Understanding? Love? Obedience?*
- c. Are you *content*, **joyful**, when God prospers you *bro/sis* above you?

Then the Apostle John expands on the Baptizer's teaching by comparing the Heavenly Man and the Earthly Man (read vv.31-35).

1. The author begins his *explanation* by examining another *pair of men*: i.) *He who comes from above* → **Jesus**; ii.) *He who is of the earth* → **John Baptist**.
 - a. *He who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth.*
 - b. Does that sound *redundant...!?! I can assure you the Bible is careful!*
 - i. It points to John's *origin* – earth.
 - ii. It diagnosis John's *nature* – earth.
 - iii. It exegetes John's *message* – earth!
 - iv. The idea of “*earth*” isn't *sinful*, it simply suggests *limited*.
 - v. John is a *good* man, a *godly* man, but John *is* man – **limited**...
 - c. **But** *He who comes from above is above all...He who comes from heaven is above all!*
 - i. **OBTW**, did you notice how John emphatically *wraps* His description of **Jesus** around His description of *John the Baptist*?
2. These verses (31-35) have *little* more to say about the **earth man**, but a *lot* to say about the **God Man**! In fact, John lists **five** truths about Jesus:
 - a. **V.31** – Jesus comes to us from *Heaven* (God). Again, the text says it *twice!*
 - i. He must *increase* because He is **not** from *earth*, but *Heaven*.
 - ii. “*The Word has become flesh and dwelt among us.*”
 - b. **V.32** – Jesus' testimony is an *eye-witness testimony*.
 - i. Because Jesus came from *Heaven*, His *testimony* is *first hand*.
 - ii. **Yet** His *testimony* will be **rejected**, *first* by His own people!

- iii. **1:11** –*He came unto His own, and His own did not receive Him.*
 - iv. And Jesus already said as much to *Nicodemus* (3:11), and it will be *sadly & ultimately demonstrated* on the **Cross**.
- c. **V.33** – Jesus’ testimony is the *truth* about God.
- i. The picture of “*setting his seal*” speaks of the ANE practice of *affirming a decree by stamping it w/ your signet ring*.
 - ii. When any individual (John the Baptist) **does embrace** Christ’s testimony he is *affirming* that the *testimony* is truly from God.
- d. **V.34** – Jesus’ testimony is Holy Spirit inspired.
- i. That word “*for*” indicates that **v.34** further explains Jesus’ *testimony* being described in vv.31-33.
 - ii. So here is another truth about Jesus’ *eye-witness testimony*...
 - iii. **Its Holy Spirit inspired!** In fact, the Spirit is with Christ **w/o measure**.
 1. **John the Baptist** was Spirit filled, but *his life* was still *limited* by his humanness (the same is true for Christians today).
 2. But Jesus was **without sin** (Heb), and so the Spirit was free to work w/Him **w/o limit**, incl. w/ Jesus’ *message*.
- e. **V.35 (read)** – Jesus holds *everything* in His *hand*! **Isn’t that good to know today!**
- i. God loves His Son and so God has *given, entrusted, charged, delegated everything* to Jesus (→ *authority* → *deity*).
 - ii. And I mean **everything**: *creation, events, future, angels, calamity, humanity, judgment* (John 5). **Everything!**

- iii. **Eph 1:20-23:** *God raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.²² And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church,²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.*
- iv. And again we read in **Phil. 2:9-11:** *For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,¹¹ and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

The Man from Heaven *must increase!* After all, He comes from God, He speaks for God, and He rules with God!

Which means when Jesus *speaks* you must listen to Him. That's what separates the *Believing Man* from the *Judged Man!*

1. Here is our *final contrast* between **two** kinds of people: the *believer* and the *disobedient*. **Read v.36.**
2. Who has *eternal life*? *He who believes in the Son.*
 - a. This is the *theme* of John's entire Gospel! His *purpose* for writing!
 - b. And *what* must you *believe* about God's Son?
 - i. First of all, that you *need Him* – you need His *forgiveness!* Because your *sins* have *offended* God, your Creator & Judge. **You** might take your sins *lightly*, but God **doesn't!**
 - ii. We live in age that *respects* disbelief, *approves* immorality, *murders* the most vulnerable, and *hates* our neighbor.
 - iii. You need God's *forgiveness* and a *new life* (Jesus: “*You must be born again!*”)

- iv. You can **only** have that by *repenting/turning* from all your sins and *believing* in Christ:
1. That He *died* on the Cross *for* you sins, *in* you place.
 2. And God *raised* Him from the dead to *prove* it's *true*.
3. But, who will **not** see life? **Who** lives under God's wrath?
- a. "Life" means "everlasting life," of course. The gift of God to the woman or man who believes in His Son.
 - b. But "wrath" is the **180 deg** *awful opposite* of life. It's defined as "God's holy and justified **outrage** against rebellious humanity."
 - c. The vocabulary and grammar pictures *wrath* continually *resting* on the *disobedient* like a *thick dark cloud* on a distant mountain.
 - d. You don't want that to be *you*!
4. John offers an important *insight* into *saving faith*.
- a. He compares *belief*, **not** w/ *unbelief*, but w/ *disobedience*.
 - b. The lesson is that *faith* is much more *substantial* than mere *understanding* or even *agreement*.
 - c. *Faith* bears fruit. And first, the *fruit* of *turning* and *trusting*, as you embrace the **entire** *testimony of Christ*.
5. Do you feel yourself to be *under God's wrath*? Do you want to *enter into eternal life*?

Believe in God's Son, only He can save you!

“He must increase...” and He did!

Jesus taught the masses.

Fed the multitudes.

Blessed little children.

Confounded His enemies.

Calmed storms.

Cast out demons.

Forgave sinners.

Healed the sick.

Raised the dead.

Foretold His passion.

Suffered injustice.

Endured abuse

Went to the cross.

Rose from the grave.

Appeared to many.

Ascended to the Father.

Now *intercedes* for His people.

Will one day return!

***Are you honoring Christ as the greatest ... and ordering your life accordingly?
...pray...***