

For the last 3-WEEKS - We've been looking closely

AT the Most famous verse in the Bible

& **AT** the **single most significant** event in a person's life –
being **born again**

Today - Jesus departs from Jerusalem (& *that conversation*)
into the Judean Countryside

& on the **SURFACE** - the Subject we see today is **BAPTISM**
(or what the Jews called "Ceremonial Cleansing")

HOWEVER - That is **NOT** the **PRIMARY** Teaching **FOCUS**
& it is **NOT** what **is Primarily happening** in this Text

What **IS** happening is
the **FIRST MINISTRY DISPUTE** in the Gospel of John

& guys - the lesson we see today
is absolutely **CRITICAL** for a healthy life of Serving Jesus

AND - it is absolutely **CRITICAL**
for the healthy life of the Church

Let's Pray that we will **SEE & EMBRACE** this lesson today

John 3:22 (NLT)

22 Then Jesus and his disciples left Jerusalem and went into the Judean countryside. Jesus spent some time with them there, baptizing people.

So - Jesus and his disciples leave Jerusalem
& go into the surrounding countryside to minister

& **as Jesus preached** & ministered to the people –
those who believed **were being baptized**

& **John 4:2** clarifies - that it was actually the Disciples
doing the baptizing, not Jesus himself

& this Baptism the Disciples were doing
was a **baptism of REPENTANCE**

which was the **exact same baptism**
that John the Baptist was still doing

& John the Baptist was preaching
the **Exact same message** - Jesus was now preaching

Repent & be baptized, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand

& so - the **Disciples of Jesus**
AND the **Disciples of John the Baptist**

Were both engaged in the **Exact Same Ministry** -
Which we see in the **NEXT** 2 Verses

John 3:23–24 (NLT)

23 At this time John the Baptist was baptizing at Aenon, near Salim, because there was plenty of water there; and people kept coming to him for baptism. 24 (This was before John was thrown into prison.)

John the Baptist **IS STILL** Preaching & Baptizing
Just as **Jesus NOW WAS**

& this area John the Baptist was in
was probably just **NORTH**

of where Jesus & his disciples were doing the **SAME THING**

So – here's where it starts to **GET REAL** - **For US**

Jesus & John were
doing the Exact Same ministry - in 2 different areas

But those 2 areas were **close enough**
that the **people could go** to either one of them

to **hear** the Good News, & to **be** Baptized

& that all **SOUNDS GREAT**

Right up until we **MIX IN** a little **Human Nature**

so - Let's **See** what Happens

when we add some **"Human Nature"** - into the **Ministry of God**

John 3:25 (NLT)

25 A debate (dispute) broke out between John's disciples and a certain Jew over ceremonial cleansing.

So - **A Jew** (or Jews) - have **stirred up** a dispute (debate)
among the disciples of John the Baptist

& since The Apostle **John points out** here - that it was a **Jew**
& used the term '**Ceremonial Cleansing**'

it probably **implies** - this was a Dispute about
which Baptism was more **Legitimate** (*The Jew's or John's*)

But remember: this teaching
is **NOT PRIMARILY** about - **BAPTISM**

It is **PRIMARILY ABOUT** -
the Damage that Human Nature does in Ministry

& in the **NEXT VERSE** - We see what happens
when we Mix **OUR HUMAN NATURE** with Our Ministry

John 3:26 (NLT)

26 So John's disciples came to him and said, "Rabbi, the man you met on the other side of the Jordan River, the one you identified as the Messiah, is also baptizing people. And everybody is going to him instead of coming to us."

1st - these disciples of John the Baptist **were referring to Jesus**
as if he were an **EQUAL** to **John the Baptist** (*not good*)

But what is **REALLY** happening is

They are **FEELING THREATENED** in their Ministry

& what they are really saying here is

HEYYYYY – HE IS COMING IN TO OUR MINISTRY AREA !

& HE IS DOING THE SAME THING AS WE ARE -

**& HE IS GETTING MORE PEOPLE
TO COME TO HIM - INSTEAD OF US**

SHOULDN'T WE DO SOMETHING ABOUT THIS?

*This isn't **FAIR** . . . This isn't **RIGHT** !!!*

**HE SHOULDN'T BE ALLOWED TO COME INTO "MY" MINISTRY
& BE MORE FRUITFUL FOR GOD -THAN ME!**

Bible Commentator - David Thomas says;

***"The continuing curse of Christianity is the existence of men in it
who have the spirit of John's disciples in this text"***

The spirit of John's disciples here -

is the spirit of **competition**, **envy**, & **ambition**

& Guys - I've seen so many Christian Servants - not just Pastor's,
but Ministry Leaders & Servants - in **every area**

who **STRUGGLE** with - or are even **DRIVEN BY**
competition, **envy**, & **ambition**

& some have the attitude:

*Boy, don't you be comin into my area & doin the work of God here,
this **AREA IS MINE** – mine, mine, mine – all mine*

James 4:1 says (Contemporary English Version)

1 Why do you fight and argue with each other? Isn't it because you are full of selfish desires that fight to control your body?

Isn't **THAT** where all disputes
in **ALL** Ministry Areas in the church - come from?

The head of evangelism at **S.W. Baptist Theological Seminary.**
gave a **word association test** to all his graduating students

& the test was meant - to reveal Motivation & Character

& **FOR** these graduates
who were **ALL** about to go into Full-Time Ministry

in the test results there was **1 category**
that the **vast majority** of this graduating class fit into

most of the students (who were headed for the ministry)
were **categorized as**;

“Highly competitive, with a special contempt for those who aspired to the same position that they themselves held”

Guys we've got to cry out to God:

to **TRANSFORM** us by the renewing of our mind,
to genuinely make us a **NEW CREATION** - for Ministry
to give us the power to **CONTINUALLY CRUCIFY** our sin nature

so that we would NOT carry that STENCH into the ministry

If we could just take that Ministry Dispute of ours
up the Mt of Transfiguration

& let just a portion of the **Glory of Jesus Christ shine** upon it
that Dispute of ours **would disintegrate** before our eyes

If we could take that Complaint or Dispute - to the Isle of Patmos
where the Apostle **John was praying** on the Lord's day,

& if we could **hear that same voice** John heard

Announcing: ***I am the Alpha and the Omega—
the beginning and the end***

& we could turn to **see Jesus Christ**

his **eyes** like **flaming fire** -

His **feet** were like **polished bronze** refined in a furnace -

His **voice** thundering like mighty **ocean waves** -

Holding held **seven stars** in his right hand,

with a **sharp** two-edged **sword** coming from his mouth -

And with **his face** shining like the **sun in all its brilliance**

If we took our Dispute to *THAT JESUS*

we would be face down - on the ground -
like a dead-man – **SO FAST**

& then Jesus might say to us

“excuse me, was there a ministry dispute you wanted to discuss”

& I Think - we would not even utter a word

If we could see our Ministry Disputes
in the true light of Jesus Christ

most of them would immediately ***fade away to nothing***

& So - In the next Vs.

The Holy Spirit is going to give us - ***THE SOLUTION***

the **only answer** we will ever need

to **forever stop** these **TYPE** of disputes in ministry

If we would truly believe this Next Vs

it would **stop the strife** in the ministry

that comes from our **competitive**, **ambitious**, & **selfish hearts**

John 3:27 (NLT)

27 John replied, “No one can receive anything unless God gives it from heaven.

If you are ever tempted to feel jealousy or envy

over someone else in the ministry
(*especially someone in your own ministry*)

I would encourage you to **MEDITATE** on this Vs
WRESTLE with God over this Vs
APPLY this verse to your struggle

& Receive the **PEACE**
that God wants to **GIVE YOU** - Thru this Vs

In The Ministry - & in Your Ministry;

“No one can receive anything unless God gives it from heaven.

A person truly called by God into the ministry
comes with NOTHING

The only “good” a person who has truly been
placed by God into the ministry - has

is what they have received from God in Heaven

& if we could ALL Truly Believe

that we **ALL** came with nothing

& if we could ALL Truly Believe

that every single thing we do in the ministry, **God does thru us**

then if God chooses to do something more, or bigger, or different
thru someone else - even in our own ministry

What Is That To Us?

We Should be Giving GLORY to GOD

Because it is **GOD** Doing the Work -

Thru Us - **AND** Thru others - that he calls alongside us

1 Corinthians 4:7 (LIVING BIBLE)

7 What are you so puffed up about? What do you have that God hasn't given you? And if all you have is from God, why act as though you are so great, and as though you have accomplished something on your own?

Now - I **KNOW** those can be **HARD WORDS**

& I **KNOW** - there will always be people **IN MINISTRY**

Who **HAVE NOT** - Or - **WILL NOT** - Embrace this truth

But - WE CAN !

& **WHEN** we **DO - WE GROW** - in the Peace of God

& the **CRUCIFYING** of our Flesh Nature

The spirit of John's disciples here -
is the spirit of **competition**, **envy**, & **ambition**

& The Holy Spirit wants to show us how to eliminate that spirit
from our lives – so we can **truly be used** by God

& in order to show us how to eliminate that spirit of competition

We are going to see John the Baptist
Exactly what **WE** Should do

He is going to turn the entire focus
right to where it belongs – **ON JESUS CHRIST ALONE!**

John 3:28 (NLT)

28 You yourselves know how plainly I told you, 'I am not the Messiah. I am only here to prepare the way for him.'

John the Baptist is saying: ***"I am only here to Do
what God in Heaven has GIVEN ME to DO***

please hear this – when we have a dispute in the Ministry
that is based in **competition**, **envy**, or **ambition**

our dispute Might Actually **BE** - With **GOD HIMSELF**

Because we MIGHT be afraid

that God is going to do **something else**
with or thru **someone else**

that might eclipse something **we thought** we owned

& HE might even do it without our permission

& If we would beg God - to **TRANSFORM US**
to **follow** John the Baptist's example in this next vs

then we would **be saved** from this trap of the flesh

John 3:29 (NLT)

***29 It is the bridegroom (Jesus) who marries the bride (the church),
and the bridegroom's friend (that's US) is simply glad to stand with
him and hear his vows. Therefore, I am filled with joy at his success.***

The Bridegroom is Christ - - **The Bride is the church**
the **friend of the Bridegroom** - **is each of us in the ministry**

& the friends only job
is to get the Bride to the Bridegroom

& as soon as the Bride & Bridegroom are together –
Then the FRIEND'S **joy** is **complete**, **& his job was finished**

So if we have ANY PART

of getting to the **BRIDE** to the **BRIDEGROOM**
then our joy should be complete

but Sometimes - it takes true brokenness & true surrender
to **MAKE THIS REAL** - in our own lives

(I know, because I've been thru it)

If we desire to be in Service to God - **for the right reason**

then that reason
is clearly & boldly stated in the next vs

John 3:30 (NLT)

30 He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less.

In the GREEK - This is called an “operational imperative”

It means: It is a **COMMAND**
for anyone who would truly serve Jesus – **it is not an option**

***He must become greater and greater,
and I must become less and less.***

Can WE Say that - TODAY?

& can we continue to say it, if He actually takes us up on it,
& causes us to **decrease** - & to become **less** & **less**?

***“He must increase (at all costs),
but I must decrease (at all costs)”***

& that includes the cost of all my Pride, & all my Ability

When you truly believe that – it will eliminate all disputes that arise from **competition**, **envy**, & **ambition** in the ministry

Finally - as we Finish our text

the only subject we are left with
is the greatness & superiority of Jesus Christ

because gone is any discussion of any Ministry Comparison,
& all that is left - is the greatness of Jesus Christ

& that’s exactly how it should be for us

These final verses **explain why**
Jesus must **INCREASE** & we must **DECREASE**

John the Baptist **KNEW** who **HE WAS**
AND - He **KNEW** who **JESUS WAS**

& that is **HOW** & **WHERE**
the **DISPUTES** in Ministry **MUST END**

FIRST - John **KNEW** that He himself - was from **EARTH**
& Jesus was from **HEAVEN**

& so Jesus was by far the Greater **FOCUS**
& by Far the Greater **PRIORITY**

John 3:31 (NLT)

31 “He has come from above and is greater than anyone else. We are of the earth, and we speak of earthly things, but he has come from heaven and is greater than anyone else.

No matter what we think of ourselves
we are from this earth

& there is only **ONE**
who has come from Heaven - & is above all

AND SO:

He must increase,
by whatever **means** (*or whatever people*) He chooses

We must decrease,
by whatever **means** (*or whatever people*) He chooses

John The Baptist Continues

With a **BIG & FINAL CONTRAST**

between **JESUS CHRIST** in Heaven
& **ALL** those on the earth

John 3:32–34 (NLT) --> -->

John 3:32–34 (NLT)

32 He testifies about what he has seen and heard, but how few believe what he tells them!

33 Anyone who accepts his testimony can affirm that God is true.

34 For he is sent by God. He speaks God's words, for God gives him the Spirit without limit.

Jesus is **SENT BY GOD**

Jesus **SPEAKS GOD'S WORDS**

Jesus **HAS GOD'S SPIRIT WITHOUT LIMIT**

& WE - - - DO NOT

& then - v.35 is the **FINAL NAIL** that should

END all **COMPARISONS** and **HUMAN** Responses
in this area of Ministry Disputes

John 3:35 (NLT)

35 The Father loves his Son and has put everything into his hands.

Jesus Christ is the only one who has been given all things

He is the ONLY ONE who is supremely in charge today

& HE is the only perfect Shepherd of all things

& **SO** - We can **TRUST HIM** completely

& we can **KNOW** - that **WHATEVER** we have
Has been given to us - **BY HIM**

So we can **STAY FOCUSED** & **BE JOYFUL**

Doing our Part - to Bring the Bride - **TO** the Bridegroom

Which is exactly how The Holy Spirit *ENDS* this text

The Holy Spirit is SAYING

THIS is the Main Thing

THIS is the Main Thing

There is only **one thing** that matters for eternity

& That is - Bringing the **BRIDE** - **TO** the **BRIDEGROOM**

John 3:36 (NLT)

36 And anyone who believes in God's Son has eternal life. Anyone who doesn't obey the Son will never experience eternal life but remains under God's angry judgment."

ULTIMATELY - **THAT** is what True Ministry

- For the Right Reasons - **IS ABOUT**

Because **THAT is** what **Jesus gave His life for**

PLEASE - Don't be taken out

by these kind of **Ministry Disputes**

REMEMBER: ***He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less.***

Let's Pray