

## Week 1

John 3:22-30

### **Introduction**

Last Sunday, we had the privilege to visit Arlington National Cemetery; and specifically got to see the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. I don't know if you've ever gotten to visit there or not, but it is incredible. After seeing the Tomb, I did some reading on it and found out that the Sentinels who guard the Tomb do not wear a rank or medals, so they never outrank the unknowns who are buried there. Even though millions of people have gone to this Tomb to see the Sentinels and the changing of the guard, these men and women would be the first to tell you that it isn't about them, but about the unknowns both there and still buried or missing around the world.

This morning, we are going to start a new series called "He not Me". One thing you will probably hear me say a lot over the course of this series is "It's not about me". I hope you are challenged and encouraged during this series. And over the next several weeks, we are going to look at several stories in the scripture of people who live in the joy and assurance of the Lord and who understand that it isn't about them. The scriptures we will be studying together all have people in them that echo the same sentiment: He must increase and I must decrease. And I think it is easy to forget that. The reason we can get spiritually dry and drift from the reality of the joy of Christ is because our priorities get out of line. We get in the habit of thinking of ourselves more than thinking of Christ. We get in the habit of increasing us and our desires instead of decreasing those things.

You may have heard of the 70 Christians who recently were beheaded by ISIS while in church. Talk about increasing Jesus and decreasing themselves. I don't know that someone can

honestly experience or face something like that if Jesus isn't increasing in their life on a daily basis. And those souls are just the most recent example of this, as there have been millions of people who have given their lives in service of our Heavenly Father. One of which is John the Baptist. This morning, we will begin in John 3:22-30. We will see that John the Baptist has the right mindset in his life and ministry. If you are physically able, would you please stand as we read these verses together?

**(v.22-24)**

Verse 22 opens with "after this" which means that what we are about to read takes place after Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus. If you will remember, it is during the course of that conversation that Jesus gives us a verse that almost everyone could recite: John 3:16. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son and that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life."

So, Jesus and His disciples leave Galilee and head to Judea. And while there, He is with the disciples and baptizing. Now, before we move on, I need to address just a couple of things here. First, Jesus isn't the one doing the baptizing. Based on what we read from the rest of the scriptures, we know that Jesus did not perform baptisms; John 4:2 explicitly says this. So, how are we to take John 3:22? I think we need to look at this through the lenses of authority. The disciples baptized the people in Jesus' name. We might say of someone who owns a restaurant, "They fed 500 customers that day!" The person who owns the restaurant may not have physically cooked meals for 500 people, but since they own the business, we say they fed them. In the same way, I don't believe that Jesus physically baptized anyone, I think it was done in His name so that is why the bible says it in this way. Imagine how a person could use that to boast to others, "I was

baptized by Jesus Himself!” Paul even records in 1 Corinthians 1:12-15 that things like that cause a division and that is why he only baptized two individuals.

We see, however, that John the Baptist is there baptizing at the same time. And an important detail is mentioned at the end of verse 24: John had not yet been thrown in prison. The other gospel writers detail John’s prison sentence and ultimate death. I think it might be appropriate here to remind everyone exactly who John the Baptist is and what his ministry and purpose were.

We are first introduced to John the Baptist at the beginning of the gospels. We know from other accounts that John is the cousin of Jesus (his mother and Jesus’ mother are relatives). His birth is also one of a miracle as Elizabeth was barren and God opened her womb and she was able to have a son in her old age. He came in the Spirit of Elijah the prophet to point people toward the Messiah. He even baptized Jesus, and it was there he said, “I shouldn’t baptize you, you should baptize me!” Earlier in the gospel of John 1:6-8, the Apostle writes of the Baptist, “<sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness to testify about the light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup>He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light.” The life and ministry of John are incredible and I don’t have the time to get into all the details of his life, this morning. But what I will say is that John knew what his ministry was and that was to point people toward the Messiah. He was the voice crying out in the wilderness to proclaim the coming of Jesus, the Messiah. And everything that John did was for that purpose.

John realized “its not about me.” Matthew 3:11, “<sup>11</sup>“I baptize you with water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to remove his sandals. He himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” Mark 1:7, “One who

is more powerful than I am is coming after me. I am not worthy to stand down and untie the strap of his sandals.” Luke 3:16, “I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I am is coming. I am not worthy to untie the strap of His sandals.” Almost identical quotes from each of the synoptic gospel authors should help us to understand that John understood that his ministry and everything about his life were not about him at all! They were all about Jesus. And John understood this. He knew that his role was about pointing people toward the Messiah, just as it was written in Isaiah, “A voice of one crying out in the wilderness: prepare the way for the Lord; make His paths straight!” It would have been easy for John to get boastful at the following he had amassed. It would have been easy for him to lose sight and focus of his purpose and his ministry. But, he always understood that everything that was happening was not about him.

Verse 24 clues us in on when all of this takes place because the Baptizer has yet to be thrown into prison. John doesn’t detail that event, but Matthew does. So, John the Apostle presumes that we the readers are at least somewhat familiar with where John the Baptist’s story is going.

#### **(v.25-26)**

So, while these baptisms are happening, we read in verse 25 a “dispute” comes up between John’s disciples and a Jewish person about purification. Some of your translations may say: question, discussion, or something similar. But, the idea is that of an argument, or at the very least, a heated discussion. It’s the same way you and your spouse/significant other “have discussions” instead of arguments, when in reality it’s an argument and we just try and soften it! “We don’t argue or fight, we just have discussions!” We all know what that means!

The basis of this discussion had to do with purification and baptism's role in that. Aren't you glad that churches don't do this anymore? I'm certainly glad we have all come to a common understanding of what baptism is and its role in our purification/salvation. The baptism that John was performing is detailed in other parts of the gospels, but it was essentially a public sign of repentance. It wouldn't have saved the people nor would it have made them ceremonially clean or anything. We see baptisms on a somewhat regular basis but this wouldn't necessarily have been the case in the first century. Commentators are in agreement that the closest thing to baptism during this time would have been when a Gentile converted to Judaism but that would have been to "wash away the defilement of their past. Today, we baptize someone to symbolize what Jesus has done in their life. It is a public declaration that someone has decided to follow Christ. That is why I will say, "Buried with Him in baptism, raised to walk in a new life" when I baptize someone. Because it is letting the world know that I am dying to myself and being raised differently.

Look at what the complaint is in verse 25: the One you testified about is over there baptizing, and everyone is going to Him! In other words, "What are we doing, John? Everyone is going to Jesus and He's getting all the followers!" Unfortunately for the disciples of John, they were falling into a trap that so many of us can fall into: comparison. When comparisons start to creep into our minds, competition is formed. And, I'll be honest, as a Pastor it is hard to stay out of the comparison and competition game. We get sucked into the "what aboutism" of church life and jealousy and envy can take root.

We are not in competition with other churches. We are not in competition with other Christians. We shouldn't compare ourselves to how God is blessing other places or people. We

tend to get territorial and that is so dangerous! If Christ is being proclaimed and people are coming to faith in Him, I wonder why we feel the need to not celebrate those victories? If some of our sisters churches in town are growing and people are coming to faith in Christ, we should celebrate that!

When they told John, “Everyone is going to Him” that wasn’t true, based on the fact that in verse 23, it says John was baptizing. So, these guys were speaking in hyperbole. But, this is often a way for Satan to cause division among believers. As Matt Carter writes, “He convinces us to criticize others who are faithfully doing God’s work. We see the crowds going elsewhere, and we get jealous.”<sup>1</sup> This is what was happening in 1 Corinthians like I referenced earlier. The Corinthian church were following \*people\* rather than Christ. The disciples of John (and maybe others) were seeing a “rivalry” present when there wasn’t one. How can there be rivals and factions form up when we are all following Jesus the way we are supposed to? They can’t.

#### **(v.27-30)**

In these verses, we find the final recorded words of John the Baptist in this gospel; and what a way to go out. John’s response to their statement shows just how much he understands the mission. He knows that the only reason that he is in the position that he’s in is because God allowed it. The ministry that we are involved in is not about us. Our lives are not about us. Everything we have and everything we do and everything we are involved in were given to us graciously by our heavenly Father.

John understood something that I hope we can all understand, and it is that apart from God’s blessing, we can do nothing of substance. Apart from His grace and mercy and goodness,

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<sup>1</sup> Carter, M., & Wredberg, J. (2017). [\*Exalting Jesus in John\*](#) (p. 71). Holman Reference.

we cannot be truly successful in anything. John wasn't someone who would have been a prime candidate to have a following like he did. He wasn't exactly someone who others would have gravitated toward. He wore camel skin clothes. He ate locusts and wild honey. He lived in the wilderness. Yet, people were still coming to him to be baptized because John understood that he was sent ahead to proclaim the Messiah.

And this is where John's joy is made complete! He gives a perfect analogy to help his people understand. In the New Testament, the church is often referred to as the bride of Christ. This builds on Old Testament imagery of how God is referred to as Israel's covenantal husband (Isaiah 54:5: <sup>5</sup>Indeed, your husband is your Maker—his name is the Lord of Armies—and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of the whole earth.") I can remember being a groomsman at some of my friend's weddings and being really excited for them. Even though I was standing up there beside them, I knew that this moment wasn't about me. And I found joy in seeing them get married. That is how John views his role as the messenger sent ahead of the Messiah. He is an important figure and is seen alongside the groom, but he knows that this isn't about him, but the Messiah, Jesus.

The "friend of the bridegroom" would have been picked with careful thought. This was a very honored position (much like a best man might be today), and this person would have a lot of responsibilities at the wedding ceremony. They would serve as a witness of the marriage, help pay for it, and even help arrange the festivities that take place during the weeklong celebration. Another duty of this friend was to provide assistance to the bride as well: ensuring she was bathed, dressed in the appropriate clothing, and even escorted from her father's house to the wedding. So, in this sense, as Edward Klink writes, "John was the true friend of the bridegroom,

who not only performed preparatory work for the bridegroom, but also assisted the bride, the people of God, to be ready to receive the bridegroom.”<sup>2</sup> John wasn’t jealous of Jesus’ popularity, he was joyous! The moment that he had been talking about for years had arrived and now, his joy is complete.

After saying this, John’s last words in this gospel summarize his life and ministry: He must increase, but I must decrease. All of what John did was for this purpose. Had John drifted from this mission statement at all, his entire ministry would have collapsed. John wasn’t worried about himself at all. And it is tempting for us to start increase our desires and likes and dislikes, especially in our Christian lives. I hope that as we go through our lives, we have the same philosophy as John: increase Jesus above all things in us.

When you read John’s words, you find that there is no other option! He says, “He **MUST** increase”. It’s not he *\*should\** increase. It’s not he *\*might\** increase. It is he *\*MUST\** increase. In the Greek, the word “must” is a present active verb in the first part of the verse, meaning “He must keep on increasing” and it is a present passive verb in the second part, meaning, “I must keep on decreasing”. This means that this is a continual and lifelong process of increasing Jesus and decreasing ourselves. A lifelong understanding that “its not about me”. And, in all honesty, it isn’t just limited to this life, either. This is an eternal statement. This is an eternal mindset. For all of eternity Jesus will continue increasing. For all of eternity, Jesus will be exalted. For all of eternity, it will be about Him and not us. And when we are with Him in eternity, we will be able to echo what John the Baptist said, “So this joy of mine is complete”. We can start that process of

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<sup>2</sup> Klink, Edward III. *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: John*. 219. Zondervan Publishers. Grand Rapids, MI. 2016.



our joy becoming complete now, but it will not be fully realized until we are in His presence forever. I read that "It is said of the pioneer missionary, William Carey, that when he was close to death he turned to a friend and said, "When I am gone, don't talk about William Carey; talk about William Carey's Savior. I desire that Christ alone might be magnified."<sup>3</sup>

## **Conclusion**

What does it look like to increase Jesus in our lives? I think there are a few things that we need to remember. One is to be humble. I've said it a few times, but it truly isn't about me/us. As people who are to be increasing Jesus, we cannot have high views of ourselves. There isn't room for a high view of us and Christ. There are numerous examples in the bible of humble people living out this call. If you find pride swelling up in your life, you have to lay that down. I find myself repenting of pride more than I used to. It is easy to become prideful, so pray that God will give you a humble heart before He has to humble your heart.

We also have to know our place in order to increase Jesus. That means that, like John, we must be about pointing people to Jesus and not trying to build our own followings. We aren't out to build our followings, but to get people to follow Christ. Honestly, I don't think it is difficult to gain a following. You tell people what they want to hear, you change who you are doctrinally, and basically just set out to entertain people and you can gain a big following. But that isn't our place. We have to know that everything we do should point people to Christ and not us. Jesus is the bridegroom, not us. Imagine you're at a wedding and the best man or maid of honor does something to take the attention away from the bride and groom. It isn't there place to do that.

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<sup>3</sup> Gangel, K. O. (2000). [\*John\*](#) (Vol. 4, p. 59). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Knowing our place means that we prioritize correctly: Jesus first, family second, and everything else after that. Knowing our place means we live out the “He not Me” mindset.

Third, I think to increase Jesus we should celebrate Kingdom Growth. Let us not be envious when we see other people doing great things for the Kingdom of God. If churches in our valley are seeing growth (and by that I mean the right kind of growth), we should rejoice in that because that means people are being saved! Envy and jealousy cannot have a place in our hearts when it comes to ministry and the growth that we see others having.

I think we also must be authentic. It would be one thing for John to have \*said\* the right things, but he also lived them out. His actions and words matched up. In Matthew 11:11, Jesus said, <sup>11</sup> “Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one greater than John the Baptist has appeared, but the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” I don’t think Jesus would have said that if He didn’t mean it and I don’t think He would have meant it if John wasn’t authentic.

Finally, at least for our time this morning, I think we must be sacrificial. To increase Jesus we have to be willing to give up our preferences and desires. We have to be willing to follow Him rather than ourselves. I hope that we are willing to do whatever it takes, not only in our lives, but in our church, too, to see Jesus increased. Being sacrificial means laying everything on the altar and saying, “Use me however you want.” It means that we die to ourselves on a daily basis. It means that it is no longer we who live, but Christ who lives in us.

This morning, ask yourself a question, “Am I increasing Jesus or increasing myself?” Is Jesus important enough to us to lay down everything for His sake? Is He important enough for us to tell Him that we are willing to do whatever He asks or whatever it takes to make His name

known? Is our joy found in Him or something/someone else? My challenge for you this morning is to commit to increasing Jesus no matter what. There may be some here this morning who are doing exactly what they are supposed to and I would encourage you to keep increasing Jesus while decreasing yourself. For others, it isn't as though you're lost, but you know you haven't been prioritizing Jesus like you need to. There is hope and forgiveness available for that. But there are some here this morning or watching online who haven't given their lives to Jesus and I would encourage you to not continue down that path. Repent and follow Christ with your lives. Whatever the Holy Spirit is leading you to do, be obedient to Him this morning. Let's stand together as we pray.