

## The Gospel of John - #13 - 01/03/2021 - "Not Me - HIM!" John 3: 22-30

**Introduction: PIC IL-** Summary of a study done at the University of Texas. "Pride is a religion with many followers. These people wear masks. Their bragging is to cover their true identity on the altar of appearance. But behind their seeming security is a sense of incompleteness!" Many of us struggle with the right view of self as we look at what is going on in our lives, families, community and world. Today we're going to look closely at John 3: 22-30 and what John the Baptist thought of himself and, more importantly, of His Savior and Master, Jesus Christ. My prayer is that all of us will come to grips with a correct view of ourselves as the Lord sees us!

**Parallel ministries- verses 22-24** Sometime after the interview Jesus had with Nicodemus in the first part of chapter three, Jesus moves from Jerusalem to the open countryside in Judea just west of town and stayed there with his small group of disciples. This was in the same area where John the Baptist was also carrying out his God-appointed ministry of helping people repent of their sins and prepare their hearts to turn in faith to Jesus as Savior and Messiah or "the Christ". The area west of the capital city was a perfect area for water baptism because water was "plentiful" in that location. The name Aenon literally means "abounding in springs". Jesus' disciples were also baptizing in the same fashion as, and for the same goal as, John and his disciples. John 4: 2 makes it quite clear that Jesus Himself was not doing the baptisms, but it appears that way here in chapter three. The explanation is that the Lord's disciples were baptizing with His endorsement or approval. This baptism in water that the two sets of followers were engaged in was not like Christian baptism in our churches today. It clearly was a baptism of "purification" or readiness to acknowledge sin in one's life and confess that sin. Christian baptism in this church age is a command for Christians and for the purpose of identifying oneself as a believer. **IL-** I trusted Jesus as my Savior at the age of six, but I didn't get baptized in water until I was 16 because it was then, as a teenager, that I fully understood what Christian baptism is for. The scene here in verse 23 is one of willing participation in the act of purification through baptism without pressure or force. This section of the text concludes with the notation by the Apostle John that Baptizer John was free to fulfill his calling out in the Judean desert because he had not, at that time, been put in prison by King Herod. That does happen before long, and I want you to know a couple of truths about what the Gospels tell us about that incident. [Reason for the imprisonment, Herod's "party" and the beheading of John]. What we need to know now as we look at the text in front of us is that this is the last time we see or hear from John the Baptist in the Gospel of John. But relax- John is just fine with whatever God wants for him and what He has planned for the one who is merely "the voice" crying out to people around him- "make straight the way of the Lord!"- to prepare to meet the Savior- and **Jesus** takes center stage from here on out in the Apostle's record. From here on out John keeps himself out of the limelight, and let's the focus be in on Jesus. **IL-** A little country boy was out fishing with only a switch for a pole and a bent pin for a hook, but he was catching many fish. A city fellow who had spent much time fishing without any success, though he had the best of fishing equipment, came across the boy with his long string of fish, and he asked the

boy the reason of his success. The boy said, "The secret of it all is that I keep myself out of sight."

**Potential trouble- verses 25-26** What may have briefly been a contentious, boisterous argument ensues with John's disciples and some Jews over the whole issue of baptizing. The text of the ESV says "a Jew" and that probably means that this one devout Jew was spokesperson for the rest of those who questioned baptizing both Jews and Gentiles. For a card-carrying Jew, baptism was only for Gentiles who "saw the light" and seriously wanted to convert to Judaism, so for such devout religionists baptism was only for proselytes to the Jewish faith, not for those who were already children of Abraham. But John's baptism was for anyone who came to him seeking to get their hearts right so they could become children of God! But the argument turned from proselyte baptism to competition between John's disciples and those of Jesus. "They came to John" refers to John's followers from various backgrounds rather than to the Jews who were hung up on the extent of the baptisms being done. These followers were hung up on WHO was doing the "expanded" baptisms and WHAT was happening as a result. John's disciples put it bluntly- "HE is baptizing, and ALL are going to him!" Translation- "Who does He think He is competing with our master out here in the Judean wilderness? And, master, we had better do something or you are going to lose your place and position because, as we see it, ALL people are going after him!" Their use of hyperbole with that word "all" was no doubt intended to get John to his feet, to stand firm and save the day by exerting his prophetic authority. **IL-** We too often use hyperbole in our reactions with others to make a point or to make ourselves look better- phrases like, "You always..." or "You never..." and the exaggerations make the matter worse in the end! That could have happened here except that John wasn't going to be caught up in the argument! His response, in short form, was to point to THE Son of God, not to himself as if in a mirror. Had his heart not been right, this would have been a prime opportunity to gather his disciples, give them a pep talk and send them out with the goal of winning back anyone who got caught up in following Jesus. No- John WANTED them to follow Jesus! **IL-** After a performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, the audience gave the conductor, Arturo Toscanini and his orchestra a prolonged ovation. The conductor, filled with emotion, turned to his musicians and said, "I am nothing and you are nothing, but Beethoven is everything!" On a far greater level I am nothing and you are nothing- even John the Baptist was nothing, but Jesus Christ, to John, is everything!" I hope that is true for you too! John intends now to promote Jesus...

**Promoting Jesus- verses 27-29** John starts off making a simple assertion that all of us can acknowledge as true, yet we don't admit to it most of the time. The statement of fact is: "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given to him from Heaven." John knew, of course, what we know but sometimes fail to live by. We only have what we have materially, physically, emotionally and especially spiritually, because that is what God has given us. If I am gainfully employed, it is because God has given me that job. If I have money in the bank it is because God has wonderfully provided, whatever the amount may be. If I am a spiritual mentor to another brother or sister in Christ it is because God has given me that great privilege, and I

can show my gratitude to God for it by faithfully using His spiritual gifts given to me when I got saved! When our church grows it will be because Jesus said, "I will build My Church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it!" John then reminds his followers that they heard him say- "I am NOT the Christ but have been sent before Him." John did say that, almost word for word in John 1: 20 and 33. His followers had to agree- they heard that specific testimony. John was not stiffening his neck and saying, "Maybe I should confront Jesus and/or his disciples- after all- this is MY territory- they can go somewhere else! And these are MY followers, MY disciples and no one is going to steal my sheep!" But instead, John uses an analogy that makes his stance crystal clear. He speaks of being the "best man" (MY words, not his!) and of Jesus as the Bridegroom. The "friend" [HIS word] of the groom is simply happy to be at the wedding and to promote the groom and bride, to draw attention to the groom, not to himself! To put it another way- **IL-** In his classic work, "The Master's Indwelling", Andrew Murray illustrated this issue of getting self in the way when he wrote- "When a man is giving a lecture, he often uses a long pointer to indicate places on a map or chart. Do people look at the pointer? No- that only shows them a place on the map, and they do not even think of it. It might be made of fine gold, but the pointer cannot satisfy them. They want to see what the pointer is pointing at. John the Baptist was just the pointer. Jesus was who he was pointing at!" When John says, in verse 29, that "this joy of mine is now complete" he simply means that he is thankful to God for being allowed to live long enough to meet and get to know Jesus in a personal way and to promote HIM, not anyone else, including John himself! We too can know tremendous joy through a daily walk with Jesus as our Savior from sin and we can find purpose in being that "pointer" to direct others to Jesus for the same salvation WE know by faith! But we can only point people to Jesus if we have a proper self-awareness, like John the Baptist!

**Proper self-awareness-** verse 30 "He must increase, but I must decrease!" What is John getting at here? To put it another way, John was content to "work for a cause, not for applause!" His cause was to promote the Promised Messiah and tell as many as possible about Him, not to draw attention to himself! John already declared in chapter 1, verse 27, that he was, in himself, unworthy to even "untie his sandals" but that God had given him a wonderful opportunity and life calling- to direct others to the One who, alone, outranks John and everybody else because He is God in the flesh, Savior of sinners! Twice in chapter one John told those around him to look carefully at Jesus who was passing by and to think of Him as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" John could have drawn attention to himself all along the way in those early days in the desert as people flocked to check out this bearded preacher in camel-hair clothes and pockets full of roasted grasshoppers and with a sizeable jar of honey to stir in! But that was NOT where John's heart was- it all comes down to heart- passion, intention and follow-through. If I have a proper view of myself as God made and re-made me, I will draw others to Him. If my pride gets in the way, unsaved people around me will be turned off by my bragging and self-promotion and may never come to faith in the Savior's finished work. It could look like I am trying to finish His work and take credit for it besides! **IL-** Someone wrote on Facebook- "I can't brag about my love for God because I fail Him daily. But I can brag about His

love for me because He never fails! To 'decrease' means that I get smaller on life's stage and HE increases in importance on that stage and Heaven's stage too! **IL-** A Presbyterian pastor in Melbourne, Australia, introduced the well-known missionary J. Hudson Taylor to a Sunday crowd by repeatedly using terms like "great" and "wonderful", then turned the pulpit over to Hudson. He stepped into the pulpit and quietly said, "Dear friends, I am the little servant of an illustrious Master." For you and me, decreasing means recognizing my place in the plan of God. Not saying, "I am a nobody, I'm no good to anybody! I am way too sinful and unworthy"; "God can't use someone like me!" But rather saying, "I am simply a servant of my illustrious Master and I am thankful for the chance to serve Him so that HE gets all the credit and worthy attention! If John the Baptist had heard J. Hudson Taylor's statement that day, he probably would have shouted down from Heaven, "Amen, brother! Preach it!" For Jesus to increase in my life in my personal walk and before others it means that I must be perfectly comfortable being inferior to Jesus- I think we can all agree on that, right?! Self-promotion and self-preservation must go in the trash and promoting Jesus in every possible opportunity must become our sermon in shoes as we display HIS grace and glory!

**Conclusion: IL-** When Alexander Duff was home on furlough from India in 1834, he frequently visited the great missionary statesman William Carey. On his last visit before Carey died, Duff spent considerable time talking about Carey's missionary work and amazing accomplishments. Finally, Carey seemed to grow tired of it and called Duff to his bedside and said, "Just pray!" When Alexander prayed and then rose to leave the room, Carey called him back. He graciously said, "You have been speaking about Dr. Carey, Dr. Carey. When I am gone, say nothing about Dr. Carey. Speak about Dr. Carey's Savior!"

\*That is what God wants you and me to do- to speak of Christ and put Him first in everything we do and highlight Him everywhere we go. Then, and only then, will He increase- when I decrease and point to Him and turn the spotlight on Him and off from me! **"Not me- HIM!"**