



JOY IN JESUS.

“WHOEVER BELIEVES IN THE SON HAS ETERNAL LIFE;
WHOEVER DOES NOT OBEY THE SON SHALL NOT SEE LIFE,
BUT THE WRATH OF GOD REMAINS ON HIM.”

JOHN 3:36

BIG IDEA

As Jesus increases, my joy increases.

LIFE IN JESUS.

- John is written so that you might believe in Jesus.
- Believing in Jesus gives life... real life.

John 20:31 – “... these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

Jesus himself had this conversation with Nicodemus last week when Nicodemus went to him under the cover of darkness. That was a pivotal conversation where Jesus tells someone exactly what he’s about: he desires to give life. But it’s more difficult than you could imagine, not because of what it requires of us, but because it’s a call to die to self. He reveals to Nicodemus that: being religious is never enough, salvation isn’t something we can accomplish on our own, and that Scripture teaches that Jesus’ death will bring life. He tells Nicodemus that his current flesh isn’t enough, but that he needs to be born again-given life from above!

You can imagine that word may have started to spread about Jesus’ hard truth. Now remember that John is telling the story of history as it’s happening, with different characters even. Immediately after John talks about Jesus and Nicodemus, he brings us to another scene where John the Baptists’ disciples are dealing with the presence of this Jesus guy. And specifically, we read about some grumblings that are happening. John the Baptist’s boys are not too happy that Jesus is becoming more popular than John the Baptist.

Verses 25-26 details a discussion and a complaint about Jesus that they bring to John the Baptist. Really, there are two or three different aspects to this complaint, but the main gist is this... John’s boys know that he has borne witness to Jesus, but they don’t like that that means that his crowds will get bigger than John’s. Their complaint sounds a lot like my complaint when I was a kid to my mom or dad, “Look, he is baptizing, and EVERYONE is going to him.” But there’s a second aspect to the placement of this story in the book... John testified about Jesus in chapter 1, saying that he was not the Christ but that Jesus was. But since that happened, Jesus has said some pretty hard things... like the fact that he was sent from above to save those who believe in him, but anyone who doesn’t believe is condemned. It seems like the author is setting this story up to give John the Baptist an out from endorsing Jesus as the Savior.

But instead of taking the out, John the Baptist doubles down on Jesus, and memorably so. He says...

John 3:27-30 – “John answered, ‘A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease.’”

HUMILITY: TAKING JOY IN SOMEONE ELSE’S SUCCESS.

John goes beyond just telling of Jesus; here, he points to Jesus’ success and says that Jesus’ success is the basis for his joy. But catch this... he doesn’t say that Jesus’ success is the basis for his joy *even though people are leaving John to follow Jesus or in spite of the fact that John’s popularity was waning*. There’s not even the hint of sadness in John’s description. It’s actually the opposite. He is saying that people turning to

Jesus and actively looking beyond John is what makes him happy! Specifically, in this passage, I want to call your attention to two things:

- As we decrease, our joy increases.

So much of life in the kingdom of God is counter-intuitive. This is one of those times. In our world today, it is almost universally accepted that there is a direct correlation between our joy and our status or position.

Think of all the ways that message is promoted to us:

- If you get public recognition for something good you've done, then you will be more joyful.
- If you get a raise, then you will be more joyful.
- If you win that award, then you will be more joyful.
- If your parents like you better than your siblings then you will be more joyful.

Now, there's nothing inherently wrong with any of those things. In fact, I hope you are all your parents' favorite, and that you get a raise for that. **What is wrong is the thought that in order to be joyful, our status must be great or increasing.** This is why we have this whole wave of self-love techniques, where the logic goes something like this: even if no one else recognizes it, you must recognize that you are awesome and *treat yourself!* If your joy can't feed on someone else's affirmation of you, at least you can feed off of your own self-affirmation of your greatness.

But John is actually teaching something very different! His response to people choosing Jesus over himself didn't leave him with an identity crisis, a Netflix binge or Gilmore Girls, and a box of Oreos. No shade. I like that too. Instead, though, his response is a resounding, "Good!" John recognizes that his role was given to him by God, and his role is to point people to Jesus. When people go to Jesus, John is fulfilling his purpose, and takes great joy in this! He must increase, but I must decrease."

Which brings us to our next point...

- As Jesus increases, our joy increases.

John actually makes a point about our joy that is surprising. Joy for Christians is directly correlated with Jesus' fame. As he increases, as his name increases, so too does our joy. But why?

The answer is this: Jesus' voice is greater than ours, just as the bridegroom's voice is greater than the friend. Jesus' voice is the one that raises the dead; his is the voice that speaks to scattered sheep and they follow; his is the voice that speaks life into hearts of stone who then get up and follow him.¹ As Christians, we feel the joy-filled new birth that has come as a result of his voice speaking into our hearts, and we can testify to the truth that his voice is superior to ours.

2 Corinthians 4:6 – "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

He must increase, but I must decrease. And this is a good thing.

JOY'S FOUNDATION: LIFE IN JESUS.

One of the best things about this passage is that we can get in on the joy. Verses 31-34 speak to the authority of Jesus. The author of John, John the Evangelist, reiterates the point that Jesus is "above all," an affirmation of Jesus' absolute authority over all things and all people. He writes that Jesus speaks the very words of God, in the power of God, because he is God. And that all who believe in him authenticate that this is true. But here, catch this... People who say they believe in Jesus must believe in Jesus as he revealed himself, or this passage of Scripture teaches that they don't believe in Jesus at all. See, this passage says

¹ John Piper. "He Must Increase, I Must Decrease." *Desiring God*, 24 May 2009, Retrieved from <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/he-must-increase-i-must-decrease>.

that believers authenticate Jesus' claim to divine authority to give life!

He is not just a man. He not just a good person. He's not just a way to life. These first three chapters claim that Jesus is God, not man; He is God, the definition of good, not a derivative; and that life comes through faith in Him alone. This is a point that the author reiterates succinctly and powerfully in verses 35-36.

John 3:35-36 – “The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”

Here's how we can enter into joy: believe in Jesus. Rid yourself of the idea that you can earn God's love. Jesus has already earned it for you. Rid yourself of the idea that there's another way to joy, another god who can save, or that there's no god at all. Instead, look to Jesus, believe in Him, and enter into the abundant life he offers right now. And this is the gospel: that man are all rebels against God's created order and design. We would rather rule than be led by God. We are at war with God, and as such, we are the objects of his wrath. But the Bible teaches that he loves us, and allows us to enter into relationship with God by faith in Jesus Christ. For those of us believe in him, Jesus died a rebel's death so that we could live the life of a Son.

Your call today is to believe in Jesus and experience the joy that comes from losing yourself in worship of Christ!

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Is your joy self-dependent or Jesus-dependent?
2. Where in your life do you need to decrease by seeing Jesus increase?
3. Have you experienced the joy Jesus offers to those who believe in him?