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He Must Increase

The Gospel of John: Why Should I Believe? · Week 11 · November 22, 2026

Scripture:

John 3:22–36

Big idea: Jesus is above all, so step out of the center and let Him take it.

Memory verse (all ages): John 3:30 — "He must increase, but I must decrease."

MOTIVATION (WHY YOU NEED THIS)

How do you respond when someone else gets the attention, the credit, or the following you once had?

Everyone has lived a version of this…

- A coworker gets the promotion you worked for
- A new person everyone suddenly wants on their team
- A friend whose life looks better than yours every time you open your phone

It hurts because we assume the story is about us – we are the center!

Nobody says that out loud, but we feel it the moment someone else has the spotlight.

John the Baptist's disciples are feeling this in our passage today…

- A few weeks ago, we saw that John's whole job was to point people to Jesus
- It worked, but now the crowds are leaving John and going to Jesus
- His disciples aren't happy about it: *"…He is baptizing, and all are going to him"*

John's answer to them is one of the shortest and hardest sentences in the Bible: *"He must increase, but I must decrease."*

Today we're going to see what it looks like to step out of the center so Jesus can take it, and why ***who is at the center of your life decides everything.***

INFORMATION (WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW)

Before we jump in, let's get our geographical bearings… SHOW MAP

- Jesus and His disciples left Jerusalem for the Judean countryside, where they were baptizing people (the disciples baptizing and Jesus overseeing)

  John 3:22 (ESV) After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing.

- John is still doing kingdom work by baptizing people at Aenon near Salim

  John 3:23 (ESV) John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized **24** (for John had not yet been put in prison).

The ministry of John the Baptist (in contrast to Jesus' ministry) …

- **An attitude of competition arises within John's disciples**

  John 3:25 (ESV) Now a discussion *[argument]* arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. **26** And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him."

  ✓ We won't speculate on the dispute itself, but it led John's disciples to be unsettled in his dwindling popularity compared to Jesus

  ✓ The disciples of John the Baptist are really trying to discern who has the greater authority, or who is superior – John or Jesus

  "In their minds John is still the superior leader. Jesus owes everything to John, and yet he's stealing John's followers." – Christ-Centered Exposition Comm.

- **John corrects his disciples' thinking and is careful to point them to Jesus**

  ✓ John makes it clear that he is not the Messiah – Jesus is

  John 3:27 (ESV) John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. **28** You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.'"

  ✓ John makes it clear that he was only sent to prepare the way for the Messiah, and there is joy in John's mission and the appearance of the Messiah

  John 3:29 (ESV) "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."

  The friend of the bridegroom was the best man: his joy was seeing the wedding happen. – Summarized from the MacArthur Study Bible

  ✓ John the Baptist's most poignant words are central to his response

  John 3:30 (ESV) "He must increase, but I must decrease."

  Why? John the writer explains…

  o Jesus was sent from heaven and is above all things

  John 3:31 (ESV) He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all.

  o Jesus speaks the words of God

  John 3:34 (ESV) For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. **35** The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand.

  If Jesus is above all, then what you do with him decides everything.

- **John the writer calls everyone to believe in the name of Jesus, or face God's full wrath on sin (now and for eternity)**

  Everyone spends forever somewhere…

  ✓ Those who believe have eternal life with the Lord

  John 3:36 (ESV) 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.

√ Those who don't believe spend eternity separated from God in the lake of fire

Revelation 20:15 (NLT) And anyone whose name was not found recorded in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire.

APPLICATION (WHAT YOU NEED TO DO)

We're three chapters into John's Gospel and one thing should be clear: **Jesus is worthy of being the center of your life.** In Him there is joy (John found it) and there is life eternal (v. 36).

So, step out of the center…

- Never believed in Jesus? Today is the day to believe
- Never been baptized? Make your faith public through baptism

Already following Jesus?

- Identify one place where you are fighting for the center (work, home, ministry)
- Step back from it, and do it with John's joy, and with Christ at the center

Homework: pray John 3:30 every day: ***"He must increase, but I must decrease."***

When Jesus is at the center, we decrease, and He increases in us and in others.