

“We Must Decrease” - John 3:22-36

Please Stand and Open Your Bibles to Matthew 3

I had you read this to give us some context for this story of John the Baptist that is unique to John's Gospel. It will also be the last time we hear about him until a couple of mentions in the book of Acts. And for the topic of the day, I believe it is not only fitting but on purpose by the Holy Spirit. But first let us remind ourselves why John wrote his gospel...

John 20:30-31

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

And as we learned last week what that life looks like...

John 3:7-8

“Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ 8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

John's gospel has more instruction of the work of Holy Spirit in the life of a believer than anywhere else. Why? Because salvation is all a work of God! None of it is of your doing. But Jesus likened it to wind blowing through the trees. We can see the branches moving and the leaves rustling. That is how we can tell it is there. The Holy Spirit is God working in the affairs of Men and Women to bring them to the Cross of Jesus Christ. And then after that He moves into the life of the new convert conforming them into the image of Jesus Christ.

Some of our stories are going to show some of the ways that happens. Once one commits himself to Jesus Christ. Receives the forgiveness of all their sins through the work that Jesus did. He will be "Born Again". This is where the Holy Spirit of God works in and through you changing you from the inside out. Today we will see that in the testimony of John the Baptist as there are some who try to appeal to his flesh and get him to succumb to envy.

Today's story is a parenthetical between Jesus's trip to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover and his going up to Galilee in chapter 4 via Samaria.

John 3:22

After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized.

Now in chapter 4 it will tell us it was His disciples that are doing the baptizing. Did Jesus baptize people? It would seem at the beginning He did until he would commission His disciples to do it. But what we see is at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry that they spent some time in Judea. It was at this time that we pick up the story of today...

John 3:23-24

Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized. 24 For John had not yet been thrown into prison.

We are not told the exact spot Jesus and His disciples were but up north of them John was still baptizing and pointing people to Jesus. Remember John's Baptism was only pointing to Christ and Christ has come. But John's ministry will end and it will not be a good ending as he will be arrested by Herod. Why? Because he tells him the truth! What will be his reward for that? It will cost him his life! Are you willing to tell the truth even if it will cost you your life? What about your freedom? Many pastors today stay away from anything that might cost them something. They did it with Covid. They did it with the

Alphabet Mafia. They are doing it with Israel. Now that we have a window of freedom do you think they won't do it again? I would rather be alone in the wilderness with John than in the palace with those that will turn on you in a minute.

What we are about to see is I think John knows his ministry is about to die, and guess what? He is OK with it. How do I know if someone is not OK with it? How they deal with envy. Churches with a name that are clinging to a brand, but God wants to move somewhere else. What do they do? Get defensive. Or with false humility try to make their brand sound better. Rely on the good ole days. God moved this way back then so that is the only way He will move! Another one of the problems in the church is Pragmatism. If it works, it must be of God. Look at that church down the street how much they are growing! We need to be doing what they are so we can grow too! Don't you want to thrive and be radiant? Look at the dynasty they are building! Lol, a play on words. But the truth is I don't want to be like anyone, but what Jesus wants us to be. Actually, we don't need more of anything but Him! But sometimes doing a work of God in the will of God requires us to not look at numbers or to be distracted by what others are doing. The temptation to envy is always there! Notice what happens next...

John 3:25

Then there arose a dispute between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purification.

Notice first a dispute. The Jews had rejected John's ministry and were trying to find a way to disrupt it. John taught a baptism of repentance. A change of mind about how to get right with God by putting your faith and trust in the Messiah Who is to come. The Jews taught a need for ceremonial cleansing that needed to be performed over and over again.

Mark 7:3-4

For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches.

People always want to argue about the way things are done. They did it to John, they did it to Jesus, they will do it to you!

2 Timothy 2:14-17

Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who

does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer.

And if they can't get you to argue they will deflect to get you to envy!

John 3:26

And they came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified— behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!”

Look at what Jesus is doing! They are baptizing more than you! What are you going to do about that!

(Talk a little about the pressures for growth and demographics that happened to us)

Look at the numbers over there! Boy you all must be doing something wrong. I even heard a pastor say that if your church is not getting bigger and bigger you are dead and need revival. Wow. That is totally wrong! If it only took 12 people to change the world you think God needs a big church? Beware of envy!

James 3:13-16

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.

The wisdom that James is talking about is shown in the way John the Baptist replies...

John 3:27

John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven..."

Until you realize that ministry is not something that is taught or trained for but a calling from God you will never have knowledge that you are in the perfect will of God. You will always be second guessing yourself and thinking everyone else is doing it better. Beware of this as it will lead to bitter envy! But when we know we have been called by God and are willing to stand alone and do just what we have been told to do, we have the same confidence that John has here. Because God called me to do something, it is up to Him to for results. If it was any

other way I would receive the glory. That is another danger to look out for...

John now will explain his ministry and calling...

John 3:28-29

“...You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent before Him.’ 29 He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled...”

Listen guys I already told you what my ministry is and we are doing it. You got to love the wedding language he uses here! Make a note of that as the bible is very clear that you and I are the Bride of Christ! But what John is saying is “I’m the best man and once the wedding begins all I can do is rejoice” After the ceremony the best man’s job is done. He did what he was supposed to and will be remembered for that. Some of us have a calling that will never be noticed this side of heaven. It might be caring for a special needs child. It may be an old folk’s home ministry. It may be just witnessing to people one on one all by yourself. Maybe you are just a prayer warrior, or God has blessed you financially and all you can do is give. Guess what?

One day you will be just as happy as John is at this point because you will hear the bridegroom's voice say...

Matthew 25:23

“Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord.”

And faithfulness is not caring what others are doing but what God wants you to do. And the key to that is the right attitude...

John 3:30

“...He must increase, but I must decrease...”

Is your attitude to see Jesus glorified or to see your thing succeed? What if someone else takes something you started and succeeds with it? This church and what we are doing has a thirty-year history that kept it going so we could do what we do. My desire is to do what God wants, to glorify Himself, and not what someone else wants. I am not trying to keep a brand name going if God wants to do something else. We need to decrease and He needs to increase. Why? So, He gets all the glory! That is what John alludes to next...

John 3:31-35

“...He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. 32 And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. 33 He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true. 34 For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure. 35 The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand...”

John understands that Jesus is God and all authority has been given to Him. And even if no one will receive the message it will still be done. A real Spirit-filled ministry will always glorify Jesus and seek only His glory. We don't care about numbers. We don't care about demographics. We don't care about money. We don't care about how many clicks we get. We don't care what people say about us. We don't care about a brand. We only care if Jesus is high and lifted up and being glorified from the pulpit and into and through people's lives. How can we tell if that is the case? By the way the message is taught!

John 3:36

“...He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

Oh, many are proclaiming the first part but leaving out the rest. It is one thing to tell everyone that God loves them. This is true. But what will happen to those that refuse the message? They have the wrath of God abiding on them! This is a message that no one wants to talk about. We try to clean it up by saying stupid things like “Hate the sin, but love the sinner” Is God going to judge sin or sinners when He returns? Sin was judged on the cross and those that reject the message are going to be Judged!

Isaiah 13:9

Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, To lay the land desolate; And He will destroy its sinners from it.

A church that is glorifying God is a church that is warning a lost world to flee from the wrath to come! But this only comes when we decrease and He increases in our lives and ministry. Are we going to stay true to God’s word or our feelings? Are we looking for a pad on the back or accolades or God’s glory in our lives?

Philippians 2:14-16

Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among

whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

John is pointing to Christ and we are too. Don't worry about what others are doing and only do what God is calling you to do. And all this comes back to the message we heard last week...

John 3:16-17

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

And if you reject this message, you will suffer the wrath of God for all eternity. You don't have too. God made a way and it is now up to you to believe.