

Having a Great Life

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John 3:22-30

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So it's true that every Christian is a minister. Every Christian has a ministry. The issue is never do you have a ministry? The issue is always what is the ministry you should be doing? Because you have one. Ephesians 4:16, each of us has a part to play so that the church functions properly. When someone is saved, 1 Corinthians 12, we are given a gift. But gifts are not skills or talents or passions, spiritual gifts are ministries. They're given to bless other people. So it's not life or ministry. What it truly is, is all of life is ministry. You are saved to serve. Your life, my life, our lives are being used to minister to other people. That's not just ministry in a local church or a nonprofit, but it's in our homes among our family and friends, with our neighbors, coworkers, other students, everyone.

Our text today is not about what your ministry is, our text is about how, how to do your ministry that drives the motivations, the hard attitudes that should mark every Christian's life whether your ministry is on staff at a church, volunteering at a church, serving in some other ministry outside of the church. What should mark your life whether your ministry is at home with your kids, at your place of employment, at your school, with neighbors on your block. Today we're going to see how to do this in the life and words of John the Baptist.

Now some little nerd moment background stuff before we get into the text. First one is this, John the Baptist did not write the book of John. John the Baptist is different than the guy who wrote this book, even though they're both named John. This is John the writer, John the apostle. Second, the life and ministry of John the Baptist is a transition. So he's the last Old Testament prophet. He's the overlap between the Old Testament and the New Testament, between Jesus being predicted and the prophecies of Jesus being fulfilled. He is the link between the king is coming and the king is here. Third, if you're familiar with Matthew, Mark and Luke, the events that we've been looking at from John 2 all the way through John 4, these are not in Matthew, Mark and Luke. All three of those books start their accounts of Jesus ministry after John the Baptist is already in jail. But we just read about John the Baptist doing ministry so that hasn't happened yet. Mark 1:14 puts it this way, after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel.

So what John's been showing us since Chapter 2 verse 1, is that Jesus had a ministry of around a year before his ministry in Galilee began, which is where those three books start. And what we see here is that between Jesus' baptism and John the Baptist going to jail, both men are preaching and baptizing at the same time. So Jesus is in the south and John the Baptist is in the north. That's the setting here before Jesus goes into the north into Galilee and does the things that we're very familiar with from the other books. We see this dual ministry beginning starting in verse 22. After this, Jesus and his disciples went into the Judea countryside and he remained there with them and was baptizing. Notice John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim because water was plentiful there and people were coming and being baptized. He was able to do that, verse 24, for John had not yet been put in prison.

So verse 22, Jesus leaves Jerusalem with his disciples. They go out into the rural parts of the area to the countryside it says, they stay there for... it could be as long as six months... living, preaching, baptizing. And notice 22, 23, baptism mentioned three times. Now baptism means being immersed, dunked completely underwater. If you watched our baptism service last weekend, you saw me have trouble with one guy and I took my hand and I pushed his head like under the water because that's what baptism is. Total immersion. This baptism is not Christian baptism like the Book of Acts or what we do here. This baptism was symbolic of spiritual cleansing, of forgiveness of sins. Getting people ready to see the Messiah. That's what John the Baptist came to do. That was his job, to tell people the king is coming, you need to get your hearts ready, get baptized, cleanse yourself because the king is almost here.

If you've ever seen the queen show up to parliament, before she arrives in her carriage, you know what happens? There are these trumpeters that stand up somewhere up in Westminster and they're blowing their trumpets telling everybody there the queen has arrived. Well that's John the Baptist. He arrives on the scene to say Jesus, the King, the Messiah, he's here. That was his entire mission, make sure people come to Jesus. And he succeeded in that mission. John 10:42 says, quote, "Many people believed in Jesus through John the Baptist." Now if I had that on my tombstone, I'd be overjoyed. Many people believed in Jesus through him. So for about a year, Jesus has this small obscure but now growing ministry in the south. John the Baptist finds a place up north, we see in verse 23, Aenon near Salim. No one is a hundred percent sure where that is today. We know it's up north, but that's about it. But it's a place, notice, where water was plentiful. Why? Well, because there were a lot of people and because he had to dunk them all the way under the water so he needed a lot of water. Now, Chapter 1, last piece of background, John the Baptist had his followers, but in Chapter 1, we saw him say, "Behold the Lamb, behold the Lamb. Hey, you guys need to follow him now. My job here is done because the King has arrived." Well, we saw people follow him, like Andrew, but some of them didn't and that's the people in verse 25.

Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. So this is kind of a debate that starts with John's disciples and some Jewish guy we know nothing about. We do know from literature at the time that purification was a big deal for Jews of that day. So maybe they hit a live wire in this guy and they're talking back and forth. But at some point, the text isn't clear how exactly, but it seems the conversation seems to shift to a competition between John baptizing people in the north and this Jesus guy baptizing people in the south. The text strongly suggests that these disciples were jealous. Jealous that a guy that John the Baptist promoted had become bigger than John the Baptist himself. Notice verse 26, they don't even say Jesus' name. And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan." "Well, there were thousands." "The guy that you bore witness, look, he is baptizing and all are going to him. His ministry's becoming more popular than yours. This isn't right. He doesn't even have a ministry without you boss." They didn't like that their rabbi, their master, is now second place to this Jesus guy.

They saw John the Baptist and Jesus as rivals, competitors. They'd become bitter and jealous and competitive with Jesus. They're defending the honor of their beloved teacher and John the Baptist would have none of it at all. He was about to teach them a lesson about life lived in light of the greatest person to ever live. How do you live knowing that there's not a chance that you could accomplish anything that would even approach the greatness of Jesus? What do you do when you're a follower of Jesus, you know he's real, he exists, how do you live knowing that this

great person exists out there and you're never going to be him? Well, John the Baptist shows us how starting in verse 27. John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven." It doesn't bother John the Baptist in the least that like at sunrise the star of his ministry is fading away while the sun is rising on Jesus' ministry. It doesn't bother him at all. In fact, end of verse 29, it's his joy.

Amazingly, think about it, despite thousands that are flocking to him, listening to his preaching, telling all their friends you've got to come see this guy there's something amazing about him. John the Baptist remains humble. This should mark every Christian and especially every Christian leader. Humility is key. He actually rebukes his followers, verse 27, with a general principle they probably knew and agreed with, that God is Sovereign, that he is in control. Notice he gives us everything we have. How many things? Not even one thing that we have that he didn't give us. This isn't King Nebuchadnezzar looking out at his kingdom and saying, "Look at everything I've done." No, that's insanity. John the Baptist here, humble, clear, God's hand his fingerprints are all over this thing. As far as my ministry goes, he's saying, God gave it to me. This is his will and in that he is satisfied. In other words, what was making his followers jealous that Jesus' popularity was growing, John is saying not only should you see this as God's will, but this shouldn't make you jealous. This should make you joyful.

So what can we learn from this response? How about this, point #1) ***Stay Satisfied With What God's Given You. Stay Satisfied With What God's Given You.*** Contentment, trust in the Lord, humility, that marks a child of God. Someone who trusts in the Lord, that he's in control of all things, who is satisfied that he's giving me exactly what he wants for me when he wants it for me, that's what we see here in the life of John the Baptist. Philippians 4:11 talks about learning, quote, "In whatever situation I'm in, to be content." And I know that's not the easiest thing for us especially when commercials exist to fan the flames of discontentment in our hearts. But can you take a step back and honestly look at what God's given you and say with John the Baptist, I do not even have one thing that wasn't given to me from God, and that's enough? Or are you on the constant comparison train? The never-ending sizing up everyone around you to measure up or to fall short. If you measure up that breeds pride, if you don't it breeds discontentment. It breeds entitlement, resentment, frustration, even a lack of trust that God is good. I mean, think about it. These disciples are tempting John the Baptist to resentment, to resent Jesus. But if we're not careful these disciples might be living in our heads saying the same stuff to us too. Why is that guy doing that? Why does she get to do that? Why is his ministry going? Or like these folks, why are all the people going to him? Why does he get to do the good stuff? Why does she have so much influence? Why did they get to get married and not me? Why didn't I get the promotion? Why don't I have that stuff? Why do they have it and not me? Why, why, why me?

We forget that God is in complete control over the life that we have, the ministry we have, the influence we have. Deuteronomy 8:17 and 18 says that even our bank accounts are given to us and we should, quote, "Beware," if we ever start to think that we have what we have because of us instead of him. Now I know in talking about God's control of all things and being satisfied in that, I know that can cause us to wonder about the bad stuff, the hard stuff, even the tragic stuff in our lives. And it's not a platitude. That is where Romans 8:28 comes in, that God is working all things, the good, the bad, all of that. He is working all of it for good, good as he sees it. Good as he defines it. And then there's Genesis 50:20 which says even the evil things that people mean to do to us, the evil things people intend to do to us, again, brought into our lives for good. Let me put it this way, if all God ever did was give you salvation, if that was it, if he didn't give you

one good thing at all after that, he loves you infinitely because he gave you the one that is the source of his infinite joy, which is his son. If like Job everything is taken from you, your wealth, your family, your health, if all of that is taken from you and me, but we still have Christ, again, God loves us infinitely. The ultimate thing he could give you is his son. Let's stay satisfied in him no matter what. And in all the lesser things too, let's stay satisfied, trusting, remaining content and even grateful for all that God has given us. Because if we're honest, he's given us a ton. Hasn't he? And instead of I should have that too, like a spoiled child, this isn't good enough give me more, no, let's stay satisfied with what he's given us. Well, let's see how John the Baptist continues to talk to his disciples.

Verse 28, "You yourselves bear me witness. You know I said this, I am not the Christ but have been sent before him." This is a rebuke. After all that time, after all this preaching, you guys were there, after a year potentially, John the Baptist's disciples don't understand him or the mission God gave him. He is a man under orders. He's been given a job to do and it wasn't to be the focus. It wasn't to be the one that all the people were flocking to. In fulfillment of Isaiah 40:3, Malachi 3:1, he was to arrive before the Messiah, announce that he is coming, get people ready for his arrival, and that was it. Verse 28, this is what God sent him to do. Those were his orders, nothing else.

So what can you and I learn from John the Baptist's response to his disciples? Point #2) ***Appreciate That You Get To Be The Lord's Servant. Appreciate, you and me, we get to be the Lord's servant.*** Appreciate, actually be amazed, stand in awe that the God of the universe, the one who creates and sustains all things, has grabbed you and said you're going to be one of my people. You're going to be one of my servants. We get to be his servant. God has stuff to accomplish here and he's chosen you to do it. Ephesians 2:10, "God saved you," quote, "for good works that he prepared beforehand that you would walk in them, that you would do them." See the word servant is used for Christians in the New Testament far more than the word child or disciple or friend or any other title for that matter. The Bible says where we're servants of God, servants of Christ, servants of the gospel, servants of the church, we are gifted to serve others with those gifts. Matthew 23:11 is clear. Quote, "The greatest among you," the top of the heap, the apex, the number one person, "shall be your servant." Honestly, I think many of us get into the mindset that God should appreciate that he gets to be our servant. Now, why do I say that? Because when things don't turn out the way we want, when our life starts to diminish like John the Baptist, we don't respond like John the Baptist did with joy. No, we get angry. We get entitled. We start demanding that God do things for us or we're out of here like he's our servant and what he wants better be what we want or there's going to be a problem. The only problem is forgetting who it is that we're speaking to. Jesus is the Lord so we're his servants who do what he says. Jesus is King so we are his subjects.

Think about that word, subjects who are subject to his will and his ways. Jesus is the master, the despotize, according to 2 Peter Chapter 2. So, we are his slaves. No will of our own. Is that how you think of yourself? I exist to do what Jesus wants subject to what he says with the goal being that I want what I want matches exactly what he wants and about which I will give an account to him one day. We like to complicate it, make it all a bunch of other stuff, but I'm becoming more and more convinced that the Christian life can be summarized with just four words. Do what you're... what? Told. Do what you're told. What if I don't want to? Do what you're told. What if I don't feel like it? Do what you're told. What if everybody else is doing something else? Do what you're told. Now that makes sound harsh, but remember the point, this comes from a heart of

appreciation that you get to be connected to the God of the universe, the one who died and rose again so that you'd be saved from the wrath you so richly deserve for all of your sins. The one who came so that you would enjoy eternal life when you give your life to him. More than a harsh do what you're told, this creates a I get to do what the king of love tells me to do. I get to do what I'm told because of God's great love for me, because of Jesus' great sacrifice for my sin, I happily deeply desire to do what I'm told. Now, John the Baptist further describes what these guys missed with an analogy. Verse 29, "The one who has the bride is the bride groom. The friend of the bride groom who stands and hears him rejoices greatly at the bride groom's voice. Therefore, this joy of mine, now that the bride groom is here, this joy of mine is now complete." So John the Baptist sees himself as the friend of the groom, kind of like our best man, but not really. See the friend of the groom in this culture was largely responsible for the entire wedding. I've done a ton of weddings and I'm not sure there was a single best man that I would trust to do all of the wedding.

In Israel he planned the wedding, he got the invitations to the guests, he presided over the reception and his most important job was getting the bride ready to be married to the groom. So along with others, he assisted her. He made sure she was clean and dressed and ready to meet the groom on their wedding day. He would then escort her from her father's house with her entourage over to the new house where the groom lived and where the wedding would be. And when he arrives with her, it would just be her and him, the friend of the groom, and he would wait until he heard the voice of the groom and when he heard the voice of the groom, he would bring the two of them together and then he would walk away. He wouldn't be sitting there going, "Oh bummer, I wish I was still there with those two." He would be excited the wedding is going to begin and I got to bring them together and now they're going to get married, my job is done. John the Baptist had one job, get people to Jesus, and then he's out. He wasn't the focus.

I mean, think about it. If one of those heralds announcing the queen is arriving to the parliament, if he's playing his trumpet while the queen is there, she's already standing there, all the other guys are done but he's still going at it. You'd be like there's something wrong with you. You're not supposed to be doing that. And that's the idea here. I brought the people to Jesus, that was my job. It's my time to disappear. All of that means John the Baptist was not a rival to Jesus, he's his friend. He happily willingly fades out of the picture so that the people's focus would rightly be where? On Jesus, not him. What a wonderful picture where Christians, point #3) ***Enjoy Not Being the Focus. Enjoy Not Being the Focus***, not being the center of attention. That's a good thing. Be more planet than sun. Everything and everyone does not need to revolve around you to be happy. That's what we see in John the Baptist, but is it really impossible to enjoy not being the focus when life and the world and our sinful hearts all scream I will only be happy if everybody focuses on me and what I want? Being the focus, being the center of attention, being seen in all your greatness and everyone else, everything, revolving around you, that in the Bible is summarized by the word glory. Glory is honor and fame and greatness. And listen, in light of all that Jesus is and all that he did, we deserve none of that. Every single one of us, we deserve none of that. It all belongs to him.

Psalm 29 starts with these words, "Give God the glory, the honor, the attention," quote, "that he is due." It is not a gift to give him glory. He is due that because of who he is. Psalm 1:15 starts with a contrast, it says, "Not to us," and then repeats for emphasis, "Not to us, but to your name, give glory." Why? It continues, "Because of all that God is and all that he's done." In fact, the most mundane things that you and I do are meant to be done to the glory of God. First

Corinthians 10:31, "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all for the glory of God." All attention all the time goes to him. And notice the end of verse 29, John the Baptist's joy was in not being the focus. Could it be that joy is found not when people focus on you, but when God uses you to focus other people on Jesus? Could it be that's where joy is found?

There were missionaries in the 1700s who would actually sell themselves into slavery. They did that so that they could preach to the slaves and they did that so that they would preach the gospel wherever those ships ended up. And in order to encourage one another in this, they would tell each other preach the gospel, die, and be forgotten, which is so against our make an impact that lasts forever kind of world. Why? Because we forget that this story of Jesus started way before we were born. It's been carried along by millions who are now gone. Even the greatest Christians who have ever lived and will ever live, they're going to die too. But Christianity is going to continue on well after all of us in this room are in heaven.

John the Baptist knew his life and ministry was not about him. It was all about Jesus because only he will last when all the rest of us are dead and gone. All of history, all of life is about him. And when the Messiah came, John the Baptist is like my job is done. I enjoyed, I got to do what I got to do, I got to point people to the only one that matters. He didn't clutch onto this and go, "No, all of you have to stay here and focus on me because it's really about me." No, it's not. He never forgot who God is. He's the Lord of heaven and earth and in control of all things. He never forgot that I get to be his servant and he never forgot what he was supposed to do, point everyone away from himself into Jesus. He was never to be the focus. And not only was he just fine with that, again, end of verse 29, not being the focus was his joy. All he wanted for people was to follow Jesus and when they did that, he was happy. It wasn't about following him and continuing to follow him and keeping his impact and seeing it grow and advance and spread all over the place. No, it was about making sure Jesus is seen clearly so that people come to him. He wasn't going to be the moon eclipsing the sun. He just wanted to see thousands and thousands come to Christ and that was all that matters. You want to talk about a legacy, there's a lot of talk today about building your legacy. There is no greater legacy than what we see in John the Baptist going, "Hey, it's not about me. It's about him." Why? Because one day all reality will recognize that all of reality is really all about Christ anyway. It's that famous line, only one life will soon be passed, only what's done for me will last. Right? No, only what's done for Christ will last.

This brings us to maybe the most humble words ever spoken. Verse 30, "*He must increase, but I must decrease.*" No leader says that, right? It's all about the win-win. He must increase and I must increase. I must increase and he'll increase with me. When I increase I'll bring him along so we can increase together. Not John the Baptist. John the Baptist did not see Jesus as a means to his end, as a means to his fulfillment, as a means to his focus. His goal was never to displace his master, only to display him in all his greatness and goodness so people look away from him and look to Christ. Jesus' ministry was growing because he's doing miracles, but it's growing because John the Baptist is looking out to thousands of people and going, "You need to follow that guy, not me." Why? Because you don't keep candles lit when the electricity comes back on or the sun comes up. Right? You blow out the candles. You don't need them anymore. Why? Because the greater light has come. He's not out there trying to obscure Jesus. He's like I need to get out of the way so that you see Jesus. I'm not the one that deserves honor and glory, he's saying, I'm not the one who came here is going to die and rise again, Savior and Lord. He's the star of the show. All of us, even the very best of us, even John the Baptist, all of the well-known Christians ever in

history, we're just all extras. And it's never good when the extra tries to steal the show from the star.

So what is John the Baptist saying here? I think it's this, point #4) ***we need to Practice Self-Demotion Regularly. Practice Self-Demotion.*** Did you accidentally write self-promotion? Self-demotion. Yearning for recognition, for applause, for attention, even for celebrity, it's sin. And yet John the Baptist had all of it. Right? Thousands flocking to him, thousands wanting him to baptize him. Thousands listening to his every word. People admiring him. People wanting to be baptized by him. He was a celebrity and yet no one had to say it to him. God didn't need to show up and rebuke him and say you're getting too big for your britches you need to bring it down a bit. He's going to increase, you're going to decrease, deal with it. That's not what happens. He already knows it. He knows God's will. He knew, notice, that it must take place. And that's because growth for the Christian is always growth downward. Right? Downward in our estimation of ourselves. Downward in our humility. Downward in obedience. Downward in glory seeking. Downward in attention seeking.

I had one guy tell me at the door after the last service, he said it's like a tree, the deeper and farther down the roots grow the stronger and taller the tree gets. I said that's exactly it. It's exactly it. The more he goes up, we go down. And that's not just good, that is the best thing for us. Why? because we don't deserve to be up. We didn't create the universe. We didn't leave heaven to save sinners from God's wrath, but he did. And a whole lot more he did, which means that a verse like verse 30 should be our prayer. Jesus, you increase in my life and through my life. And since I'm going to get in the way of that, decrease me, help me decrease. Few verses are a greater model for life in ministry than this one. Nothing is about people seeing you, appreciating you, getting your attention and focus and accolades, none of that matters. It should all instantly be redirected. Think about the apostle Paul, 30 years into being a Christian, 1 Timothy Chapter 1, he still remembers how unworthy he is that he would have anything to do with Jesus let alone be an apostle. He says I am unworthy to be called an apostle. 1 Corinthians 15:10, he says, "I am what I am." All the ministry, all the things that I'm doing, the people getting saved, the revivals that happen, everywhere I go, "I am what I am by the grace of God." And that's it. All the greatness belongs to him. All the glory, all the fame, all the honor belongs to him. The goal is that people are attached to him not to us.

Another lady last night at the door, she goes, "Pastor, it's like this. We should live our lives while being noticed as little as possible and hopefully not at all, just like a good pair of underwear." Okay. So go be a good pair of underwear so people don't see you. They see how wonderful Jesus is through your life so the honor stays with him where it belongs.

I want to end by turning you to Matthew Chapter 11. Matthew Chapter 11, if you got a Bible from one of our ushers, Matthew 11 is on page 905. 905. Jesus is rebuking the crowds for getting caught up in the hysteria of John the Baptist ministry, all the pomp and circumstance, all the people, all the stuff, he's rebuking them for getting caught up in all of that but actually ignoring his message. This was to their shame because verse 11, Jesus says, "Truly, I say to you," Matthew 11:11, "among those born of women, there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist." Did you catch that? According to Jesus, there has never been a greater person on the planet than John the Baptist. He lived the greatest life. He had the greatest ministry. And the greatest one, the truly greatest one that's ever lived, the Lord Jesus Christ looked at him and said you are the greatest human being to ever live. The question is, why is he so great? And the answer is our text today. It's because a great life is defined by humility. A great life is satisfied

with God's will. A great life is amazed that we get to be God's servants. It shuns the focus being on me. It regularly practices self-demotion. It was great for him to decrease so that more people would see Jesus. That is a great life. And since all of life is ministry, that is a great ministry. Being people who refuse to seek glory and attention for ourselves, but instead use our lives and pray that God would use our lives wherever it is that we find ourselves to bring glory to the only one that truly matters, the Lord Jesus Christ. When people seeing him is all that matters to us, that is a truly great life. Let's pray.

Jesus, realign our hearts, realign our hearts to live these truths. There's a lot in this text about John the Baptist, but Jesus, it all centers around humility. Father, you say that you are opposed to the proud but you give grace to the humble. You tell us to humble ourselves under your mighty hand, that we may exalt you in due time, that you may exalt us in due time. Would you please help us to embrace and love and cherish humility, because as we get out of the way people see Christ and he is all that matters. Our great God and Savior, it's in his name I pray. Amen.