

## Sunday September 17, 2023 | John 3:22-36

The gospel of John is unique in the stories and details that it shares with us. As the gospel started, the nature of Jesus is explained. (1:1) “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” John the Baptist has declared to us that Jesus is (1:29) “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” We have seen Jesus call His first disciples and perform His first miracle by turning the water into wine. John then shares with us how Jesus cleansed the temple in Jerusalem. While in Jerusalem Jesus explained to Nicodemus what it meant to be born again. These stories help fill in the details as to how Jesus’ public ministry started. Up to this point John the Baptist has had the more influential and larger ministry. This morning we will see that change.

### John 3:22-36 ESV

- (22) **After this** Jesus and His disciples went into the **Judean countryside**, and He remained there with them and was baptizing.
- (23) 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).**
- (25) Now a discussion 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.”
- (27) 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.’
- (29) 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.
- (30) He must increase, but I must decrease.”
- (31) 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.
- (32) He bears witness to what He has seen and heard, yet no one receives His testimony.
- (33) Whoever receives His testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true.
- (34) 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.
- (36) 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.

This section begins with “After this” and is referring to Jesus’ time in Jerusalem and His conversation with Nicodemus. Jesus leaves the city and heads out into the Judean Countryside. As they are out their His disciples start baptizing people. John will go out of his way at the beginning of chapter 4 to let us know that Jesus did not baptize anyone.

### John 4:2 ESV

- (2) (although Jesus Himself did not baptize, but only His disciples),

At the same time John the Baptist is at Aenon near Salim. Aenon means springs, and verse 22 tells us there was plenty of water there.

Now we have Jesus with His disciples and John the Baptist both out baptizing people and drawing crowds. These dueling ministries are only shown in the gospel of John. He makes sure we know in verse 24, that John has not been put in prison yet. The other gospels do not tell us much about Jesus public ministry until after John the Baptist is put in prison.

### **Mark 1:14-15 ESV**

(14) **Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee**, proclaiming the gospel of God,  
 (15) and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

Mark leaves out Jesus’ time in the **Judean countryside**, and jumps immediately to His **Galilean** ministry. When John the Baptist is put in prison, Jesus becomes the prominent teacher of the day. Jesus extends the message of John the Baptist for a season, offering the Kingdom to the Jews. The gospel of John lets us know that this period of transition was difficult for some of the followers of John the Baptist, but we will see this morning that John understood his role.

### **John 3:25-26 ESV**

(25) Now a discussion 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.**”

John the Baptists’ disciples get in an “discussion” the word means **debate, argument, controversy**, with a Jew over purification. The details are left out, but notice when they come to John they do not ask about purification, but start complaining about Jesus’ ministry. There are two prominent teachers at the time and it is leading to disputes even though John and Jesus were like minded. John’s disciples want Him to reclaim His leadership role. They imply that all should be going to John to be baptized not to Jesus and His disciples. **John’s disciples have been comparing and it has led to jealousy**. John the Baptist shows incredible wisdom in His response.

### **John 3:27 ESV**

(27) John answered, “**A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.**”

John gives an interesting answer to his disciples. He points out the maxim that every good thing a person has in their life has been given by God. John’s ministry was given to Him by God and He wants to be content with it. His disciples on the other hand are not content. They feel like ever since John bore witness about Jesus that His followers are declining. In their mind this was not good for John’s ministry. The two responses to John’s declining following are a great example of the two planes we can see life on. John’s disciples are thinking earthly, and John is thinking eternally. Paul had to address this same issue in the Corinthian church.

### **1 Corinthians 3:1-7 ESV**

(1) But I, brothers, could not address you as **spiritual people**, but as **people of the flesh**, as infants in Christ. (2) I fed you with milk, not solid food, **for you were not ready for it**. And even now you are not yet ready,

(3) for you are still of the flesh. For while there is **jealousy and strife** among you, **are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?**

(4) For when one says, **“I follow Paul,”** and another, **“I follow Apollos,”** are you not being **merely human?**

(5) What then is Apollos? What is Paul? **Servants** through whom you believed, **as the Lord assigned** to each.

(6) I planted, Apollos watered, but **God gave the growth.**

(7) So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, **but only God who gives the growth.**

These believers who Paul viewed as brother and sisters in Christ **were acting like people of the flesh, mere humans.** They were jealous and fighting with each other. They were comparing who followed whom. Fighting whether Paul was better or Apollos. Paul points out that their focus should have been on God who gives the growth. It is not about the man that God is choosing to use, it is about God. These believers were not maturing like they could have because their focus was in the wrong place. **When we set our eyes on man, we do not grow.** Paul had to feed them milk instead of solid food. Their growth was stunted because they were focusing on man and thinking in the flesh not spiritually. These conversations would have sounded spiritual, they were talking church and ministry the whole time. Yet they weren't talking truth and focusing on God.

#### **1 Corinthians 4:6-7 ESV**

(6) I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, **that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written**, that none of you may be **puffed up** in favor of one against another.

(7) For who sees anything different in you? **What do you have that you did not receive?** If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

**When we focus on man, we go beyond what is written.** Notice the focus becomes on what so and so said not what the Word of God says. We become less interested in what the passage teaches and more focused on what this group, teacher or banner says about it. When we do this, we become puffed up. We end up thinking we are better than everyone else. Paul points out the same truth John did. What do you have that you did not receive? Every good thing in your life, **every spiritual truth you have ever learned has been given by God.** We should not take any boast in it. Let's focus on the God who teaches us and on His truth.

#### **John 3:28-29 ESV**

(28) You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before Him.'

(29) 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.**

John the Baptist reminds his disciples that he was upfront with them from the beginning, He is not the Christ. He was there to get things ready for the Christ. Then he uses a word picture of a wedding. At a wedding the two most important people in the room are the bride and groom. John the Baptist is clear that He is neither. **He is the best man.**

He had the role to get things ready for the bride and groom and announce the groom's arrival.  
**But this was not John's wedding.**

### **Matthew 11:2-5; 11 ESV**

(2) Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples

(3) and said to him, **"Are you the one who is to come,** or shall we look for another?"

(4) And Jesus answered them, **"Go and tell John** what you hear and see:

(5) the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.

**(11)** Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen **no one greater than John the Baptist.** Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven **is greater than he.**

As John is in prison, Jesus is not ushering in the kingdom like he expected. John the Baptist starts to have doubts. Is Jesus really the Christ? Did I get it wrong? In the gospel of John, he can seem so confident. **None of us are above having doubts creep in. Jesus has a grace and care for John's doubts,** He does not chastise or condemn John. **Jesus points Him back to the stable truth of God's word** in Isaiah to assure John that He is in fact the Christ.

Jesus has high praise for John. He is the greatest born of women, but the least in the kingdom is greater than Him. **Jesus is saying that the bride and groom of the wedding have the most joy and honor.** John is the best man, He is the greatest born of women and had the high honor of being the last Old Testament prophet. **You and I in the church are the bride of Christ.** We have an intimacy with Jesus that is incredible. We have such a privileged position in the church because of God's grace. John was an incredible man, but He was not part of the bride. We are, let's not take that for granted. John knew His role and His ministry was ending as Jesus' was just starting.

### **John 3:30 ESV**

(30) He must **increase,** but I must **decrease."**

John had a clarity that we need. He wanted Jesus to **grow, become greater, increase,** and keep increasing. And then when Jesus starts to increase, He could decrease, even **diminish, become less.** Wuest translates the phrase that Jesus needs **"to become constantly greater but for me constantly to be made less."** The order is very important to notice. John did not try and decrease himself first. The first thing that had to happen was Jesus had to be increased. The same is true in our lives. If you try to start living for God by decreasing yourself or focusing on the sins you need to stop you will struggle. When we try to grow that way, our focus is on our self and as we already saw when we look to man even ourselves, we don't grow.

### **1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 ESV**

(9) For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you **turned to God from idols** to serve the living and true God,

(10) and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

The Thessalonians turned to God first. He became the focus. As they turned to Him, that also meant turning away from the false idols that they had been worshipping. Turning from idols would not have saved them. They could very easily turn to a different idol. It is about turning to Jesus. **He is the focus of our salvation and He should remain the focus as we walk with Him.** As He increases in our lives, self will decrease.

### **Psalm 123:1-2 ESV**

- (1) **A Song of Ascents. To you I lift up my eyes,** O you who are enthroned in the heavens!  
 (2) Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maidservant to the hand of her mistress, **so our eyes look to the LORD our God,** till He has mercy upon us.

John had this correct spiritual mindset because His eyes were focused on God. He knew that the most satisfied His life would ever be is when He was walking in what God had for Him. **From large crowds, to no crowds, to prison, He wanted what God had for Him in each step.** We will never truly be satisfied and find contentment when we are trying to live outside of the will of God for our lives. **When self-increases and He decreases life becomes miserable.** John will continue to explain to his disciples how great the Christ is. He must increase.

### **John 3:31-32 ESV**

- (31) 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.  
 (32) **He bears witness to what He has seen and heard,** yet no one receives His testimony.

John's point is fairly straightforward, Jesus is from above and has first hand knowledge of God. John was from the earth. **Jesus' testimony was far superior to his own,** all should go follow Him. Jesus' testimony was the very words of God.

### **John 3:34-35 ESV**

- (33) Whoever receives His testimony sets his seal to this, **that God is true.**  
 (34) 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.**

Jesus was speaking the words of God and to believe in Jesus is to affirm that what God said is true. When Jesus was alive on earth, He lived based on the power of the Holy Spirit in Him. **This was possible because the Father gave the Holy Spirit to Him without measure.** The Father loved the Son so incredibly much, He didn't hold back. John the Baptist wanted to walk in the ministry that God had for Him. John also had the Holy Spirit and wanted to get all the measure that was given to Him. This same principal is true in the church today.

### **1 Corinthians 12:7&11 ESV**

- (7) **To each** is given the manifestation of the Spirit **for the common good.**  
 (11) All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, **who apportions to each one individually as He wills.**

As a believer your spiritual gift has been custom tailored, to you. The Holy Spirit apportioned it as He saw fit and it is for the common good. John understood this and wanted to walk fully in what God had for Him. I want to encourage you this morning, the Holy Spirit has custom tailored a walk with God for you. Let's not miss what He has for us. **He must increase. When Jesus becomes our focus, we will walk in what He has for us.** Then in verse 36 we are told what this all-important testimony of Jesus is.

### **John 3:36 ESV**

(36) 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.**

This is the testimony; eternal life can only be found by believing in Jesus. Then notice the word change for if someone rejects this message, they are disobeying the Son. Jesus has made the offer of Eternal life so simple. This entire chapter had been pointing us to the fact of our need to be born again by believing in Jesus. **We are to trust in who He and what He did.** If someone refuses to obey then the wrath of God remains on them. Jesus went to the cross and fully experienced the wrath of God for our sins so that we would not have to. When someone rejects this message, they are choosing to stay in that wrath.

The future for someone who believes in Jesus is beyond grand. Words fail to describe how incredible it will be. But the person who refuses to obey and does not trust in Jesus, their future is beyond bleak. It is full of wrath.

### **Proverbs 11:23 ESV**

(23) The desire of the righteous **ends only in good**, the expectation of **the wicked in wrath.**

When we believe in Jesus, we are given His righteousness. The wicked are still in their sin. What is so hard to get our mind around is that this is by their own choosing. Please do not reject this message of salvation. As believers let's not take our walk with Him for granted. Our future is so grand because of Jesus.

### **1 Thessalonians 5:9-11 ESV**

(9) For God has not destined us **for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,**  
 (10) who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep **we might live with Him.**  
 (11) **Therefore** encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.