

He Must Increase

John 3:22-36

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Introduction: This passage describes a pivotal event in history. On the surface it is the account of jealousy on the part of John the Baptist's disciples over the rising popularity of Jesus. But, it is actually the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies about Messiah and the beginning of the New Testament Revelation of Messiah. John is the last Old Testament Prophet and Christ is the first New Testament Preacher.

Nowhere is the collision of the Old and New more clearly displayed than in this passage. Let's read it together.

John 3:22-36 ²² After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing. ²³ John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and *people* were coming and were being baptized-- ²⁴ for John had not yet been thrown into prison. ²⁵ Therefore there arose a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purification. 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." ²⁷ John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven. ²⁸ "You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent ahead of 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. So this joy of mine has been made full. ³⁰ "He must increase, but I must decrease. ³¹ "He who comes from above is above all, he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. ³² "What He has seen and heard, of that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. ³³ "He who has received His testimony has set his seal to *this*, that God is true. ³⁴ "For He whom God has sent speaks 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 "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

I want you to gain a key insight into the Old Testament and its prophets this morning. It was always about Jesus Christ from Genesis to Malachi. In fact the Bible says:

Revelation 19:10 Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God." For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

Jesus chided the Bible Students of His day for looking right past the purpose of the Scripture. It was to reveal God and God purposed to reveal Himself in the Son who is Christ who became Jesus...The Christ....The Son of the Living God!

John 5:37-40 ³⁷ "And the Father who sent Me, He has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form. ³⁸ "You do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent. ³⁹ "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; ⁴⁰ and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.

When Jesus could have just revealed Himself to the disciples He chose to teach them instead out of the Scripture.

Luke 24:25-27 ²⁵ And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

The Apostles preached the Scripture and all they had was the Old Testament. Peter Preached from Joel, Psalms and II Samuel on the day of Pentecost.

At this moment described in Scripture, God is focusing Himself into time. He is invading the physical world and He is going to reveal Himself fully to His creation and to His fallen image bearers. There are few moments in Scripture more dramatic than this.

The account has two main players. There are the disciples of John and then John himself. What they say and do is intended to reveal God's perspective on human achievement and fulfillment.

What we learn here is counter-intuitive. It goes against our nature and instincts and is therefore summarily rejected by most of humanity as patent nonsense. Let's look at it then:

- The Circumstances of the Event [22-24]
- The Concerns of John's Disciples [25-26]
- The Counter Arguments of John Himself [27-36]

The Circumstances of the Event [22-24]

After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea: After going into the Temple and causing a huge confrontation. After going back to Galilee to perform His first miracle and after speaking to Nicodemus, Jesus and His disciples went out out into the countryside surrounding Jerusalem.

There He was spending time with them and baptizing: The "term spending" time means they stayed there. They ministered there for weeks or months. During that time they were baptizing those who came to hear the preaching and embraced the truth of it. Jesus Message was pretty straight forward:

Matthew 4:17 ¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there: John was to the north in Samaria. Aenon means “spring. They were probably practicing an emersion because the actual word “baptize” means to immerse in Greek and there is mention of much water which would allow people to go down into it and get baptized.

John had not yet been thrown into prison: The other gospels begin the story of Christ’s life after the Baptist had been thrown into prison. John starts before that and is the only one who records this passing of the baton and the transitioning from the prophecy that Christ would come to the Preaching that Christ has come.

So the circumstance is this. John had been preaching for some time that the long awaited and prophesied Messiah was coming. God told John that He would reveal the identity of the Christ by causing the Holy Spirit to descend on the Messiah. When Jesus came to John to be baptized, John saw that definitive sign from the Father and the Spirit.

John pointed this out to some of His disciples as Jesus walked by and they actually began to follow Christ. These were Jesus’ first disciples. They accompanied Jesus to Cana and then returned with Him to the countryside of Judah, not far from where John the Baptist was continuing to preach. Why did John keep preaching if Jesus had arrived? I think the answer is pretty simple. **Nobody told him to stop!** God told him to baptize and preach and he just kept doing what he was told.

John 1:33 ³³ "I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.'

When Jesus comes back into this area, the two are preaching very near to one another. People were hearing John preach and then they were hearing Jesus. The inevitable question finally arose. Who’s message is the right message?

The Concerns of John’s Disciples [25-26]

John 3:25-26 ²⁵ Therefore there arose a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purification. 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."

There arose a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purification: We know absolutely nothing else about this discussion. Purifications were Jewish ritual washings. Sometimes the word describes baptizing, but typically speaks of ceremonial washings before eating or performing a sacrifice in the temple. Given the setting, it may well have been a dispute over whose baptism was better...John’s of Jesus.

The way the disciples of John approach him with this concern tells us a lot about how they took the discussion. They came to John and said,

John 3:26 Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him."

He who was with you beyond the Jordan: There are a couple of give aways here. First they do not use Jesus' name. They call Him "that guy who was with you" or "what's his name." BUT...they do not call him Jesus and it is hardly possible that they did not know his name. All of Judea was buzzing about this guy.

To whom you have testified: There comments also reveal something previously unknown. Jesus was with John in the wilderness for awhile at least. It was over a period of time that John and Jesus were with one another before Jesus was baptized and began His public revelation of Himself.

Behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him: This is a jealous comment. The use of the word "all" is indicative of that. There were many but certainly not all. John had exclusive preaching rights about Christ until now. All of the sudden there is a new preacher in town and He is more dynamic, and more charismatic and EVERYONE is going over to Him.

All of this is happening because the long awaited Messiah has appeared and is fulfilling the purpose of God to reveal Himself fully to humanity through the Son. God the Son became a flesh and blood man, born of a human mother, but conceived by the Holy Spirit.

The entire Old Testament has been rushing into this single vortex of history. God had told His prophets everything about this man and this moment in time. God foretold Jesus' lineage and tribe and family, His place of birth, the circumstances of His conception and even the time of His birth. God puts the punctuation on it all by telling His last Old Testament Prophet exactly how to identify the Christ. John is faithful to that duty and testifies to all who hear that Jesus is the Christ of God...the long awaited Messiah.

But these disciples of John had missed the entire point of John's teaching. I have to tell you that this is discouraging to preachers because we think we are making things plain enough. The problem is not with John's message or even with John. The problem is spelled out for us by Paul when he wrote to the Corinthians. You should know this verse and embrace it. It tells you why people do not believe the Gospel. AND...it tells you who do thank and worship whenever they do....and that includes you and me.

1 Corinthians 2:14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

1 Corinthians 2:11-12 ¹¹ For who among men knows the *thoughts* of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the *thoughts* of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God,

Do NOT be like these men. Many believers and churches in our day are like this. They compete for disciples, followers or church members. They are always trying to outdo one another and are Jealous of the success of others. They want to be the ones that everyone comes to and supports.

This always ends the same way. With people talking about God for their own purposes and ends. Churches today are planted with polls and surveys. The message, music and programs are tailored to attract the maximum number of attendees. The Elders are like a board of directors making executive decisions to keep the ship steaming full ahead. The Pastor is trained to be a CEO and a PR guru not an expositor of the Word or even more importantly a simple witness to the glory and splendor of Christ.

AND...this brings us to the climax of the account. It is the testimony of possibly the most Christ Centered preacher in history. John is all about Christ. He is a mere man, but has sunk his teeth into this truth. History, creation and even your own personal life are about Christ. They all exist only because of Christ. He made all things and did so to give them life and fulfillment. Sin pulls, even drags men away from the source of their only true joy and peace and meaning. The world promises what it can never give, but that does not stop every generation from believing its lie. By the time we are old enough to realize that we have been played we are already deep into a life that will not ever bring us what it promises.

The Counter Arguments of John Himself [27-36]

John 3:27 ²⁷ John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven.

Listen you guys...whatever you have comes from God. If you have physical strength or outstanding intellect you have received that from God. Yes you have developed your gift, but God gave that to you and the means to develop it. This is a life principle! It is not just about ministry although there is a direct application here. It is about life. "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given from heaven."

John 3:28 ²⁸ "You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent ahead of Him.'

What is happening is what I have always said. I am not the Christ. I am just a proclaimer of the Christ. Men don't need me...they need the one I am always testifying about. I have been sent for that purpose.

John 3:29-30 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. So this joy of mine has been made full. ³⁰ "He must increase, but I must decrease.

The best man at the wedding is supposed to be all about the joy and care of the groom. He is not jealous of the groom. He does not covet the bride for himself, but rejoices that the groom...his friend...is taking a beautiful and loving bride. He is supposed to be

most happy when the groom is cared for best. The best friends purpose is to do things behind the scenes so that the groom will look good, relaxed and can concentrate on the bride. The best man does the unwanted and un rewarded work for the groom.

John 3:31 ³¹ "He who comes from above is above all, he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all.

I came from the earth. I am a child of the earth. I testify to what I know here on earth. I can tell you I saw the Spirit like a dove. I heard the voice of the Father. I have been given strength not to preach and baptize, but this is all I know.

This other guy is from above. He came down from heaven and that makes Him the Creator...The Living God. He is more important than any other thing that exists, because all other things only exist because He caused them to exist.

John 3:32 ³² "What He has seen and heard, of that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony.

This man will tell you about heaven because that is where he is from. Don't ask me about it...I am not an eyewitness to it. If you want to know about God, Salvation, Truth, Life, Fulfillment, Hope and Eternal Life....you need to hear the testimony of Jesus and you need to believe it. Internalize it. Stake your eternal soul on it. You need to receive His Testimony.

John 3:33-34 ³³ "He who has received His testimony has set his seal to *this*, that God is true. ³⁴ "For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure.

He who has received His testimony: This describes saving faith. It is not intellectual assent. Not an acknowledgment that there is a God or there was once a man named Jesus. It is a critical, non ambiguous decision to believe that everything Jesus says about Himself, Heaven and the way back to God is absolutely true.

Has set his seal to *this*, that God is true: This is like signing an eternally binding document in which you give full recognition to Christ as your life giver. You say to Him that you owe Him your very life and you will give it to Him. Putting your seal to the truthfulness of God is a crucial aspect of saving faith. DO you have it? Do you reserve the right to pass judgment on what God says or what Christ teaches about Himself and eternal life.

He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure: A restatement of what we have just said, but now it is an affirmation. Christ speaks the Words of God because He is God. Not only that but He has authority to pour out the Holy Spirit on men just as it was poured out on Him in John's sight. We should take this to mean that Christ can and will transform us spiritually. We cannot know Him or understand Him apart from the Holy Spirit as we observed at the beginning of the message. Therefore what we know of God we know through Christ who pours out the Holy Spirit on those who give themselves to Him.

John 3:35-36 ³⁵ "The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand. ³⁶ "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand: This is the place where all the glory that men have ascribed to the Father is now passed to the son. Why? Because the Father loves the Son. They are one in mind and heart and nature. There is no rivalry only unity. As a father gives his life's possessions to his son so the Father gives His power, authority, splendor and glory to His Son.

He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life: DO you want to get to heaven....see God and enjoy eternal life in His presence? Then trust the Son! Obey the Son when He calls you to trust Him and give yourself freely to Him.

The wrath of God abides on him: This verse contains one of several places where Scripture equates "saving faith" with obedience to God. He says if you trust the son he will give you eternal life. If you do not, the cause of your condemnation will remain in place for eternity.

In other words, going to hell is not punishment for failure to believe in Jesus anymore that a man is killed by an oncoming train for refusing to be helped off the tracks. Think with me! He is killed by the train! That man's death was already certain and he rejected the only way to be saved. This is the way it is with humanity. We are lost because we are of the earth and cannot know God. We don't seek God. We don't like God. We like the earth. We like what the earth gives and will gladly give our lives to the earth. After a few short decades our lives here draw to a close and we find that all the earth promised was empty and our souls still need something. Not only that, but even if we attain everything and find some measure of delight in it during our lives ...it must all be left behind for eternity.

John concludes that life revolves around Jesus Christ. It does not mean that we do not enjoy the things of this world, but we enjoy them as a gift from God with gratitude and worship toward our life giver. We find contentment in giving more than we take because our joy and life comes from God through Christ who gives to us without measure.

Jude 1:20-25 ²⁰ But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. ²² And have mercy on some, who are doubting; ²³ save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh. ²⁴ Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, ²⁵ to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, *be* glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.