

John 3:22-36

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[0 : 00] Amen and good morning. Please take your copy of God's Word and join me in John chapter 3.! I'm sick and really grieved to not be with you.

I think last Sunday I slept 20 out of the 24 hours in the day. Often on a Sunday morning I'll wake up. If I'm sick at home, I'll wake up in the 10 o'clock hour and wish that I was here and be praying for you guys.

Well, I didn't wake up until 1 o'clock this past Sunday and just said, Ah, wish I had been there with them. Let's pray before we read this text. Father God, we thank you for your Word to us.

We recognize that it was written by the pen in this case of John, but he was carried along by your Spirit and it had an original audience, but also was written for us.

We humbly recognize that it was written ultimately for your glory, but also for our good. And so we ask that you would help us as we open it together to believe its promises and obey its commands and that we would have affection for its author.

[1 : 33] Father, help us to hear it and respond as we should to it, we pray. In Christ's name, amen. John chapter 3, beginning in verse 22 and through the end of the chapter.

John chapter 3, beginning in verse 22 and through the chapter 3, John answered, A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.

You yourselves bear me witness that I said, I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him. 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. He must increase, but I must decrease. 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. He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony.

[3 : 12] Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.

The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. 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.

The first five verses of our text this morning give us a timing, some locations, and a circumstance. The question of their significance must be addressed, and they help set up for us why this text exists at all at the end of chapter 3.

So before we look at the rest of the passage, and I give you an outline for this morning, let's spend a few minutes here. At the beginning of verse 22, we see John the Apostle say, After this.

And he uses this phrase for the passage of some undetermined time. He'll do this throughout his gospel account. You can note the very same at the beginning of verse 12 of chapter 2, following the miracle of the wedding at Cana.

[4:28] So, sometime after Jesus cleanses the temple and interacts with Nicodemus, he and his disciples leave Jerusalem. And they head out to the Judean countryside, the same general region, but they are now outside of Jerusalem.

And he remains with them, he tarries with them, and is baptizing. We'll talk about it a bit more next week, Lord willing, but we'll see that John carefully records that Jesus himself was not baptizing, but his disciples were doing so.

So here we have Jesus and his disciples in one place, the Judean countryside baptizing. And then John the Apostle says, verse 23, John the Baptist was also baptizing in another place, anon near Saline.

This is the northern part of the country. Why? Because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized.

For John had not yet been put in prison. I was a great temptation at this point to want to unpack all of this to just talk about baptism, which is not what we're going to do this morning, because that is not the driving point of this text.

[5:48] We'll see why in just a moment. Verse 24 states a fact we see here, for John had not yet been put in prison. That is entirely self-evident.

Clearly, John the Baptist had not been imprisoned. Verse 23 tells us where he was and what he was doing. So, why the inclusion of the phrase in verse 24?

It tells us that this event took place in between the baptism of Jesus and his following temptation in the wilderness, and John the Baptist's imprisonment.

The synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, are silent on the public ministry of Jesus before John was arrested. And so this note clarifies the timing of this event.

John's gospel supplements the synoptics with these earlier events. But why? What is John the Apostle stressing here that requires this inclusion?

[7:00] It seems a little out of place. He has introduced his gospel account with John the Baptist's bold testimony to Jesus as the Christ. The very purpose that John the Baptist declares he was sent for.

That's right there in chapter 1. John the Apostle has gone on to record Jesus' calling of the first disciples, his first miracle, his temple cleansing, and his words of life to Nicodemus.

It seems that the stage has moved on. The entrapments for John the Baptist have been cleared off, and Jesus is now full center.

So why circle back to John the Baptist? Doesn't it seem disjointed? Like, what is John the Apostle doing here?

Hasn't John the Baptist served his purpose in setting up the stage for Jesus' ministry? I think the next two verses help us to understand why John the Apostle did this.

[8:09] Verse 25 says, Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. We aren't given the details of the discussion.

I spend a lot of time looking for the details. What's going on? What's the context that's happening here? This seems really significant to where we're about to go.

But I think we don't know the details, because the details of the discussion are not important to the point that I think that John the Apostle intends to make.

So, it's important to know that their discussion would have been related to baptism as it related to the Old Covenant purification practices. This is as much as I think we can know about what's happening here.

There's lots of conjecture, but I think that's what we can know from John chapter 3. But whatever the discussion, it raises a question amongst John's disciples.

[9:10] I think this is going to help us see what the point is. They come to John, his disciples, and they said to him, Rabbi, or teacher, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness, they're talking about Jesus, look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him.

Here I think we find the point of John the Apostle's spirit-led inclusion of this last part of chapter 3. John the Baptist's ministry was being eclipsed.

The sun was setting on it. He had not yet been imprisoned, but his influence was waning. The glory of Jesus' ministry was surpassing that of John's.

It would seem that John's disciples were troubled by this reality. How might we know this? This is not just sanctified imagination.

Look what they say. Look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him. We're all going to him?

[10:29] No, they weren't. He's in a place where the water is plentiful. People are still coming to receive the baptism of John, but this is the feeling they have, the sense that they have, right?

They seem to have become envious and troubled by Jesus' rise to fame and the setting of their teacher's ministry.

They devoted themselves to him, and suddenly this other one is becoming much, much more important. Perhaps they were even feeling less important than they wanted to feel.

And I think in this text, we most readily find ourselves identifying, regularly identifying, with John the Baptist's disciples.

Feeling less important than we want to feel. Not gaining the success in this life that we'd like to have.

[11:37] Seeming overlooked. Feeling like everyone is going on out ahead of us, and we are falling behind. We can become envious.

We can be jealous. We can be bitter. John the Baptist's response to this attitude of self-importance is the significance of this text.

The expressed humility of John the Baptist is why I think John the Apostle circles back to him. As Jesus is being exalted in the narrative, and John's influence is beginning to wane, the words that John the Baptist says are why John the Apostle records them.

serves us by showing us the godly response to such a circumstance. This response of humility.

So here's our outline for this morning. Number one, the humble rest in God's sovereignty. Number two, the humble are self-aware.

[12:55] Number two, the humble exalt Jesus Christ. Notice first, the humble rest in God's sovereignty.

Now, why choose the word rest for this point? Now here, I am going to use some sanctified imagination as I give some tone to the way I think John would have responded.

Verse 27, that maybe it was a rebuke, but I think that they come to him, they're frustrated. They think that things should be going differently than they're going.

They're envious. They come to him as they look. He's baptizing and all are going to him. And rather than rebuke, he says with a quiet confidence, a person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.

Nothing that we have is ours apart from God's sovereign purpose in granting it. Not a single thing that we have.

[14:10] No possession that we have. No gifting that we have. Natural or ordained through practice. Not a single thing that you can do.

Nothing that you have to offer at all is yours apart from God's sovereign purpose in granting it to you.

We have no space as Christians knowing this to be true for boasting at all. No threat of it.

Understanding that nothing that we have is ours apart from God's sovereign purpose in granting it is the foundation for humility. It's the very thing that needs to be worked down into the very core of who we are if we were going to produce any measure of humility at all.

Nothing that I have is mine apart from God's sovereign purpose in granting it. I am his.

[15 : 14] He has created me in Christ for works prepared beforehand for me to walk in. Anything that he's given me to accomplish that. Adversely, nothing that we don't have isn't ours apart from God's sovereign purpose in not granting it.

So if we have some measure of success in some area of our life there's no reason to boast in it because God granted it. And if we don't and God is withholding it for our good and his glory.

What a wonderful promise that no matter what comes into our life whatever circumstances are happening God is in control of every single ounce of it.

It's the foundation for humility. God is creator. We are not. We are creation. From our call to worship this morning 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 26 and following Paul there exhorts this for consider your calling brothers not many of you were wise according to worldly standards.

That's the room. Not many of us wise according to worldly standards. Not many were powerful. Not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise.

[16 : 43] God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world even things that are not to bring to nothing things that are.

So that no human being might boast in the presence of God. God works in his people. He brings his people together in such a way that the world looks at us and says their God must be great.

Because they are not. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus verse 30 of 1 Corinthians 1 who became to us wisdom from God righteousness and sanctification and redemption so that as it is written let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.

If anything anything to boast about it is in our God who has taken wretched sinners and rescued us called us redeemed ones adopted us called us children set us on a task given us gifts John's answer to them is striking a person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven the humble rest in God's sovereignty secondly and it follows the humble are self aware verse 28 John the Baptist says you yourselves bear me witness saying you saw me say I am not the Christ but I have been sent before him

John the Baptist summarizes the testimony recorded in chapter 1 with this phrase I am not the Christ but I have been sent before him but he says a bit more than that if you look at John chapter 1 beginning in verse 20 there John the Apostle records he confessed and did not deny but confessed I am not the Christ and they asked him those who were sent to question him what then are you Elijah he said I am not are you the prophet and he answered no so they said to him who are you you need to give an answer to those who sent us what do you say about yourself he said I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness make straight the way of the Lord as the prophet Isaiah said that they had been sent from the Pharisees they asked him then why are you baptizing if you are neither the Christ nor Elijah nor the prophet

[19:39] John answered them I baptize with water but among you stands one you do not know even he who comes out to untie John knows who he is he knows the purpose for which he was sent and that was the exaltation of Jesus Christ he was the forerunner the one to go ahead and prepare the way for the Christ he then goes on in verse 29 to illustrate his point with a familiar scene at a wedding 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 is analogous roughly with our cultural practice of a groom having a best man so you can read that into the text except that best men these days are given very few responsibilities

I think often the best man's job is to be the goofiest of all the groomsmen I've officiated a lot of weddings and he's the one you have to most get the attention of sometimes we don't even trust him with the rings anymore that's usually my advice I usually say just give the rings to me I'll hang on to them we'll make sure they end up on your hands but not so in this day the best man was responsible for a lot that went on in the design of the wedding the planning of the wedding he brought the groom to the bride he protected on the wedding night the wedding chamber would only let the groom go in to his bride and so this bride groom has prepared himself for this very important purpose for the groom he knows who he is he's not the groom at some point in that day the attention turns from him and it turns to the groom he's merely the friend of the groom and so he rejoices he's so glad all of the work that went into it the whole point of it for him is to see the bridegroom exalted and so

John says right I am not the Christ but the Christ is here he has come he has been presented therefore this joy of mine is now complete I have finished that task right it is over it is good that people are going to Jesus to receive baptism so the humble are self aware beloved praise God not a single one of us is the Christ we are not perfect and we could not bear that load and we could not have accomplished what he accomplished fully God and fully man truly God and truly man thank God that Jesus is Jesus and we are not and humility begins at this place where we know that we're not and it should desire in us to make much of him and it seems so obvious when we say that but we are so readily self serving trying to gain people's applause trying to gain success in worldly terms we often care too much about temporal glory for ourselves rather than eternal glory for

Christ so the humble rest in God's sovereignty the humble are self aware and finally the humble exalt Jesus Christ but I must decrease right Jesus must be maximal and I must be minimal your Bible translation likely has placed as mine has closed quotes at the end of verse 30 which suggests that this is the conclusion of John the Baptist answer to his disciples Greek didn't have any punctuation so this is a translative decision and it is not without contention the question is did John the Baptist cease speaking at the end of verse 30 or at the end of verse 33 and I will tell you

I spent too much time trying to figure it out I wasn't convinced either way as I read and studied these past weeks and thankfully it doesn't really matter it just really doesn't matter are these John the Baptist final recorded words perhaps I think that's why the close quotes tend to go there seem like good hard punctuation at the end of this speaking perhaps not the verses go on I think to explain what he means there he must increase but I must decrease either way this beautiful sentence does not lose its significance what a statement he must increase but I must decrease the Christian mantra of our day seems to be he must increase we know that

[25 : 58] Christ is supposed to be glorified he must increase so I must increase I must be successful I must be well put together I don't need to be a mess on Sunday mornings I must be doing well in my job and gaining promotion it must have a nice home and a nice car it must have a platform and it needs to be growing in size right how might I magnify Christ unless I am increasing seems to be the thing it's in the water it's the it's why I call it a mantra it's as if it's being repeated to us day in and day out right if Christ is to be increased we also must be increased and this is not this is not the way of Christianity just simply not such a backwards thing it seems that the one who came to reign over his people to set them free from the power of sin and death who will forever rule his enemies will make a footstool for his feet that he would come and he would suffer and he would die and for some reason we think that now that that's been accomplished we get to flip the script that in following our

Christ being his disciples following in his way we get to do it different than he did John the Baptist doesn't think so neither did Paul Paul says in Philippians chapter 3 verse 8 and following there he says indeed I count everything as loss all of the gain that he had in his life all of the spiritual credit that he had to his account he says everything I count as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord I just for a second want that phrase to stick in your mind everything is lost because of the surpassing worth more valuable than everything I could lose of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord not merely knowing about but knowing him for this sake knowing

Christ Jesus for this sake I have suffered the loss of all things and I count them as rubbish refuse in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law but that which comes through faith in Christ the righteousness from God that depends!

on faith that I may again know him and the power of his resurrection and may share his sufferings becoming like him in his death that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead what is what is Paul saying here he's saying that to walk in this world we can have the things of the world and what it grants to us or we can suffer the loss of all those things that we can have Christ and that to know him means that we're going to walk in his ways John the Baptist and Paul understood this clearly John the Baptist understood it in such a way that he would someday soon be arrested and then martyred

Christ Christ must increase but I must decrease we make Christ known in the world by having hope beyond this world as we suffer the loss of all things in this world world we say to people we have a greater treasure there's a surpassing worth out there and it is knowing Christ and being known by him now whether or not John the Baptist ceases speaking at this point and John the apostle picks it up it doesn't really matter to me the testimony of the Johns they go on in to the last verses of this text 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 he bears witness to what he has seen and heard yet no one receives his testimony!

[31 : 21] Whoever receives utters the words of God for he gives the spirit without measure the father loves the son and has given all things into his hand now the best argument for this being John the apostle is that he goes on to unpack all of this in the coming chapters so we're going to let that happen these phrases be unpacked but just notice that whichever John is saying it they are expressing the Jesus came from the father verse 31 Jesus is preeminent verse 31 Jesus declared the truth first part of verse 32 Jesus agreed with God verse 33 Jesus was empowered by the spirit without measure verse 34 and

Jesus received all authority verse 35 Jesus Christ is supreme therefore he must increase all of us are not that we must decrease the humble exalt Jesus Christ and in the last verse 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 so the eternal destination of anybody who doesn't place their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is an eternal destiny of wrath God's white hot anger!

against sin do not dumb down do not dilute the doctrine of hell there's an eternal place torment for those who don't place their faith in Christ bad news but the good news is whoever believes in the son has eternal life and this gets picked up again and again and again and again through John's gospel account right this teaching about eternal life as John states his purpose for the letter in John chapter 20 verse 30 and 31 he says now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name that you may have life in his name life forever and we're not wrong for doing that right this phrase eternal life we're all eternal but those who place their faith in

Christ are going have eternal life this is good it's good that our brains go there but I think it doesn't quite do it justice because we miss what it does right now and for ever more so if we back up a little bit!

I can't wait to unpack all of this out with you more and more and more John 17 verse 3 there it says Jesus says and this is eternal life you better pay attention to what comes next and this is eternal life streets of gold mansions it's not what 17 3 says and this is eternal life that they know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent isn't that astounding this is eternal life now and life forever more the great blessing of it the joy of it is that we know we know God and Jesus Christ who

[35 : 42] God has sent we have a lot to think about when we think about what it means to know God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent this is what characterize is the humble people recognizing this great reality nothing we have is given to us and nothing is withheld from us apart from God's good design in our lives the humble rest in God's sovereignty the humble are self aware we know exactly who we are we know who we would be apart from Christ we know who we are in Christ still failing yet to be the people that we want to be seeing ourselves change from one degree of glory to another grateful all the time that he is working in us the very things that he asks of us there's no boasting for the

Christian in their salvation or in their sanctification or their one day glorification none of us have any room to boast in anything but in the Lord and the humble because we have Christ because we know him and are known by him we spend our souls we spend our very selves to exalt Jesus Christ let's pray together