

John 3:22-36

22 After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing.

22 The beginning of the next chapter tells us that Jesus' disciples were doing the baptizing (John 4:1-2). Some of them had assisted John the Baptist. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance to prepare hearts to receive Jesus. It isn't clear if this is the same kind of baptism as John's or if they were baptizing them into faith in Christ. Jesus had not yet publicly declared He is the Messiah though He had given the first public sign of being the Messiah by turning the water into wine.

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).*

23, 24 For a short time John and Jesus' disciples were baptizing at the same time at different places on the Jordan.

25 Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification.

25 John's disciples started a discussion with Jesus' disciples about purification. John may have been with the Essene community before he started his ministry. The ruins of that community show that they had numerous mikvah. They would go down one side of the steps into the water and immerse themselves completely and then left going up the other side of the steps. They would do this before they did something that they considered sacred such as copying the Scriptures. The concept was washing away the sins and coming out clean, a physical picture of an inward act. Perhaps they were asking if Jesus' baptism was different from John's. We aren't told so it was something insignificant.

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."

26 John's disciples felt they were losing the numbers game. Too often we measure success as the world does, by outward success, by recognition of others, which usually is related to fame or wealth. But please hear me when I say that success that really matters has nothing to do with numbers of people or dollars. Success is faithfulness to obey God moment by moment, as we love Him with our all and our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39)! That is success in the eyes of heaven, in the eternal realm (Jeremiah 1:18). And when it is all said and done, what else really matters? John the Baptist knew this. It was his life. He shunned wealth, and when popularity came, he held it loosely.

27 John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.

27 John knew that the only reason people had flocked to him in the wilderness to be baptized was that God had given him that mission and sent the people. It was not his great oratory skills. "Repent and prepare the way of the Lord!" It was not miracles. It was not his wardrobe. It was God (1Corinthians 4:7)! God sent all of Judea out to him to the extent that it caused a stir among the religious leaders. Now the crowd was starting to go to Jesus and John knew it was the sovereign will of Almighty God.

What a great truth to keep us from jealousy and strife. Why is that person popular or that church growing in numbers? It is because God willed it to be so. Why does that

person have such a gift? It is because God gave it to him or her (Numbers 11:26-29). If you do not like it, take it up with God. Life is not a competition to see who can outperform others. It is not about getting to the top of anything. Life is knowing God and His great love for us! Life is glorifying God and enjoying Him forever.

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

28 John knew what his calling entailed and what it did not entail. He was sent before the One. He was not the One. So, when the One came, it is only right that the people go to Him! If only everyone could learn this lesson John understood so well. It is not about me! It is about Jesus (Matthew 11:11).

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.

29 That joy is mine, and it is now complete. Without an understanding of a Jewish marriage in that day, we can't understand what John the Baptist was saying. I am going to let the New American Commentary explain this to you in its own delicate terms.

To clarify for his disciples what he meant, therefore, the Baptizer used a typical Jewish type of parable, drawn from Jewish marriage customs. At that time the bridegroom normally selected one or two close friends to escort the bride to the bridegroom's marriage chamber and to wait outside the room or tent for the bridegroom's shout and often for receipt of tokens that the marriage had been consummated with his virgin bride. Such friends of the bridegroom were thus able to certify to the wedding guests that the consummation of the marriage had taken place and the joyous festivities could continue (cf. 3:29). John gladly accepted his role as a friend of the bridegroom. Just as he had earlier willingly turned over his disciples to Jesus in a self-giving act (1:35-37), here he expressed his genuine joy that Jesus was being accepted by the people. This brief parable, therefore, serves as a powerful illustration.

John the Baptist was telling his disciples, "Look, this is how it is supposed to be. The bride does not belong to the best man. I am just glad to be around to hear of the consummation of the marriage."

The analogy of God as the groom and the people as His bride was not new. It came right out of the Old Testament (Isaiah 54:5). The book of Hosea was to point out the unfaithfulness of Israel as God's bride, and the patient, loving, faithfulness of God (the groom) to continue to give Israel (the bride) another chance (Hosea 1:2). It is no wonder then that this analogy is used by John and later by the Apostle Paul in describing Jesus as the groom and the church as His bride (Ephesians 5:25).

30 He must increase, but I must decrease."

30 One was ascending as the other was waning. So it is with every believer. Our life increasingly becomes about Jesus. Our personal desires, plans, and dreams become less and less important in direct proportion to our adoration of Jesus and communion with Him. The more you know Him, the less you think about yourself. As He increases, you decrease. How much has Jesus increased in your heart and mind? It is a good spiritual gauge.

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.

31-33 Jesus has heaven's perfect perspective, the only view that counts. Man is always fallible. The Son of Man is not. Jesus speaks from our Creator's mind, truth that is unchanging and certain, but mankind often rejects that truth. The Message translates verse 33 like this: *But anyone who examines this evidence will come to stake his life on this: that God himself is the truth.* If you look at the miracles and claims of Jesus, consider His death and resurrection, and are honest with yourself, you will come to the conclusion that Jesus declared the message of heaven, the very truth of God.

34 For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.

34 Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit and yielded Himself completely to the Holy Spirit. His words were God's words. They are absolute truth.

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

35 In these first three chapters of John we have learned that Jesus is the Word of God made flesh, that He has always been with the Father, ever toward one another, and at the Father's side (1:18). Now John is saying that God so loves the Son that He has put everything in His hands. Jesus has been given all power and authority (Matthew 28:18). Of course, it is safe for God to do so because they have the same heart.

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.

36 It is another of John's "either or" statements. If you believe in the Son, you have passed from death to life. You are no longer going to have to pay for your sins. Justice was served for our sins on the cross. But if you reject God's loving provision for your sin, the just wrath of God remains upon you (Romans 5:9).

Questions:

What was the concern of John's disciples?

How does that human reaction affect us?

What was John the Baptist's defining statement? Application?

How did John describe Jesus' authority?

What are the two choices in verse 36?