

## John 3:22-36

John the Baptist had achieved a great deal of popularity as the result of his preaching and baptizing. But now he was no longer the only one baptizing. While in the Judean countryside, the disciples of our Lord also baptized those who came to them. Just imagine the Judean countryside alive with the teaching of both these great preachers!

Note: John's baptism was a baptism of repentance -- in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. The baptism by the disciples was essentially the same as John's. His disciples could not yet baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit since our Lord had not yet been crucified, buried, and risen from the dead.

**Who was doing the baptizing in the Judean countryside (v. 22)?** John 4:2 clearly says that Jesus was not baptizing—His disciples were. Jesus was probably overseeing His disciples as they did the baptizing.

**How was John's baptism being received by the Jewish people (v. 23)?** John the Baptist had a large, devoted following: "*People were constantly coming to be baptized*" (v. 23). Matthew tells us that people came to him from "*Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan*" (Matthew 3:5).

Note: "*There was plenty of water*" (v. 23) implies that the baptism was done by immersion. If John was baptizing by sprinkling, there would have been no need for "plenty of water."

**What was happening in v. 25?** Evidently the "discussion" in view centered on the relation of "John's baptism" to other ceremonial washings that various other Jewish authorities espoused. These other washings probably included the Old Testament rites of purification that some Jewish leaders advocated.

**What do we see going on between the disciples of John the Baptist and certain Jews (v. 26)?** Concern about the competition for "baptizees" which resulted in jealousy, rivalry, and bickering. They were in essence saying to John, "Your baptism is so great, why are so many leaving you and going to Jesus?"

**How would you describe the attitude/concern of John the Baptist's disciples?** They loved their master and were jealous of Jesus' success. They were prideful. They were more focused on themselves and their ministry than on the spiritual condition of the people coming to be baptized. They can see the end in view—for themselves and for their ministry. "We're going to be out of a job if this keeps up!" Yet this is the way God meant it to be.

Note: A leader often suffers more from his zealous disciples than from his critics!

Application: **Do we see examples of comparison and competition in the church today?**

**What did John the Baptist mean when he said, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven" (v. 27)?** He was acutely aware of God's sovereignty in all things. If the newcomer was attracting and winning more followers than John himself, this was not because he was stealing them away from John or acting dishonestly in presenting his claims. It was because God was giving them to Christ to be His followers.

This statement expressed the belief that God had permitted Him to enjoy the popularity that He was experiencing. It also expressed John's satisfaction with that state of affairs. John demonstrated an exemplary attitude. He recognized that God had assigned different ministries to Jesus and himself, and that it was wrong for him and his disciples to wish things were otherwise.<sup>1</sup>

**What did John remind his disciples of (v. 28)?** He was not the Christ. But he had a well-defined role – to precede the Messiah and prepare the people's hearts for His arrival. It's as if he was saying, "If I'm doing my job well, people will flock to Jesus. So quit worrying about the people going to Jesus to be baptized."

**John likens this situation to a wedding scene (vv. 29). Who is the bride?** Followers of Jesus (the church).

**Who is the bridegroom?** Jesus

**Who is the friend (best man) of the bridegroom?** John

**Why is the friend joyful when he hears the bridegroom's voice?** When the voice of the groom is heard, it meant the bridegroom was coming for his bride. At this point, the best man knows his task is accomplished. He can rejoice that the bride and the groom are joined in marriage.

John's point was: The bride does not belong to the best man but rather to the bridegroom himself. Therefore, it was fitting that the people follow Jesus rather than John.

**Why is his joy complete (v. 29)?** He has fulfilled his mission of bringing the bride and bridegroom together. John willfully and joyfully accepted Jesus' growing popularity as God's plan. He is losing his congregation to Jesus—and he is happy about it! John's joy comes from people coming to know Jesus Christ. Jesus' increasing popularity may have filled John's disciples with resentment, but it filled John with joy.

**What was John's attitude toward Christ (v. 30)?** *"He must become greater; I must become less."* This classic expression of humility arose out of John's perception of, and acceptance of, his God-given role which was to serve as Messiah's forerunner, announce that the Messiah had come, point the people to Jesus, and then to step back once Jesus appeared on the scene. He labored with the singular focus of pointing men and women to Christ and to make them realize His true worth.

Application: **Like John the Baptist, do you know your purpose(s) in life?**

**Is there any example from John the Baptist's life for us to follow?** He must increase, but I must decrease should be the motto of every Christian, especially leaders among God's people. Jesus should become greater and more visible, and the servant should become less and less visible. It's all about humility and it's all about Jesus. John the Baptist's disciples failed to understand that.

Application: **How can we have the humility of John the Baptist?** Meditate, study, and read the Word of God so that you can increasingly comprehend the immensity of God, the magnitude of the sacrifice (the Cross), the wonder of the resurrection and the contrasting depths of your own depravity. And pray for insight and understanding.

**John documents the supremacy of Jesus Christ (vv. 31-35). How is Jesus preeminent?**

- v. 31 Jesus came from heaven. He has a heavenly origin and a supreme position compared to any earthly religious leader (the one who belongs to the earth, i.e. John the Baptist). It is only proper that men should follow Him rather than His messenger.
- v. 32 Jesus testifies to what He has seen and heard from His communion with the Father. He speaks with authority as a clear reliable witness yet many refused to believe.
- v. 34 He speaks the Word of God. Jesus has the full endowment of the Holy Spirit -- without limit. Christ was anointed with the Holy Spirit in a way that was not true of any other person. All of God's former messengers received a limited "measure" of God's "Spirit." The Spirit came upon the Old Testament prophets only for limited times and purposes. However, God gave His Spirit to Jesus without limit. This guaranteed the truth of Jesus' words.
- v. 35 The Father loves Jesus and that love is manifested in God giving Him control over all things, i.e. all authority to accomplish the Father's purposes.

**John placed the alternatives side by side. What are the two options given to us (v. 36)?** Belief or unbelief. Our eternal destiny depends on what we do with the Son of God. There is no middle ground. To try and ride the fence, to make no decision, is to reject Jesus. Because He is the Son of God, there is a heavy price to pay for rejecting Him. There are eternal consequences. This is one of the clearest verses in the Bible on how a person can be saved – simply and only by believing in Jesus Christ. Note the absence of any referral to doing good things, being the best we can be, joining the church, obeying the Golden Rule, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on John, 2023 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), 112.