

No One Greater
John 3:22-36
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INTRODUCTION

1. I would like to invite you to turn in your Bibles to John chapter three.
2. We are looking this morning at the last section that is found in verses 22-36.
3. Up to this point all of chapter 3 occurred in Jerusalem.
4. Now Jesus and His disciples move away from the city into the rural areas of Judea.
5. Listen to what John the apostle tells us in this section.
6. Read John 3:22-36
7. When John the Baptist appeared on the scene, he came preaching the message of repentance.
8. Matthew 3:1-2 says he was “preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”
9. This has always been his message.
10. As a passionate preacher, he preached with this one motive.
11. When he was asked, “Are you Elijah?” He said, I am not” (Jn.1:21).

12. When he was asked, “Are you the Prophet?” He answered “no” (Jn.1:21).
13. They said then “Who are you?” He said, “I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as Isaiah the prophet said” (Jn.1:23).
14. He was a voice and a witness of Christ.
15. As a voice, he testified that Jesus was “the Lamb of God” (Jn.1:29) and “the Son of God” (v.34).
16. John never stopped proclaiming that truth.
17. That’s not true of many preachers today.
18. Many today are more interested in preaching their opinions and making a name for themselves.
19. In his book, *Famine in the Land*, Steve Lawson writes, “A new way of ‘doing’ church is emerging. In this radical paradigm shift, exposition is being replaced with entertainment, preaching with performances, doctrine with drama, and theology with theatrics. The pulpit, once the focal point of the church, is now being overshadowed by a variety of church-growth techniques, everything from trendy worship styles to glitzy presentations and vaudeville-like pageantries. In seeking to capture the upper hand in church growth, a new wave of pastors is reinventing church and repackaging the gospel into a product to be sold to ‘consumers’” (25).
19. There is a lot we can learn from this passage today as we see John the Baptist’s commitment to fulfill his divine calling. Christ is always to be at the forefront of what we proclaim.
20. The apostle John begins this section with *the transition*.

I. The Transition (v.22a)

“After these things”

This refers back to Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus (3:1-21), to those who believed in Him when He was at the Passover (2:23-25) and His cleansing of the temple (2:13-22).

It is “after these things” then Jesus and His disciples depart.

II. The Location (v.22b)

“Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea.”

The “land of Judea” refers to “the rural areas of Judea” (D.A. Carson, John, 209). This is the “country districts outside of Jerusalem” (A.T. Robertson, Robertson’s Word Pictures).

The ESV translates this “the Judean countryside.”

The previous episodes took place in Jerusalem which was part of Judea. Jesus could not have entered Judea because He was already there.

From John’s account so far, we see that Jesus has been to Bethany (1:28), Galilee (1:43), Cana (2:1, 11), Capernaum (2:12), Jerusalem (2:13), and now He goes to the countryside of Judea (2:22).

III. The Determination (Purpose) (v.22c)

Why did He go from the city to the rural areas?

The apostle John says in verse 22, “And there He was spending time with them and baptizing.”

A. He Wanted to Get Away from the Crowds

“Upon His arrival, Jesus would have found Jerusalem teeming with Jewish pilgrims from all around the Roman world, there to celebrate this foremost of Jewish feasts” (John MacArthur, John 1-11).

The text doesn't say how many were there, it only says in 2:23 that “during the feast, *many* believed in His name.” Of course, not all believed, but those who did were considered to be *many*.

There were times in Jesus' ministry when He departed from the crowds to be alone. In Matthew 14, it records that after the feeding of the five thousand, verses 22-23 says, “Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away. 23 After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain *by Himself* to pray; and when it was evening, He was there *alone*.”

B. He Wanted to Spend Some Time with the Disciples

The apostle John says in verse 22, “And there He was spending time with them and baptizing.”

“Them” is referring to “His disciples” mentioned earlier in the passage.

What were they doing? The rest of the text tells us “and baptizing.”

Although this verse says that Jesus was baptizing. It “probably means He was overseeing the baptizing done by His disciples” (John Walvoord, The Bible Knowledge Commentary) because 4:2 says He was “not baptizing,

but His disciples were.”

During this time, “Jesus’ disciples were baptizing those who came to hear Him preach and heeded His call to repent (cf. Mat.4:17)” (MacArthur, 125).

How long did they do this? We can’t be dogmatic but some say it was from eight months to at least half of year.

David Thomas says, “It is supposed that He tarried in this Judaeon district from the month of March till November or December, at least half a year” (The Genius of the Fourth Gospel).

Steve Lawson says, “It was here that Jesus spent eight months of His ministry away from the crowds, away from the religious leaders, away from the spotlight. Amazing! He only had 3 ½ years of ministry and here He spent eight months in private discipleship” (Sermon, “Marks of An Effective Ministry”).

The verb “spending time” (diatribo) literally means “to rub away” (GING) or “to wear away or consume by rubbing” (Spiros Zodhiates, The Complete Word Study Dictionary). When it is used in the book of Acts it refers to “a long time” (Acts 14:3), “some days” (Acts 15:36; 16:12), “many days” (Acts 25:14), “seven days” (Acts 20:6), “more than eight or ten days” (Acts 25:6).

The use of the imperfect indicates that John was speaking of “an action in process or a state of being that is occurring in the past *with no assessment of the action's completion*” (Michael S. Heiser, Glossary of Morpho-Syntactic Database Terminology).

Before we get lost in how long Jesus spent this time with

His disciples, we should note that He believed it was important to spend time with them.

If they were baptizing, He had to teach them what it meant?

Baptism during this time included three stages:

The first phase was called mela and that amounted to circumcision. Because circumcision was a God-ordained sign, any male who came in, even in an adult, would need to be circumcised. He would need, therefore, to identify himself with the people of God by this unique circumcision ceremony.

The second thing that would happen to him, would be tebula and that was immersion. He would be dunked in water, submerged in water, in order to demonstrate that they were dead to their old life. They were dead as to their old customs, their old habits, their old traditions, most of all their old idolatry, and their old iniquity. That was now gone; they were burying it. That submersion into water depicted the death of that old life. That would come out of that water, having arisen to walk in a cleansed and new life with God's community — God's family.

The third part was called corban and it had to do with the sacrificial animal. They were to bring an animal to be slaughtered and the reason for the slaughtering of the animal was to remind the Gentile of the forgiveness of sin, their coming into the community of God's people and that the animal was the substitute to die for their sins.

In this 3 stage ceremony they literally passed on, as it were, the symbol of a substitutionary death to those Gentiles who came in, depicting the ultimate lamb who

would come and truly take away sin. (John MacArthur's sermon *Baptism: A Matter of Obedience*, p.6).

John MacArthur says that the disciples' baptisms "foreshadowed Christian baptism, which was not instituted until after Jesus' death and resurrection (of which Christian baptism is a picture; cf. Rom.6:3-4)" (125).

It is obvious He also taught them how to speak to people with compassion and how to preach the gospel. As we learn in Matthew 28:19-20, He obviously taught them what it meant to be a disciple.

A.W. Tozer says, "True discipleship is obeying Jesus Christ and learning of Him and following Him and doing what He tells you to do, keeping His commandments and carrying out His will. That kind of a person is a Christian—and no other kind it" (The Quotable Tozer II, compiled by Harry Verploegh, 56).

Steve Lawson says, "Discipleship is always up close and personal. Despite a growing public ministry, Jesus remains committed to a personal ministry of spending time privately with His disciples, building into their lives" (Sermon, "Marks of An Effective Ministry").

*Matthew 10:1-28 records His instructions to them prior to sending them out.

John now records in verses 23-36 the baptism of John that occurred during this same time.

IV. The Situation (vv.23-36)

A. The Baptism of John (vv.23-24)

The apostle John says, “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.”

“Aenon near Salim.” It is not clearly known where this place was.

A.T Robertson says, “Eusebius locates it in the Jordan valley south of Beisan west of the river where are many springs (fountains, eyes). There is a place called Salim east of Shechem in Samaria with a village called Aimen, but with no water there. There may have been water there then, of course. (Robertson's Word Pictures).

It is interesting to note that “Aenon” is a Hebrew transliteration of “Ayin, which means ‘a spring’ (M.R. Vincent, Vincent’s Word Studies of the NT) or more literally “‘many waters’ which doubtless means ‘many springs’ (D.A. Carson, The Gospel According to John, 209).

John MacArthur says that “Both sites were in Samaria, leaving Judea to Jesus while John was ministering to the north. There is abundant water at both locations, in keeping both with the meaning of Aenon...and the statement that ‘there was much water there’” (125).

The parenthetical note in verse 24, “for John had not yet been thrown in prison” “informs readers that this incident took place between Jesus’ temptation and John’s imprisonment, a period of time about which the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) are silent. The Synoptics begin their account of Jesus’ public ministry in Galilee after John is already in prison (Matt.4:12; Mark 1:14; cf. Luke 3:19-20 with 4:14). The gospel of John

supplements them by recording these earlier events from Jesus' ministry, events that were simultaneous with John the Baptist's ministry in Samaria" (126).

Verses 25-26 record two incidents involving the disciples of John the Baptist. The first, found in verse 25, involves:

B. The Dispute with a Jew (v.25)

The apostle John says, "Therefore there arose a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purification."

The KJV & NKJV has the plural "Jews" but the singular is the preferred translation.

John says they had a "discussion" (zetesis). This was "a controversy, debate" (GING) regarding "purification" (katharismos, ceremonial washings).

"The dispute probably concerned the relation of the baptismal ministries of John and Jesus to the Jew's purification practices alluded to in 2:6" (John MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible).

*Mark 7 records that the matter of purifying was important to the Jews.

John Walvoord says, "Since there were Essene lustrations and Pharisaic washings, why should Jews follow another washing, John's baptism?" (The Bible Knowledge Commentary).

Whatever the dispute was, it is clear in verse 26 that John's disciples were concerned "that Jesus was in competition with him" (John MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible).

Verse 26 shows us:

C. The Envy Concerning Jesus' Baptisms and Popularity (v.26)

John the Baptist's disciples came to him and said, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him."

Warren Wiersbe says, "Without realizing it, John's disciples were putting him into a situation of competing against the Lord Jesus! "All men come to Him!" (John 3:26) sounds like a wail of despair" (The Bible Exposition Commentary).

John Calvin says this "is the language of envious persons, and proceeds from sinful ambition; for they are afraid that the crowd will immediately forsake their master" (Calvin's Commentaries: John).

In other words, "John's disciples were concerned about the decreasing popularity of their leader" (KJV Bible Commentary).

D. John Responds to His Disciples (vv.27-36)

He says, "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."

1. "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven" (v.27).

Steve Lawson says, "This is a great statement of the sovereignty of God. Everything ultimately comes from God. John understood that everything about his ministry was under God's control. His ministry came from God. His message came from God. His followers came from God. His success came from God. His converts came from God. His disciples came from God. It's God's to give and God's to redirect if He pleases. It's all in God's hands to give or to withhold" (Sermon, "Marks of An Effective Ministry").

- a) David realized this when he said in 1 Chron.28:4-5, "Yet, *the Lord, the God of Israel, chose me from all the house of my father to be king over Israel forever. For He has chosen Judah to be a leader*; and in the house of Judah, my father's house, and among the sons of my father He took pleasure in me to make me king over all Israel. 5 "Of all my sons (for the Lord has given me many sons), *He has chosen my son Solomon* to sit on the throne of the kingdom of

the Lord over Israel.”

- b) Jeremiah was told this by God in Jer.1:5:

“Now the word of the Lord came to me saying,
‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
And before you were born ***I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.***”

- c) Amos also said this in Amos 7:14-15:

“Then Amos replied to Amaziah, ‘I am not a prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet; for I am a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs. 15 ***‘But the Lord took me*** from following the flock and the Lord said to me, ‘Go prophesy to My people Israel.’”

2. John continues by referring back to his original statement regarding the Messiah

He said, “You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent ahead of him.’”

- a) In 1:20 he told the “priests and Levites from Jerusalem” (v.19), “I am not the Christ.” In verse 23 he said, “I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as Isaiah the prophet said.”
- b) Even when he was questioned about his baptism he said in verses 26-27, “I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know. 27 ‘It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.’”

John's testimony has always been about Jesus not himself. He was the messenger sent with a message of repentance—to turn to Jesus the Messiah!

He was not trying to build a name for himself.

D.A. Carson says, “John the Baptist, unlike some of his followers, is not perturbed by news of Jesus’ rising popularity. He had always made clear to his followers that he was not the Christ (1:20), but that he was sent as His herald (1:26-34). Unlike many preachers for whom humility is little more than an affectation, John meant what he said. Both John and Jesus were given their roles by heaven (v.27), and John was entirely content with his” (211).

3. John gives a parable illustrating his role (vv.29-30)

He says, “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 friend of the bridegroom” is the “best man.” He organized the details and presided over the wedding. “He found his greatest joy in watching the ceremony proceed without a problem, and in knowing that the groom and his bride were being united with great rejoicing” (Carson, 211).

In this parable, John says, he’s the best man and Jesus is the groom. He is rejoicing that His bride is coming to Jesus.

Isn't this the same joy we have when we see someone come to Christ?

- a) Luke 15:10 says "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."
- b) Ezek.18:23 says, "'Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,' declares the Lord God, 'rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?'"

John concludes his parable by saying in verse 30, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

John MacArthur says the word "must speaks of divine necessity. It was God's will for John to give way to Jesus; there was no reason for the crowds to hang around the herald once the king had arrived. Because he understood this, John the Baptist joyously accepted God's plan for his ministry" (John 1-11, 129).

- 4. John now gives 5 reasons to accept the supremacy of Christ (vv.31-36)

He says, "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."

- a) Christ was from above, John was of the earth and sent by God (v.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.”

The words “from above” (anothen) occurs in 3:3, 7 and is translated “born again.” This word reflects the heavenly origin of the new birth and refers here to the One “who descended from heaven: the Son of Man” (3:13).

Jesus is “above all.” He is sovereign over all. Colossians 1:16-18 says, “For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. 17 ***He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.*** 18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that ***He Himself will come to have first place in everything.***”

“John’s preaching was bold, powerful, and persuasive, yet he was just a ‘man sent from God’ (1:6). Jesus, in contrast, was God incarnate (1:1, 14), and His testimony to the truth was infinitely greater than John’s (cf.5:33-36)” (John MacArthur, John 1-11, 130).

John the Baptist testified of Jesus in John 1:15, “This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me’” (cf. 1:30).

b) Christ knew the truth firsthand (v.32)

“What He has seen and heard, of that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony.”

Jesus’ teaching is superior to everyone else’s because His knowledge is not secondhand. “He is the source of divine revelation” (MacArthur).

Jesus said in 8:26, “I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and the things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world.”

Even though Jesus knew the truth firsthand, not everyone embraced Him. Verse 32 ends with “and no one receives His testimony.” This echoes what John says in 1:11, “He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.”

Jesus’ death on the cross was the ultimate rejection of the people. Peter said in Acts 2:23, “This Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.”

c) Christ’s testimony always agreed with God (v.33)

“He who has received His testimony has set his seal to this, that God is true.”

Not everyone rejects Jesus message. To those who “received His testimony,” they affirmed that

what Jesus said agreed with God.

This verse affirms that “Jesus always spoke in complete harmony with the Father” (MacArthur), so to reject Jesus is to reject the Father.

1 John 4:14-15 says, “We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.”

1 John 5:11-12 says, “And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12 He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.”

- d) Christ experienced the power of the Holy Spirit without limit (v.34)

“For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure.”

Because Jesus is God, He was not limited by sin to speak perfectly for God. Unlike John the Baptist, His ability to be controlled by the Spirit was limited because of his sin. Jesus spoke “the words of God” without error.

John said that Jesus was “full of grace and *truth*” (John 1:14). His enemies said that He was “truthful and [taught] the way of God in truth” (Mat.22:16), so Jesus asked in John 8:46, “Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me?”

- e) Christ received all authority from the Father (vv.35-36)

“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.’”

“This last point explicitly states what the first four imply. Because of His love for the Son, the Father has given Him supreme authority over all things on earth and in heaven. That supremacy is a clear indicator of the Son’s deity” (John MacArthur, John 1-11, 132).

Verse 36 is the last invitation John the Baptist gives before fading from the scene. He says, “‘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.’”

As we said last week, the one who believes has eternal life, the one who does not believe is under judgment.

Notice that the word “believes” is used synonymously with “obey.” To believe in Jesus is to obey Jesus.

Jesus said in Luke 6:46-49, “Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say. 47 “Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: 48 he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock;

and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. 49 "But the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great."

The sentence of judgment awaits all those who refuse to believe in Jesus. John says they "will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

CONCLUSION

1. John MacArthur gives this fitting summary when he says, "John the Baptist clearly declared the sovereignty and supremacy of Jesus Christ, emphasizing that He alone is able to save sinful men from the consequences of their disobedience. And what John proclaimed with his lips, he exemplified with his life, actively promoting Jesus' ministry even at the expense of his own. Thus, the weight of John's witness can still be felt today-as a warning to unbelievers, that they must repent and follow Christ, and as an example to believers, that they should seek the Savior's glory rather than their own" (John 1-11, 133).
2. Have you believe what John has testified of Jesus?
3. I want to call you to believe in Him today by repenting of your sin and turning fully in obedience to Him. There is *no one greater* than Jesus Christ.
4. Let's pray.