

G R A C E

Reformed Baptist Church

Soli ◇ deo ◇ gloria

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Sermon Notes

He Must Increase

John 3:22-36

January 9, 2005

1. _____
2. _____ - _____
3. _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____

1. Background

Verse 22

- Jesus and His disciples *went out into the Judean countryside.*
 - They were already in Judea (in Jerusalem)
- John states that Jesus was baptizing; however, in John 4:2, the evangelist states that Jesus himself did not actually baptize. Rather, His disciples were the ones physically baptizing new converts
 - * Only the Fourth Gospel mentions that Jesus baptized

Verse 23

- John was baptizing in *Aenon near Salim*, because there was much water there

- No one is certain of the exact location of Aenon near Salim
 - It is possible that it is about seven (7) miles east-south-east of Jericho, near the Jordan River
 - This is about four (4) miles north of the place where the River Jordan enters the Dead Sea.
- The word “Aenon” is related to the Hebrew word *ayin*, which means “spring”
 - When John states, “...because there was much water there...” in Verse 23, he likely means “many springs” there

Verse 24

- *For John had not yet been thrown into prison*
 - The reason for this statement is to set this early account of Jesus’ ministry apart from the early accounts in the Synoptics
 - Mark [1:14], as well as Matthew and Luke, place the beginning of Jesus’ *Galilean* ministry after the arrest of John the Baptist, without reporting an earlier *Judean* ministry.
 - The portion here in the Fourth Gospel, therefore, is the earlier *Judean* ministry.

Verses 25 – 26

- *There arose a discussion on the part of John’s disciples with a Jew about purification*
 - A literal reading of this text indicates that John’s disciples initiated [Greek, *ek*] the discussion or debate
 - According to the passage, we do not know why John’s disciples began this discussion
- **Verse 26** gives us insight into why John’s disciples were possible discussing baptism with “a Jew” in Verse 25:
 - It is very possible the Jew mentioned in Verse 25 was comparing John’s baptizing ministry negatively with that of Jesus’, which caused John’s disciples to defend him [John the Baptist]
 - John’s disciples, in Verse 26, state, “He is baptizing, and **all** are coming to Him.”

- Note the use of the word **all** as a figure of speech
 - It seems that now, the popularity of Jesus is growing, and He is [likely] baptizing more converts than John the Baptist

2. The Response of John the Baptist – **I Must Decrease**

• JOHN’S INITIAL RESPONSE TO HIS DISCIPLES:

- **A man can [has the *ability* to] receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven.**

- “John casts his response in the form of a maxim, or aphorism. As such it is extremely broad: God’s sovereignty stands hidden behind all human claims, for a human being does not have anything but what he has received (cf. 1 Cor. 4:7)...In the immediate context, John the Baptist is applying the aphorism to the situation brought to his attention by his disciples. **All gifts come from heaven (“from God”), including the call to a particular station in the stream of redemptive history.** For John the Baptist to have wished he were someone else,...would simply be covetousness by another name” D.A. Carson

• JOHN’S SECOND RESPONSE TO HIS DISCIPLES:

- **“I am not the Christ”**
 - Repeating what he said in John 1:20

• JOHN’S THIRD RESPONSE TO HIS DISCIPLES:

- **The Bride / Bridegroom / and friend of the Bridegroom**
 - In the Old Testament, the prophets use the bride / bridegroom relationship as a metaphor of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel (Isaiah 62:5; Hosea 1-2)
 - John uses the bride / bridegroom relationship to explain his special place in redemption history: the friend of the bridegroom
 - This would be the modern-day *Best Man*

- The *Best Man* in ancient times was responsible for organizing and presiding over the details of a Judean wedding ceremony
- The *Best Man* received great joy when the ceremony proceeded without a problem, and in knowing the bride and bridegroom were being united with great rejoicing
- John states, **So this joy of mine has been made full** (Verse 29)
 - John the Baptist’s joy is associated with the verb *πεπληρωται* (peplayrotai), meaning *to fulfill*, or *to complete*.
 - In other words, John **“has the final and ultimate satisfaction of knowing that his God-given ministry has been successful.”** D.A. Carson
 - What light, therefore, does Verse 29 shed on John 1:6-7?

“There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, **so that all might believe through him.**”
(emphasis added)

• JOHN’S FOURTH RESPONSE TO HIS DISCIPLES:

- **He must increase, but I must decrease.**
 - The word for *must* here, the Greek *δει*, or *dei*, refers to the determined will of God – Jesus will increase

Key Question: **WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR A CHRISTIAN TO DECREASE?**

“There has never yet been a man who led a life of ease, whose name is worth remembering.”
Theodore Roosevelt

- ❖ The willingness “to decrease” is, likely, the truest mark of a mature disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ.

An understanding [and a willingness to submit to the truth] that to be used mightily by God, we must become like _____; and to become like _____, we must _____ like _____. This is what it means to be

❖ This process will always be _____. Therefore, let us

_____.

A.W. Tozer, in *The Pursuit of God*:

Self is the opaque veil that hides the face of God from us. It can be removed only in spiritual experience, never by mere instruction. We may as well try to instruct leprosy out of our system. There must be a work of God in destruction before we are free. We must invite the cross to do its deadly work within us. We must bring our self-sins to the cross for judgment. We must prepare ourselves for an ordeal of suffering in some measure like that through which our Savior passed when He suffered under Pontius Pilate.

Let us remember that when we talk of the rending of the veil we are speaking in a figure, and the thought of it is poetical, almost pleasant, but in actuality there is nothing pleasant about it. In human experience that veil is made of living spiritual tissue; it is composed of the sentient, quivering stuff of which our whole beings consist, and to touch it is to touch us where we feel pain. To tear it away is to injure us, to hurt us and make us bleed. To say otherwise is to make the cross no cross and death no death at all. It is never fun to die. To rip though the dear and tender stuff of which life is made can never be anything but deeply painful. Yet that is what the cross did to Jesus and it is what the cross would do to every man to set him free.

Let us beware of tinkering with our inner life, hoping ourselves to rend the veil. God must do everything for us. Our part is to yield and trust. We must confess, forsake, repudiate the self-life and reckon it crucified. But we must be careful to distinguish lazy “acceptance” from the real work of God. We must insist upon the work being done. We dare not rest content with a neat doctrine of self-crucifixion. That is to imitate Saul and spare the best of the sheep and the oxen.

Insist that the work be done in very truth and it will be done. The cross is rough and it is deadly, but it is effective. It does not keep its victim hanging there forever. There comes a moment when its work is finished and the suffering victim dies. After that is resurrection glory and power, and the pain is forgotten for joy that the veil is taken away and we have entered in actual spiritual experience the presence of the living God.

3. The Fruit

- **We are Uprooted us from the World.**
 - **Verse 32**
 - We find our joy in Christ – we are truly free [from the trappings of this world].
- **We learn what it means to truly know God.**

Larry Crabb, in *Inside Out*:

The kind of internal change that permits a richer taste of God is possible, but it requires

surgery...And there is no anesthetic as the knife penetrates our soul. But this kind of change – change from the inside out – is worth the pain. It makes the Christian life possible.

- **Verse 33**
 - We know with a personal understanding the character and nature of God
 - Read 1 Peter 2:9-12 (specifically, 9b)
 - What are some attributes of God that we know through trials?
 - This becomes our greatest testimony
- **We fulfill our mission, and our joy is made complete.**
- We become like John the Baptist and experience unspeakable simply because Christ is glorified.

Larry Crabb, in *Finding God*:

In a culture so thoroughly devoted to life now, and in a church drenched with teaching on self-improvement and building happier lives, we can't easily develop a passion for something other than our immediate satisfaction. The historic church, in its role as embassy of a foreign kingdom, taught that the chief end of people is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever; the modern church too often teaches that the chief end of God is to gratify people.

In his book, *Hard To Believe: The High Cost and Infinite Value of Following Jesus*, John MacArthur writes:

A missionary whose story has influenced my life greatly is a man mentioned earlier named Henry Martyn. After a long and difficult life of Christian service in India, he announced he was going to go to Persia (modern Iran), because God had laid it upon his heart to translate the New Testament and the Psalms into the Persian language.

By then he was an old man. People told him that if he stayed in India, he would die from the heat, and that Persia was hotter than India. But he went nonetheless. There he studied the Persian language and then translated the entire New Testament and the Psalms in nine months. Then he learned that he couldn't print or circulate them until he received the Shah's permission. He traveled six hundred miles to Tehran; there he was denied permission to see the Shah. He turned around and made a four-hundred-mile trip to find the British ambassador, who gave him the proper letters of introduction and sent him the four hundred miles back to Tehran. This was in 1812, and Martyn made the whole trip on the back of a mule, traveling at night and resting by day, protected from the sweltering desert sun by nothing but a strip of canvas. He finally arrived back in Tehran, was received by the Shah, and secured permission for the scriptures to be printed and circulated in Persia. Ten days later he died. But shortly before his death, he had written this statement in his diary: "I sat in the orchard, an thought, with sweet comfort and peace, of my God; in solitude my Company, my Friend, and Comforter."