

**Lighthouse Bible Church**

**October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2012**

**John 3: 22 – 36**

**‘He must increase and I must decrease’ *Matthew 11: 11***

### **Stand – Read – Pray**

Let me take you back just as a reminder of what has happened leading us to this particular passage of scripture this morning. Remember Jesus and His disciples came to Jerusalem for the Passover and they went into the temple and saw all the selling of animals and changing of money going on inside.

Remember that Jesus began to drive out the money changers and those who sold the oxen, sheep and doves and turned over the tables of the moneychangers and how chaotic that scene would have been.

After this and while Jesus was still in Jerusalem, He did many signs and miracles that are not recorded but as a result of that ‘many believed in His name’ but as we saw before it was a superficial, shallow non saving faith because Jesus knew their hearts and the motive behind what they believed.

Then a ruler of the Jews, a teacher of Israel named Nicodemus came to Jesus and acknowledged that Jesus was ‘a teacher come from God’ but He would not acknowledge that He was the Messiah, God in human form.

Jesus went right to the heart issue with Nicodemus and that was his need to be born again, his need to be saved in order to get into the kingdom of God and that it was nothing that he could do but what the Spirit of God only could do.

Nicodemus was so steeped in his religious practices yet he was still lost in his sin because he believed that he could work his way into the kingdom of God, that he could earn his way, through his religious practices, into heaven. Jesus says you can't.

You remember that Jesus gave Nicodemus an example of the serpent in the wilderness being lifted up and how Christ must be lifted up and 'that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life'.

Jesus said that the only way someone enters the kingdom of heaven is by becoming a born again believer whose sin has been nailed to the cross and is no longer under the condemnation and judgment of God.

He said that for those who do not believe, they are already condemned because of their unbelief and will die in their sin and suffer the punishment of eternal pain, torment and judgment of God forever.

Jesus finished by saying the reason some people do not want to believe is because they love their sinful lifestyle and hate the light, hate Jesus, and because of that are condemned to eternal judgment unless something changes before they die.

We never hear what Nicodemus says in response to all of this and when Jesus is finished they leave Jerusalem headed for Judea and that is where we pick it up this morning starting in Verse 22.

**Verse 22: after these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized.**

What we have here in this passage is the transition from the ministry of John the Baptist to the ministry of Jesus. Remember, John has been pointing the people to Christ and telling them that He is the promised Messiah, He is the Son of God, He is God in human form and you need to follow Him.

Yet, many were still following John and being baptized by him because they thought that He was a prophet sent from God. **Matthew 3: 5 – 6:** said **all Jerusalem, Judea and all around the Jordan came to be baptized by him.** It was a ceremonial cleansing, as we have already seen, as a symbol of their repentance from sin.

They wanted a Prophet and they would follow a Prophet but they didn't want to follow a Savior, because they thought they didn't need one because they were Jews, children of Abraham, and following the laws of God, so they continued on with John.

And over here you have **Jesus and His disciples baptizing** and ministering to the people and their message from the Savior, the Messiah, the Son of God is **repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand** **Matthew 4: 17** says Jesus said. **Mark 1: 14 – 15** says that Jesus' message was **preaching the gospel and saying the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the gospel.**

Jesus tells His followers to **believe the gospel**, the good news, that salvation is by grace through faith and not of a person's heritage or religious practices or works righteousness. No more animal sacrifices, no more priesthood, just believing in the finished work of Christ on the cross. And now in Verse 23 you have John also baptizing and preaching.

**Verse 23:** now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim because there was much water there and they came and were baptized.

Jesus leaves Jerusalem and heads north west into the country of Judea to an area where there is water enough to baptize. We don't know if He is at the Jordan or a water source further west of the Jordan river.

John the Baptist has already moved to **Aenon near Salim** which is probably an area also north west of Jerusalem and further north than where Jesus is. None the less, they are both preaching and baptizing in an area fairly close to each other.  
*Much water there; no sprinkling but immersion*

There are two ministries going on at the same time and fairly close to each other. John is preaching a baptism of repentance and baptizing his followers and Jesus is preaching the gospel of salvation through faith in God and baptizing, symbolically, for the remission of sins that will be fully realized when Christ dies and is buried and rises again.

All this is going on before, **Verse 24** says, **John had not yet been thrown into prison.**

After the end of chapter 3, John the Baptist is never heard from again, this is his final testimony as to who Christ is and his relationship to Him. After this, which the Apostle John does not record, John the Baptist is put into prison and eventually beheaded.

Matthew and Mark record in more detail why John was thrown into prison and what happened to him while he was in there. **Matthew 14: 1 – 12** and **Mark 6: 14 – 29** says that John the Baptist had rebuked king Herod because he had married his brother's wife named Herodias and he was actually her uncle. It was an incestuous relationship that violated the Old Testament levitical law of marriage and John told Herod, repeatedly, that it was wrong.

So Herodias tells Herod to put him in prison so he could be executed. Herod put John in prison and would like to have killed him but he was afraid of the people because they thought John was a prophet.

So on Herod's birthday, his step-daughter Salome, Herodias' daughter, dances before him and his guests and Herod foolishly says 'I will give you anything you want'. Apparently Herodias knew that Herod would make such an offer because it says that Salome had been prompted by her mother Herodias to ask for the head of John the Baptist. So she did and it was granted and he was beheaded.

So before that happens, John and Jesus are both ministering and soon John will be removed from ministry and Jesus will move to the forefront but until then, while they are both ministering, there is a dispute that arises, look at it in Verse 25 – 26. And it is not between Jesus and John but their disciples.

**Verses 25 – 26: then there arose a dispute between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purification and they came to John and said to him, Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him.**

This is a transition time where John the Baptist is preaching and baptizing and pointing people to go and follow Jesus and it seems to be working as the end of Verse 26 indicates.

Here is an example of humility in a man who had such a huge following and yet he is telling them to go and follow Jesus. He's not saying, 'hey where is everyone going?' or 'no one is going to think I'm successful in ministry if I keep losing these people'. You see, ministry is never about the numbers, it is about pointing people to Christ.

The more people that left John to follow Jesus, the more successful John's ministry was, and he knew it and he gloried in that. He didn't have a selfish, self-centered, jealous, its all about me kind of ministry, it was always about him bearing witness to the light and recognizing his subordinate, but important, role.

Well, some of the followers of John had a **dispute** with one or more of the disciples of Jesus about the issue of **purification** and **baptism**. We don't know what the issue was but it caused some questions and concern between the followers of Jesus and of John the Baptist.

And so they come to John the Baptist and look what they say in Verse 26 **he who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified**. Now who are they talking about? Jesus! They are saying that Jesus **is baptizing and all are coming to Him**.

They are saying 'the one you told us to go see and follow, everyone is going to see and follow him and are being baptized by him. Think about that! They should have been going and seeing and being baptized by Him as well and they were still holding on to John and his ministry.

Listen, they were in essence, jealous of everyone going to follow after Jesus. They were envious of all the crowds going to see Jesus and they present it to John in such a way that was trying to set him up to be jealous and envious also. They said **all are coming to Him**, that was an exaggeration to promote the jealousy.

But then you get to see the humble, gracious, loving spirit of John that sees Jesus' ministry, not as a competition or numbers game, but the carrying on and furthering of God's kingdom through someone else besides himself. This is an incredible man, John the Baptist. Maybe that is why Jesus says in **Matthew 11: 11 among them that were born of women there has not risen a greater than John the Baptist**.

That is why John says later in Verse 29 **therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.** He says ‘I’m not jealous or envious of Him, I am overjoyed that people are going to Him and leaving me, that is what I have been waiting for, that was my ministry being fulfilled. What a faithful servant of Christ.

There seems to me so much jealousy in ministry today, whether it is in the title a person wants to have or the number of people in their church or ministry or program and when anything infringes on that, people become jealous. That is usually the ruin of many a ministry and the splitting of many a church as much as it is the ruin of a family and a marriage, because of jealousy.

John wasn’t that way, he recognized his God given role as the messenger of one crying in the wilderness preparing the way of the Lord and then getting out of the way. Moses, the Bible says in **Numbers 12: 3 was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.** Look back to **Numbers 11: 26 – 30:**  
*Read*

Look what John says in **Verse 27 John answered and said ‘a man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven’.**

John says listen, it is God who sets up ministry and moves people in ministry and if God chooses to send people to Christ and be ministered to by Him, then I am glad for that, not jealous. John was content to be used by God and then for his ministry to fade into the background. That is a man of true humility.

Paul said of his own ministry in **1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15: 10 but by the grace of God I am what I am.** He told Timothy in **1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 1: 12 that it was Christ Jesus who has enabled me because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry..**

John the Baptist has to remind them in **Verse 28** **you yourselves bear me witness that I said ‘I am not the Christ, but, I have been sent before Him’.**

He says, ‘I told you that I was here to point you and everyone else to Christ’ so there should be no dispute, there should be no jealousy; ‘it’s ok, just go and follow Him, that is the plan of God’. *Read 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 3: 4 - 9*

One writer said “You know what the character of any great ministry is? Not how many people follow the minister but how many people follow Jesus Christ. Any time you run into a ministry where people are constantly attached to the minister, something is wrong. Any really God-blessed, God-given ministry makes disciples of Jesus Christ, not disciples of some man. And John's ministry was a joyous ministry because he had sent a whole nation to Jesus Christ.” *MacArthur John Chapter 3 archives GTY.*

Then John uses a great illustration in **Verse 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.**

John looks at himself as the **friend of the bridegroom and Jesus as the bridegroom** in a typical wedding setting. The friend of the bridegroom was responsible for much of what took place at the wedding ceremony, much like a best man would today.

The friend of the bridegroom’s final act would be bringing the bride to the groom and then placing their hands together and then the bride and groom consummating the marriage and the friend fading out of the picture.

John says ‘that is me’ I have brought you to Christ and now I have finished what I was called to do.



And John says **I rejoiced greatly because of the bridegrooms voice.** The groom did not speak until his hand was placed in the hand of the bride and then he was able to speak; and at that moment the friends work was done, he bowed out.

John says 'I rejoiced' at being used by God in such a profound way to bring others to Christ. It was never jealousy or envy that his ministry was fading and Jesus' ministry was increasing. It was a cause for great celebration and joy. O that that would be the case for many today.

Then look at **Verse 30** which says it as clearly as possible **He must increase and I must decrease.**

John says 'its not optional', this is God's plan and design, just like the plan and design of the friend and the bridegroom. Only this was God's design from the beginning, from before John was born, to be the voice of one crying in the wilderness pointing people to Jesus. He willingly desires to decrease and for Christ to increase. What humility. Then John gives several reasons why they should follow Christ and stop following Him. Look at Verse 31.

**Verse 31: He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth.**

First of all John the Baptist says Jesus came from heaven. He is God in human form and is above all else. We've looked at verses before showing that Christ came from heaven and that He is going back to heaven.

John says compared to Christ I am nothing, I am earthly and speak of earthly things. I have no value or worth in comparison to Christ. So don't be jealous or envious of Him. He says in Verse 32

**Verse 32: and what He has seen and heard that He testifies and no one receives His testimony.**

John says that Jesus, as God the Son coming from heaven, had direct sight and hearing from the Father of what He was to share with the world. In **John 8: 26** Jesus said **He who sent Me is true and I speak to the world those things which I heard from Him.** In **John 15: 15** Jesus said to His disciples **for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.**

John says ‘why would you want to listen to me when you can hear God speaking directly through Him’? John the Baptist is telling everyone that Jesus, the Son of God, is far superior to him because He has an intimate relationship with God the Father and hears Him and speaks what He says.

John says that sad thing is, is that **no one receives His testimony.** Not meaning that no one ever doesn’t receive it as Verse 33 says, but the majority don’t. And the reason is, as **1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 2: 14** says **the natural man or unbeliever can not receive the things of God because they are spiritually discerned.** Until God opens your heart to the truth of the gospel, you remain dead in your sins as **Ephesians 2: 1** says. Then in Verse 33

**Verse 33: He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true.**

John says that those who do receive what Jesus says, and the implication is that they believe it and act on it and live it, **certify** or put their stamp or seal that what He says comes from God and it is the absolute truth.

It is believing that when Christ speaks, He is speaking the truth of God. And by the way, how does God speak to us today? Through His Son **Hebrews 1: 1 – 2** says. How does His Son, how does Jesus speak to us today? Through His Word. **Colossians 3: 16** says **let the Word of .... Christ dwell in your richly.**

**Verse 34: For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure.**

John says that because Jesus is God in human form there is no limit to the Spirit's power working in and through Him. It is the power of the gospel that saves a soul from hell. It is the power to heal the sick and raise the dead. It is the power to forgive sin. It is the power to speak every word that fulfills perfectly every written word of God.

**Verse 35: the Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hands.**

We have already seen the expression of love that the Father has for the Son in other passages. It is a perfect love that God the Father showed to His Son by **giving all things into His hands.**

In **Matthew 11: 27** Jesus said **all things have been delivered to Me by My Father.** Remember the great commission in **Matthew 28: 18** where Jesus says **all authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth...**

John the Baptist says 'listen, because Jesus came from heaven because He is God in human form, because He speaks the truth as He hears it from God the Father, because He has the fullness of the Spirit of God and because God loves Him and has given all things into His hands, then follow Him, not me. Then he ends with an invitation and warning to all who hear and read. Look at verse 36.

**Verse 36: He who believes in the Son has everlasting life, and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.**

This is similar to **1<sup>st</sup> John 5: 11 – 12** and this is the testimony that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life, he who does not have the Son of God does not have life...

What about you?

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**October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2012**  
**John 3: 22 – 36**  
**‘He must increase and I must decrease’**

Introduction and Review:

Verses 22 - 23: Jesus and John were baptizing  
Matthew 3: 5 – 6, 4: 17, Mark 1: 14 – 15

Verse 24: John had not yet been imprisoned  
Matthew 14: 1 – 12, Mark 6: 14 – 29

Verses 25 – 26: Then there arose a dispute  
Matthew 11: 11, Numbers 12: 3, 11: 26 – 30

Verse 27: A man can receive nothing unless...  
1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15: 10, 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 1: 12

Verses 28 – 29: I am not the Christ but the friend...  
1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 3: 4 – 9

Verse 30 – 35: He must increase and I must decrease  
John 8: 26, 15: 15, 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 2: 14  
Colossians 3: 16, Hebrews 1: 1 – 2  
Matthew 11: 27, Matthew 28: 18  
1<sup>st</sup> John 5: 11 – 12

Verse 36: He who believes in the Son has everlasting life  
1<sup>st</sup> John 5: 11 – 12