

## EXPOSITION OF JOHN

### Message #17

### John 3:22-30

I recently listened to an interview of a professional athlete who said - I hate losing, but if we lose to a better team, I understand it. There is a lot of wisdom in this statement. No one likes to lose, but if you lose because someone else is better, losing doesn't hurt so much. What hurts is when you lose and you know that they are not better. In fact, if you lose and you know you are realistically better, that really is tough to take.

When it comes to ministry, it is the same way. I don't know too many godly ministers who mind people going to another church if that church is taking them deep in their understanding of God's Word and taking them to new levels of commitment to Jesus Christ. What hurts is when people leave and go to places that you know are not taking them deep in their walk with God. If they go someplace that makes them feel good about themselves, that is depressing, because real ministry is about the Truth of God - not about our own agenda.

There is an attitude that exists today with many, many people that it really doesn't matter which church you go to, just go. Whatever suits your fancy. Just pick a church and go. Now Jesus Christ did not think that way and, as you will see, neither did John. If a person were being drawn into a disciplined commitment to Jesus Christ, John was all for it. If on the other hand a person was being led in some area of spiritual apathy or sin, John condemned it.

This passage is not paralleled by any account in the Gospels. Mark begins with Jesus ministry after John's imprisonment (Mark 1:14). Matthew agrees with Mark (Matthew 4:12-21) and Luke mentions John was in prison at the outset (Luke 3:19).

The context is that Jesus is starting to make a dent in some of the minds of men like Nicodemus.

**The purpose of this text is to show all that after Christ's baptism, John put his seal of approval upon the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.** A key lesson to learn here is:

**A TRUE MINISTER OF GOD WILL RECOGNIZE HIS GOD-SANCTIONED ROLE IN POINTING PEOPLE TO JESUS CHRIST AND THE TRUTH OF GOD AND HE WILL EXPERIENCE NO GREATER JOY THAN WHEN HE SEES THIS HAPPEN.**

When people are right with God, their greatest joy will be in seeing people gravitate to a place where they may truly pursue the will and Word of God. People right with God don't just want people going to church - they want them in a church where they can truly learn truth and blossom in truth.

Now make no mistake about this - John was the best minister on the planet, when this event occurred. Jesus Christ is literally on earth and Jesus Christ is what John's ministry was all about. He was the predicted forerunner of Jesus Christ. So when John sanctions people going to Jesus Christ, he is not sanctioning them leaving him and going to a lesser ministry, but to a greater ministry. His response would have been completely different had people been going to some lesser ministry. Had they gone to any other ministry, he would have been angered.

He would never have reacted in such a mild and kind way.

Now to understand this text, there are five key observations we want to make:

**OBSERVATION #1** – Jesus takes His disciples to minister in Judea. 3:22

“After these things” refers to all the events that took place in Jerusalem. Christ performed signs and wonders in Jerusalem, He chased people out of the temple in Jerusalem and He had an important discussion with a leading Pharisee named Nicodemus in Jerusalem. After these events, He left Jerusalem and went out into the Judean country (the northern part of the Jordan river valley) and there He was spending time with His disciples and His disciples were baptizing people. The verb “was spending” is in the imperfect tense, which means Jesus was spending a considerable period of time in this area. It was not short.

Christ’s disciples needed time with just Him. He took the time to Personally permit them to get to know Him. John, who is writing this gospel never forgot about this. There is no question that a good lesson for any Christ-like minister to learn is that you must take some time to get to know your flock and to let your flock get to know you. It is imperative that opportunities exist for the minister to take this time to point and direct people to the truth of God.

Jesus did not baptize anybody (4:2), but His disciples did. Jesus will eventually baptize with the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11), however not just yet. Now John's baptism was Jewish and preparatory - prepare yourselves to receive the Lord by acknowledging that you are a sinner by baptism (Acts 19:4). Jesus’ baptism was Jewish and apparently purifying (John 3:25). One who came to Christ apparently was baptized not only as a sign one was a sinner, but also that one had come to Christ to receive Him so one could have necessary purity to enter the Kingdom.

**OBSERVATION #2** – John and his disciples were also ministering in the area. 3:23-24

Both Jesus and John are ministering in rural areas, not urban areas. All people are sinners whether city person or country person and need to be saved from sin. That is why these two are in these areas. Jesus was in Judea and John was to the north in Aenon, near Salim, which may have been Samaria. Now it has been guessed that John and Jesus were about 20 miles apart. John was still baptizing Jewish people, getting them ready to meet Jesus Christ. He had not yet been thrown into jail, so he was still carrying out His ministry. So many people tend to abandon their ministries once a better minister comes; John kept at his assignment. In ministry, you love it when people want to help. Many make themselves available to help minister in any way they can and it is a true blessing.

**The Apostle John gives us this information to clearly show John’s high regard for Jesus . before he went to jail, while he was still ministering.**

What we have here are two different persons - One is God and the other is a prophet of God. Both are involved in doing the will of God. Just because John met Jesus Christ did not mean he no longer had responsibilities. He still had the responsibility to get Israel ready to meet Jesus Christ. John was calling Israel to repent of sin.

In fact, it will be his preaching against sin that will eventually get him arrested and killed (Matthew 14:1-3; Mark 6:17-32). But as one commentator observed, “A true minister of God will continue to preach the truth whether they pay you or slay you.”

When you tell people they are sinners and needed to be saved there will be times you will be hated by religious people, relatives, and friends. This is not popular. One other point to observe from verse 23 is the fact that John was baptizing “because there was much water.” There is nothing wrong with assessing ministry opportunities in a particular area and taking advantage of those opportunities. We can make a similar application - we keep preaching God’s Word on the radio because there are many radio stations and we have enough money to do it. That does not mean it will always be this way, but it is now and we are taking advantage of it.

When we get into eternity, we will still have responsibilities. Just because Jesus Christ is near to us in proximity does not mean we can sit back and do nothing.

**OBSERVATION #3** – John's disciples got into a discussion with another Jew about baptism.  
3:25

Now apparently Jesus was stressing something different in His baptism than John was and John’s disciples quickly spotted it. Jesus is the One whom the Jews were to receive. Apparently there was a difference between what John taught about baptism - preparation and what Jesus taught about baptism - purification. Since Jesus Christ was on the earth, water baptism was not going to purify one before God. Faith in Jesus Christ would accomplish this. Jesus was telling people that to be pure, they had to believe in Him (John 3:16, 18). Baptism for Christ and His disciples had become more of a discipleship issue (John 4:1).

Now John's baptism was sanctioned by God, but when God, in the Person of Jesus Christ came, John's theology yielded to Christ's theology. John does not minimize his role or responsibility, but he also realizes that there is One on the scene who is far more proficient than he is. The Apostle Paul will come later and the Church must yield to Pauline doctrine. **There is a progression in doctrine and you see it right here.**

If you ever want to start a theological debate, bring up the subject of water baptism. Ask what does it mean? If there were debates in Christ’s day, you certainly can expect them in our day.

I have a pastor friend who began teaching a doctrine in his church. My pastor friend has spent years studying this doctrine. Some odd duck in his church held a different quirky doctrinal position, not based on a true and real understanding of God's Word or a careful and prayerful study of God’s Word but just because he was odd. Now the real problem was that this man would not change his position to that of true and sound doctrine. A far better teacher God sent to him, but he was so blinded, that he would not admit truth. John was not like that. He was willing to admit truth.

**OBSERVATION #4** – John's disciples are disturbed by Jesus' success. 3:26

John's disciples were loyal to John and I know that this pleases God. I wish people would be more loyal to their ministers and their churches. But loyalty is something that will be rare as we near the coming of Jesus Christ.

John's disciples were upset because Jesus, who had been baptized by John, was now drawing people to Him (4:1). Jesus was making more disciples than John was and John's disciples were upset. **This was a problem of numbers**. These disciples were more interested in John than Jesus. Jesus was captivating the nation and they were losing some of their influence and this bothered them. We could call this a **jealousy based on numbers**. Notice they say here "all" are coming to Him. This is a distortion. That is what jealousy does - it distorts reality. People who are jealous do not deal with real facts, they invent things in their delusional mind.

Numbers are not a sign of success. We are not called by God to be successful; we are called by God to be faithful. Two men are before us - John and Jesus. Both will be killed. John will be decapitated and Jesus will be crucified. Both were successful because both were doing the will of God regardless of the numbers or the responses. **Always remember we are not called to be successful, but we are called to be faithful and if you are faithful you are successful with God**.

When the power of God is present, there will be an initial positive surge. Most people drawn to Christ were fly-by-night in their commitment. They were drawn to Him because of the interesting things He could say and do.

**OBSERVATION #5** – John responds to his disciples. 3:27-30

There are four responses John gives to his disciples which were profound. Dr. James Montgomery Boice said that these responses are important because they show us the necessary ingredients to achieve true, God-honoring humility.

**(Response #1)** - A man's ministry is controlled by the sovereignty of God. 3:27

A man cannot receive any ministry unless God grants it to him. By the way, the noun used for the minister is "man," not "woman." I do not believe it is right to have women ministers. It does not square with the Bible.

The truth in this verse can free you. You are who you are, you do what you do, you have gifts, talents, looks, skills and abilities because God has given them to you. You strive to be faithful with your assignments, not to be like everyone else.

John is telling his disciples that his ministry and Jesus ministry are granted by the sovereign will of God. The sovereignty of God is something very important in the book of John (John 6:65; 19:11). John was perfectly content with his ministry entrustment and he did not sense any rivalry with Jesus because he knew both were ministries from above.

When you feel outdone, outclassed or eclipsed because someone does it better, remember a man can receive nothing except from heaven. The first key to humility is to acknowledge the sovereignty of God in all things.

**(Response #2)** - John's ministry was preparatory to Christ's ministry. 3:28

These disciples knew that John's ministry was to be a forerunner of Jesus Christ and they also knew he was not the Christ (1:20). He testified, himself, that he was not the Christ. He was sent to prepare the way of the Lord. He was sent to be a forerunner to Jesus Christ so when Christ came, John was not jealous; he was excited that he was fulfilling his God-ordained role. John knew who he was and who he wasn't. He is not jealous, bitter or insecure. He is okay with what God made him. The second key to humility is to acknowledge who you are and what God has given you to do.

**(Response #3)** - John is a friend of the groom, but he is not the groom. 3:29

John saw Jesus as the Bridegroom of Israel. He saw himself as the friend of the Bridegroom and when the Groom finally showed up, John's joy was full. John was content to fade quietly away into the background and let the Bridegroom get all of the attention.

The friend's or best man's responsibility is to help the groom in any way possible. That was John's job. Once Christ came on the scene, he was happy because the real groom was finally here. The third key to humility is to realize the focus of ministry is Jesus Christ.

This analogy is critical to the Church Age. The Apostle John is writing this well into the Church Age. The Church is the Bride and Jesus is the Bridegroom. That imagery and theology is developed right here.

**(Response #4)** - John must decrease but Christ must increase. 3:30

Dr. Warren Wiersbe observed there are three "musts" in John 3 - 1) The must of the sinner (John 3:7); 2) The must of the Savior (John 3:14); and 3) The must of the servant (John 3:30). John affirms his subordinate type of ministry. This is what John's life and ministry were all about. His ministry was about making Jesus greater and himself lesser. Literally, that was his job. He found great joy in doing this job. The fourth key to humility is to realize Jesus is greater than we are. John is not annoyed with Christ's popularity, he delights in it.

It is easy to tell when one is close to Jesus Christ - there is no self-conceit, no pride. There is a constant realization of Christ's greatness, Christ's holiness and our depravity.

It has been observed that there are people who actually go into ministry and pursue some ministry because they are jealous of somebody else. There is a real shortage of John-type men and women of God today. We will find our greatest joy in doing what God has called us to do - just as John did. Our greatest joy in life will be when Jesus increases in our life and we decrease. At best, we are all small and insignificant. God is the One who is truly Great and Gracious.