

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

### **He Must Increase, I Must Decrease John 3:22-30**

We live in very competitive times. Unfortunately that competitive spirit can infiltrate the church of Jesus Christ. And when that happens it is very possible for professing Christians to behave very badly.

The Bible records for us one of the greatest examples of this in **Philippians 1:15-17**. Hopefully you remember this passage. Paul was under house arrest. And the church at Philippi had been a great encouragement to him but there were another group of Christians who out of selfish ambition wanted to cause him distress in his imprisonment. Let me read this passage for you, "**Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; (16) the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; (17) the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment.**" Paul enjoyed a very prominent position within the church and there were those who wanted his role to be diminished. They viewed him as their competitor. How did he respond? Listen to **Philippians 1:18** "**What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice, yes and I will rejoice.**"

Some people are all about themselves. But certainly you would have to say that this was not true of the Apostle Paul. His life was all about Christ being exalted. As long as Christ was exalted Paul cared very little about what might happen to him or what might happen to his position of prominence in the church.

But Paul is not the only one in the Scriptures who has this attitude. John the Baptist also had this very same attitude and this leads us to the passage that we will be studying this weekend.

Let me read for you **John 3:22-30**, "**After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing. (23) And John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and they were coming and were being baptized. (24) For John had not yet been thrown into prison. (25) There arose therefore a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purification. (26) And they came to John and said to him, 'Rabbi, He who was with you, beyond the Jordan, to whom you have borne witness, behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him.'**" (27) John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing, unless it has been given him from heaven. (28) You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before 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. And so this joy of mine has been made full." (30) He must increase but I must decrease."

Notice how the passage begins, "**After these things.**" Does this phrase introduce an incident that has nothing to do with what has preceded it or is there some link? Let us for a moment consider what has come before.

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In **John 3:1-15** the Apostle John recorded for us a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. In this conversation Jesus spelled out for us not only the necessity of the new birth but also how one might experience it. Then in **John 3:16-21** the apostle simply gives us his own personal reflections on this earlier conversation that he had recorded.

Considering what has come before, could this in any way be linked to the incident that we just read about between John the Baptist and His disciples in **John 3:22-30**. I believe that the answer is yes. But how are these two passages of scripture linked?

After making clear what Jesus stands for in John 3:1-21 the apostle John returned to John the Baptist in John 3:22-30 in order to show his continuing unwavering support of Jesus. In other words the apostle John chose to once again point his readers to John the Baptist to communicate his unwavering support of Jesus even though his own ministry was being eclipsed by the very person that he was supporting. This leads us to the question that we will be seeking to answer this weekend.

The question that we will be answering this weekend is this: What do we learn about John the Baptist's unwavering support of Jesus in John 3:22-30?

The first thing that we learn about John the Baptist's unwavering support of Jesus is this, John the Baptist's unwavering support of Jesus was not shared by all of his disciples (John 3:22-26).

Let me read for you **John 3:22-26**, "**After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing. (23) And John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and they were coming and were being baptized. (24) For John had not yet been thrown into prison. (25) There arose therefore a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purification. (26) And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have borne witness, behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him."**

Let us look at **verse 22**, "**After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them baptizing.**" After the events previously recorded Jesus moved with his disciples from Jerusalem into the country districts of Judea. The locality is not closely specified, but it appears to be somewhere in the Jordan plain, perhaps not far from Jericho which is of course just west of the Jordan River. And what were they doing there? They were baptizing. Not Jesus, but His disciples according to **John 4:2**. Most likely the baptisms that they were performing were a continuation of the "baptism of repentance" which was performed in order to publicly testify to a person's personal readiness for the approaching kingdom. Obviously Jesus' public ministry was now in full swing.

Now let us go down to **verse 23**, "**And John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and they were coming and were being baptized.**" In this verse the spotlight moves from the baptizing ministry of Jesus to the baptizing ministry of John the Baptist. And what do we see? We see that even though the public ministry of Christ was now in full swing, it was not as if the baptizing ministry of John the Baptist had suddenly stopped.

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It is very clear from this passage that people were still coming to John for baptism. People were coming to him for baptism in a place called "Aenon" which was near "Salim."

Unfortunately not only do we not know where "Aenon" was located we also don't know where "Salim" was located. But if we were to take a guess, the best guess would be that John was baptizing in a place about thirty miles north of the area where Jesus was baptizing.

We now know approximately where Jesus and John the Baptist were ministering but when were they baptizing?

Let us go down to **verse 24, "For John was not yet thrown into prison."** Obviously John shares this with us in order to put this particular incident into a very precise time frame. Because he does this we know that this specific incident takes place earlier than anything we find in the synoptic gospels involving John the Baptist.

So what do we know so far? We know that very early in the ministry of Christ, at a specific point in time, prior to His Galilean ministry that He and John the Baptist were performing a similar baptizing ministry in two separate locations that most likely were relatively close to each other.

Now isn't this interesting. Two very similar ministries taking place not too far from each other; one ministry being performed by an up and coming spiritual star in Israel which of course is Jesus and the other ministry being performed by Israel's long standing spiritual super star John the Baptist.

Now the outstanding question must be asked: Will the parallel ministries of Jesus, the up and coming star, produce a competitive spirit between Jesus, John the Baptist or their disciples?

Let us now go on to **verse 25, "There arose therefore a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purification."** Since the apostle John tells us "**There arose therefore a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew**" it would seem that this discussion between John's disciples and this Jew was in some way generated by the baptizing activities of Jesus and John the Baptist that were just described. But though this discussion might have been generated by these activities it surprisingly appears that it did not focus on the rite of baptism itself. Rather it appears that the discussion focused on purification rites. Why would I say this? Let us continue to read the verse; "**There arose therefore a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about baptism?** No, What does it say? "**There arose therefore a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purification.**"

The word for "purification" used in John 3:25 is the same word used by John to refer to Jewish purification rights in John 2:6. In light of this we would have to conclude that the dispute did not focus on the relative merits of the baptism administered by John versus the baptism administered by Jesus, but rather it focused on something totally different. It focused on Jewish purification rites.

However, though there seems very little doubt about the original point of this particular discussion, it obviously took a curious turn while the disciples of John the Baptist were on their way to talk to him as we will see in **John 3:26.**

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Let us read this verse **"And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, We have a question about Jewish purification rites."** No, this is not what they said, rather they said, **"Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have borne witness, behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him."** Now isn't this interesting. Though the disciples of John were initially engaged in a discussion about purification rites their attention turned to the baptizing work of Jesus when talking to John the Baptist. Their attention was no longer on water. Their attention was no longer on purification rites. But rather their attention was being directed at Jesus and there is no way that we can possibly take their remarks as positive. It certainly seems that the disciples of John the Baptist had begun to view Jesus as their competitor.

What did they say? **"Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan (obviously referring to Jesus), to whom you have borne witness (the person you have promoted), behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him."**

Let me ask you a question, "Was everyone going to Jesus in order to participate in the baptism of repentance in preparation for the coming kingdom?" And of course the answer is no! The declaration of the disciples of John the Baptist that "all" were going out to Jesus to be baptized was obviously an exaggeration. Why would they have exaggerated the facts? Someone might suggest it was to make a point. But in light of the response of John the Baptist, I believe that we would have to conclude that they exaggerated the facts because they were upset.

Why would they have had this response to the reports coming to them about the baptizing work of Jesus? The disciples of John the Baptist were worried. It was as if they were saying, "Rabbi, your star is sinking. Your ministry is diminishing. What are we going to do?"

The disappointment for them of watching the ebbing of a ministry that had once been a great flood tide had produced in them a personal resentment as they viewed the success of Jesus. It was of course a very human reaction on the part of John's disciples, and it could have presented a temptation to John Himself. He had spent many years of loneliness and self-denial in the wilderness, no doubt experiencing rejection and alienation. Now, having experienced headline success, he was seeing it suddenly fading away. It would have been easy for John to yield to a very natural impulse to assert himself.

He could have been tempted to get a bigger banner. He could have been tempted to get brighter lights. He could have been tempted to make more noise. But will he?

This leads us to the second thing that we learn about John the Baptist's unwavering support of Jesus in John 3:22-30? Not only have we learned that John the Baptist's unwavering support of Jesus was not shared by all of his disciples but we also learn that:

John the Baptist's unwavering support of Jesus continued in spite of his diminishing role (John 3:27-30). Let us read **John 3:27-30, " John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing, unless it has been given him from heaven. (28) You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but 'I have been sent before Him.' (29) "He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly**

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**because of the bridegroom's voice. And so this joy of mine has been made full. (30) He must increase, but I must decrease."**

Our competitive society is structured to compel us to measure our achievements against those of others very much in the way the disciples of John were doing. But this was not true of John the Baptist. And fortunately for us we can learn a great deal from his very revealing and proper response to his diminishing role. So what specifically were those things?

The response of John the Baptist to his diminishing role reveals the proper philosophy (John 3:27-28). Let us go back and read **John 3:27-28 "John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing, unless it has been given him from heaven."**

John stood before his disciples and quietly answered their resentful assertions with a proverb, "**A man can receive nothing, unless it has been given him from heaven.**" John the Baptist viewed everything that men enjoy by way of success as being from the hand of God. And it was this philosophy that kept him from becoming resentful of Jesus success.

What Jesus was doing, and the success that He was enjoying was from the hand of God. What John the Baptist was doing and what he was enjoying was also from the hand of God. This is what John the Baptist was communicating in **John 3:28** when he said "**You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, "I am not the Christ,' but 'I have been sent before Him."**

If men are displaying superior gifts or enjoying greater success than we are it is because God has given them those gifts and it is because God has given them that success. It is all a part of His eternal plan.

Are there people in your life that you have found yourself resenting simply because they may be more gifted than you or have enjoyed more success than you? If there are then I would suggest that you at this very moment take time to not only thank the Lord for His eternal plan but also that you would thank Him for all those that He is using to accomplish His eternal plan.

The philosophy introduced to us in John 3:27 should not only impact how we respond to the success of others but also how we respond to our own success (1 Corinthians 4:6-7). Let me read for you the statement of the apostle Paul in **1 Corinthians 4:6-7.**

Listen to what he said, "**Now these thing, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that in us you might learn not to exceed what is written, in order that no one of you might become arrogant in behalf of one against the other; (7) For who regards you as superior? And what do you have that you did not receive? But if you did not receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it."**

When we loose track of the truth that everything that we have has been received from the hand of God, not only can it lead us to becoming resentful of others, but it can also lead us to become boastful in terms of ourselves.

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Again take a moment and consider your life. Are there certain successes that you are enjoying that cause you to think more highly of yourself than you ought? Most of you will most likely say, I don't think so. But let me ask you a question when you find yourself successful at something, what is your response? Is it to sit back with a sense of personal satisfaction basking in the glow of that success, or do you quickly go into the presence of God through prayer and give Him thanks for entrusting you with the gifts and talents that He has bestowed on you that made that success possible.

So, whether we are looking at our success, or the success of others, the proper philosophy for us to have is this, "**A man can receive nothing, unless it has been given him from heaven.**" What else do we learn from his very revealing and proper response to his diminishing role?

The response of John the Baptist to his diminishing role reveals the proper attitude (John 3:29). Let us now go back and read **John 3:29 "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. And so this joy of mine is full."**

John the Baptist's meaning is obvious. Jesus is the bridegroom. John the Baptist is the friend of the bridegroom. The bride are all those who by faith come to Christ. Why does John the Baptist use this particular illustration? John the Baptist uses this particular illustration in order to picture that the proper attitude of a friend when the bridegroom is united with his bride is one of great joy.

The disciples of John were being bummed out as people were coming by faith to Jesus for baptism? This should not have been.

Certainly, even today when we hear of the great successes of various churches in our Valley in bringing people to a saving knowledge of Christ it should fill us with the same type of joy that a friend of the bridegroom experiences when the bridegroom is united with his bride. What else do we learn from John's very revealing and proper response to his diminishing role?

The response of John the Baptist to his diminishing role reveals the proper conduct (John 3:20). Let us read **John 3:30 "He must increase but I must decrease."**

### CONCLUSION

There is no other way to live for Christ! This is an operational imperative! It is a must, not an option. As William Carey a great missionary pioneer lay dying, he turned to his friend and said, "When I am gone, don't talk about William Carey: talk about William Carey's Savior. I desire that Christ alone be magnified." That was the spirit of John the Baptist as well. "He must increase but I must decrease."