

18 - He Must Increase

John 3:22-30

REVIEW / INTRODUCTION

Last time we were in the text we covered John 3:16. The emphasis of the text is that God has a love that gives. God loved therefore He gave His son. And the challenge is that if we know Him and he lives in our hearts then we will have a love that gives and serves and seeks to bless others.

READING THE TEXT

22 After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. 23 John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized 24 (for John had not yet been put in prison).

25 Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. 26 And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was

with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him.” 27 John answered, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is 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 The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. 30 He must increase, but I must decrease.”

PREACHING THE TEXT

22 After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing.

AFTER THIS

Jesus was speaking with Nicodemus about God's plan of salvation. He told Nicodemus he had to be born

again. Then Jesus headed to the countryside near John The Baptist.

JESUS WAS BAPTIZING

Did you know that Jesus had his disciples baptizing others right down the river from John The Baptist? Jesus taught his disciples to baptize people as a sign that they had repented of their sin and had become a follower of Jesus Christ the Messiah.

²³ John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized ²⁴ (for John had not yet been put in prison).

There was plenty of water for more than one party to be baptizing. After John introduced Jesus as The Messiah he continued to baptize people as they repented of their sins.

This river had several good spots for baptizing people. As long as John was free he would continue in the

ministry that God had given Him. But it had to evoke some initial surprise that right down the river was Jesus and His disciples doing the same thing as John. What feelings might you have had if you were in the same situation as John and his followers? Jealousy? Confusion? Something else?

²⁵ Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. ²⁶ And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him."

STOP HIM, WE WERE HERE FIRST!

It appears as if a Jew went to Jesus first to find out what this baptism for repentance was all about. And then he saw John and his disciples also baptizing so he went to compare notes and see if they were doing the same thing as Jesus. This alerted his followers that John had

competition. At least that is how John's disciples looked at it.

COMPETITION IN THE GOSPEL BUSINESS

There is a great competitiveness that I have noticed over the past couple decades. I noticed it when I was on pastoral staff of a mega church. We were the fastest growing church in the cities and when we hit 2000 we were excited because there were a lot of lives being transformed. When we hit and surpassed 3000 a little bit of pride took hold in me. If there were other large churches they were the competition. It was tempting to give reasons of why we knew better and people should come here rather than there.

Then when I was pastoring a couple of town and country churches I noticed many people felt inferior to larger churches. So occasionally someone would speak in pride and suggest that the larger churches in Hayward were just doing programs. They did not know how to study the bible like we did. Of course we had no idea when they

did in Hayward. But many people spoke out of jealousy and a spirit of competition.

One thing I have learned is to notice where God is at work and encourage that ministry even if it is not at our church. When we invest in the kingdom and reject a spirit of jealousy God will bless us. It's not our job to be a rival and strong competition for other church. It is our calling to save the lost, make disciples out of them and get people saved and serving the Lord and His body. It is not our job to think of ourselves as better than others or in competition with others.

Paul noticed this spirit of competition and jealousy even in the 1st century. Some were jealous of Paul because God was blessing him and speaking through him as an Apostle.

Philippians 1: 15– 17

Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for

the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.

“ALL” ARE GOING TO HIM!

John’s disciples told him that “all were going to Him!” Here is John’s answer to jealousy and a spirit of competition. Remember his followers were tempting John to be jealous of Jesus because Jesus was encroaching on “their turf.”

²⁷ John answered, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.

In other words, John is say; “this is not my turf.” Anywhere a case of God breaks out is God’s turf. It does not belong to the pastor or elders or members or anyone. We do not make up ministries, rather we discern where God is at work and join Him there. So it never had anything to do with us. Ministry is about discerning where God is working and saying amen to what God is doing and then joining Him as each one does his or her part.

Numbers 11: 26– 29 gives us a perfect example of how Moses dealt with jealousy and a spirit of competition. ***In the camp of Israel there were two men on whom the spirit of prophecy had come— Eldad and Medad— and they were prophesying in the camp, not at the Tent of Meeting. And a young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.” And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth, said, “My lord Moses, stop them.”***

Even Joshua, with all of his wisdom, was shaken by jealousy! But Moses said to him, ***“Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them! “Do you know what I wish? I wish everyone was prophesying for the Lord! How wonderful that would be!”***

Moses had seen God’s glory, and it gave him great joy to see others catch a glimpse of that glory and exercise their spiritual gifts! I think it is no wonder that we read just a few verses later in

Numbers 12: 3: Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth. The spirit of John the Baptist and the spirit of Moses were very much the same. They were two of the greatest men who ever lived. We can easily see that John applied this philosophy to his own life.

GOD IS IN CHARGE NOT ME

John did not come up with his ministry. John was given his ministry by God Himself. John did not have the power to decide who ministers and who does not. He is not the religious police rushing to stop everyone else from doing a similar ministry. Just like Moses, John had humility. He did not have to pretend to be bigger or more important or any different than what God had made Him. Discern, and join Him wherever He is at work.

Do you feel outdone or overshadowed by someone who came in and took away your ministry? Has someone come into your life who is obviously more gifted or more

effective, someone you are finding it difficult to accept?

We all need to remember,

“A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.”

John continues to correct his followers;

²⁸ You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’

I AM NOT THE CHRIST

John reminds them that He is not The Christ. His job is to go before The Messiah and introduce Him. His job is not to demand glory for himself but instead to hand off his disciples and ministry to Jesus.

²⁹ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete.

IS THE BEST MAN JEALOUS AND SPITEFUL OF THE GROOM?

According to William Barclay: The “friend of the bridegroom,” the shoshben, had a unique place at a Jewish wedding. He acted as the liaison between the bride and the bridegroom; he arranged the wedding; he took out the invitations; he presided at the wedding feast. He brought the bride and the bridegroom together. And he had one special duty. It was his duty to guard the bridal chamber and to let no false lover in. He would only open the door when in the dark he heard the bridegroom’s voice and recognized it. When he heard the bridegroom’s voice he was glad and he let him in, and he went away rejoicing, for his task was completed.

John the Baptist said he found his fullness of joy in his Master’s voice. We too are to find joy in Christ, but it has a double joy for us, because as members of the church we are the bride of Christ!

On a relational level, this suggests that the proper attitude toward fellow believers who outstrip us or outshine us is to

share the joy of their accomplishments just like a best man.

We are supposed to rejoice in the successes of our brothers and sisters in Christ. This is rooted in one of the great metaphors of Scripture—the Body of Christ. The Apostle Paul says in

1 Corinthians 12: 26

“If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.”

Humanly speaking, John the Baptist faced a temptation that could have easily overcome him. He had been at the height of his popularity. All segments of society had come out to hear him. Some people said he was Elijah incarnate. Herod himself was listening to John. But now his crowds had begun to diminish. Yet he rejoiced! No wonder we read in

Matthew 11: 11,

“Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.”

His humility was the key to his greatness, just as it was with Moses, and it is the key to any greatness of ours, whether we serve in a great or small place. We should rejoice in the success of others, for we are bound together in Christ.

STORY: I BUILT THIS MEGA CHURCH....OR NOT!

I recall wrestling with jealousy on one occasion. I was part of a church that grew from a couple hundred to about 5 thousand. I left to plant a church in Duluth when the church had grown to about 2500. And a couple years later I came back to visit and now the congregation had grown to around 4500. and all the staff I hired or trained were in different positions. The offices were moved. The ministry approach had changed from when i was there. And I struggled for a while wrestling with jealousy and competition. Wasn't it good enough the way we set it up back then? I was there in the beginning and things seemed to work fine back then.

First, I wanted credit and acknowledgment. And second, I thought things should run the way I set them up. I know that every time you grow in a mega church by 800 you have to reassess your systems. I know that in my head. But there was a great wrestling match within me. It took me a few hours to be able to honestly say;

30 He must increase, but I must decrease.”

God's economy is all about the glory of Jesus Christ. The more credit you take for your ministry or service, the less power of the Spirit there will be. The more you defer glory to Jesus and avoid jealousy of others and avoid the spirit of competition, the more God will power up your ministry and your Christian walk. God invests Himself in the broken and humble. He always has and always will. If we believe that we are here for the glory of God, then He must increase and we must decrease. The glory belongs to Him, the author and sustainer of our faith. It is not our church, or my church. It always was and always will belong to Jesus.

TAKING IT HOME

1. Are you tempted by the spirit of competition and spiritual pride right now?
2. If so, what is the Spirit of God teaching you through the text?
3. In what way must you decrease so that He may increase?
4. What ministries or people is God calling you to bless and encourage that you have been cursing or withholding favor?