

John 3:22-36 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." 31 He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all. 32 He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony. 33 Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. 34 For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. 35 The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. 36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

Pray

Intro

As you study through the Gospel of John, you notice that John wants us to see Jesus for who he truly is in all of his glory. But John also wants us to hear Jesus and listen his message. Because, Jesus came with the message from God (the truth) that sets us free. He's come with the words of eternal life.

Here in our passage we see Jesus' ministry taking off and John the Baptist's fading out. That causes a dispute. This morning we're going to look at three lessons that come out of this dispute:

1. The meaning of baptism
2. The sound of a superior voice
3. The path to greater joy

1. The meaning of baptism

Here's what's going on. John the Baptist is still conducting his ministry which was to point people to the Messiah. He's still baptizing those who repent of their sins and accept the message of the Savior.

At the same time Jesus' ministry is beginning to grow and he is baptizing those who hear his voice, repent of their sins, and receive the gospel. We are told right at the beginning of ch. 4 that, Jesus didn't, himself, baptize anyone one. But under his authority and supervision his disciples did.

V. 25 tells us that a "discussion" arose between a Jew and John's disciples over purification. When it says "discussion" other versions translate this word, dispute or argument. Almost like a few times in mine and Carrie's marriage when our conversation starts to get a little heated. And the kids say, Mom, Dad, why are y'all arguing? And we say... "We're not arguing, we're discussing."

Involved in this dispute are two things - 1. Purification and 2. The fact that people were leaving John's ministry and were starting to follow Jesus.

We've already seen the fact that the concept of purification was built heavily into the Jewish religious system and their everyday culture. Remember the stone water pots from the wedding back in ch. 2.

John the Baptist's ministry, particularly the fact that he was baptizing, was very controversial. And here's why. Baptism existed before John. But, before him, Jews were never baptized. Gentiles (a Gentile is a person who was a non-Jew). Gentiles who converted to the religion of the Jews were baptized. To the Jews a Gentile was considered unclean. And an unclean person couldn't come to the temple and worship. But if they converted to Judaism, they would be baptized. They would be taken out and immersed into water. It was a ceremonial bath which indicated that their uncleanness had been washed away.

So you can see why John infuriated the authorities when he started baptizing Jews. He was saying they were unclean and needed to be cleansed from their sins.

Now, it's extremely important for us to realize that Baptism is not the actual thing that washes away our sins. Baptism is a public and symbolic act which serves as a public testimony that a person has been united to Jesus, that their sins have been washed away, and they are identifying with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. That's the meaning of Baptism... our union with Christ.

There are two main reasons we don't baptize infants or our children until they become converted (conversion is when you repent of your sins and turn in faith to Jesus). The first reason is no where in the NT is a baby or any child who is not yet a believer baptized. In the book of Acts there are some "household baptisms." But if you look at those texts, those happened when the entire family heard the gospel, repented of their sins and placed their faith in Jesus. The second, and more important, reason is that the Lord Jesus himself told us exactly who he wanted us to baptize.

Matthew 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

This is why we won't baptize our children (or even adults for that matter) until they can understand what it means to take up the cross and follow Jesus, and there's evidence in their lives that the Holy Spirit has done the necessary work for them to do that.

Now, imagine. John is over here baptizing. And Jesus is over here baptizing. Here's the dispute. Who's baptism is more significant? Who's baptism will make you more pure? John was baptizing first. Jesus even needed to be baptized by John. And yet, Jesus' ministry is growing while John's is getting smaller.

You see how human pride gets involved, even in good, godly ministry. One person says, "I was baptized by John!" Another says, "That's nothing! I was baptized by Jesus' disciples!" I wonder if that's precisely the reason that Jesus didn't personally baptize people.

It's not who performs the baptism that is the most important. It's the fact that in our baptism we are identifying with Christ. Every true believer is united in Christ and our baptism is a public declaration that we identify with our Savior.

Let's look at how John the Baptist responded to this dispute, so let's look at #

2. The sound of a superior voice

I love the way that John responded to this argument. It wasn't with pride. It wasn't with selfishness. John knows that everything happens for a reason. And that reason is that the God of Heaven is sovereign and he is on his throne. Look at

V. 27 John answered "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from Heaven."

Everything that happens is part of God's plan. And in those plans God is working things for the glory of his name and the good of his people. John was satisfied with that because John wasn't trying to build his own kingdom. He was grateful to even play a part in Christ's.

John also deflected the attention from himself. In v. 28 he re-emphasized that he was not the Christ. He was not the star of the show.

Now let's ask the question... Why was John content, even though he had labored so hard in ministry? Why was he, not just content, but joyful over Jesus getting all the attention? Do you realize how hard it would be to see your work begin to fade while someone else's took off?

For example, a little over six years ago, with much prayer and seeking God we planted The Road. Over the years many of us have spent much time praying that God would be glorified in us. That he would use us to reach the lost. That God would grow us in a way that pleases him. That one day God would bring us to the place where we can plant other Churches.

What if, instead of blessing us with those things, God chooses to bless other Churches here in our area? We've committed our life to this thing. We've put in our blood, sweat, and tears. Will we be jealous when we see other ministries increase?

My friends, this is Christ's kingdom. We should be as excited if God chooses to bless the work of other laborers in the kingdom as we would if he chooses to use us.

What was the key for John the Baptist? What was it that gave him joy over the fact that his ministry was declining away while Jesus' was exploding?

It's very simple... John heard the sound of a superior voice. What do I mean by that? Do you remember how John the Baptist identified himself? In

John 1:23 [He said] I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord."

The voice of John the Baptist played a powerful role in the coming of Christ. By using his voice, he was fulfilling Scripture about the greatest event in human history. He was the one, chosen by God to use his voice

to be the herald of the Son of God coming into the world. And that was John's identity. He was the voice. But there came a time when John heard a voice that was superior to his own. He heard a voice more wonderful and powerful than his own.

Listen to what he says... Again, in v. 28 he says, "Look, I keep on telling you guys, I am not the Christ." And then he gives them an illustration. In v. 29 he said the one who has the bride is the bridegroom... That's a groom. He went on to explain... I'm not the groom. I'm the friend of the groom. Listen to what this man said, who's identity was in his voice... In v. 29 "he said the friend of the groom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete!"

If John the Baptist had not been born again, if the Holy Spirit had not given him a new heart and a new set of ears, then he would have loved his own voice. But the new heart and new ears given to him by the Holy Spirit caused John to find the voice of Jesus more compelling, more thrilling, and more satisfying than his own.

I love to watch that show, The Voice. And what I love most is sometimes a person will sing who's voice is so amazing I that I find myself listening with my mouth jaw dropped, stunned by how they sound.

How much more stunning is the voice of our Savior who

- Calls the dead to life
- Sings over his Church
- Says to the storm, "Peace Be still!"
- Who says "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more!"

My friends, hearing... actually hearing the voice of Jesus in your life changes everything. It breaks the power of self-love. It reorients the center of our love for ourselves and this world and relocates our affections to him. That's what did it for John the Baptist and that's what will do it for us.

These are the first two lessons we learn from this dispute:

1. The true meaning of baptism, 2. The sound of a superior voice... That leads us to #

3. The path to greater joy

Listen again to

John 3:29-30 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."

Here's what needs to happen for every person... When a baby is born, in a sense, the only thing they think about is themselves. I'm hungry, so I cry. I'm bored, so I cry. I need my diaper changed so I cry. It's not that the baby is intentionally trying to do something wrong, but they are still completely self absorbed. As we get older we get a little more sophisticated with all of this. We have to learn to channel or mask our selfishness. Because we all live in a world of selfish people and we have to help other people get their selfish needs met so I can get them to help my selfish needs. But at the end of the day, apart from grace, the human heart revolves around itself.

If you remember Copernicus from your sixth grade science class. Before him, everyone, including scientists and the Church believed and taught that the Earth was in the center of our solar system. Copernicus discovered that it is not the Earth, but the Sun that is at the center. The Earth and all the other planets revolved around it. That was a scientific revolution.

And we need the same revolution in our hearts. We need to discover, with the help of the Holy Spirit, that we are not the center of the universe. Everything does not revolve around us. Christ is at the center. Sometimes, so much of the chaos in our lives comes from the fact that we are trying to make ourselves the center and we live like God, Christ, and his Church are little planets or moons that revolve around us.

Here's the ironic thing. When we live like everything revolves around us we do that because we are trying to find our own joy in this world. But when we approach our joy that way, we actually lose our joy. Did you hear John? He greatly rejoiced at the bridegroom's voice... In the same breath he said two things (This is John 3:29-30). 1. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete... 2. He must increase, but I must decrease.

Do you see this? The way to find our joy, the way to maximize our joy is when we stop living for ourselves and start living for Christ. Do you want to learn how you can come to have profound lasting joy and peace in your life...

Take the Lord's prayer and say...

Hallowed [which means glorified] be Thy name, not mine
Thy kingdom come, not mine
Thy will be done, not mine

Something that might feel hard to believe, but it's true... Jesus is far more committed to our joy and peace than we are. And he's far more able to give us the joy and peace that we are searching for.

How do you know if you've heard the voice of Christ and have been changed by it? It's one thing to say, "Oh yes, I believe in Jesus. Oh yes, I love the sound of his voice." But how can you tell if it's true?

The rest of ch. 3 goes on to explain how that Jesus bears witness, or gives testimony of what he has seen and heard of the Heavenly Father.

John 3:34 says, "For he whom God has sent [Christ] utters the words of God..."

How do you know if you love the voice of Jesus? How do you know if you truly trust him?

John 3:36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

Do you see in the context here? Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life... But whoever does obey, they are the ones who truly believe. They have eternal life. We don't believe that to be a Christian you have to walk in sinless perfection. However, we need to do away with the notion that a person can be a true Christian and not walk in the ways of Christ.

Do you know that you can hear the voice of Christ any time you want? All you have to do is open the pages of Scripture. Maybe you've heard this a million times... But let this hit you afresh...

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is breathed out by God...

That means whenever you hear the Scriptures being read, you are hearing the voice of God. You are hearing the very words of his mouth.

The heart that's dead in sin, looks at the Bible, and they don't like what they see because to obey it means they can no longer pretend like they are the center of their universe. But the person who has been spiritually raised from the dead, Here's what they say about the Bible, here's how they feel about the voice of Christ. They see, they experience, they feel the joy of God in trusting him and obeying him.

Friends, do you feel that ache in your soul, that longing for more? Something inside you that's constantly saying everything is not quite right? Friends, every single one of us has a longing inside to hear the voice of the Son of God, our King, our Savior and to be filled with the joy that comes from knowing him.

And even if you have heard him, there are so many other noises in this world competing for our attention and affections. And we even struggle sometimes to focus on his voice because of our own weakness and remaining sin.

But one day, my friends, Jesus is coming back for us. And we will hear his voice... Listen to this

1 Thessalonians 4:16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with [shout] a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.