

He Must Increase, I Must Decrease

John 3:25-36

Thought for the Day: Because of who Jesus Christ is and what He has done for us, we should elevate Him to the highest place in our lives. We should place Him on the throne of our lives and gladly confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Just as John the Baptist sought to glorify Jesus Christ above himself, so we should seek to glorify Him in all that we say and do.

John 3:22-24 – There was an overlap between the ministry of John the Baptist and that of the Lord Jesus Christ. This overlap created some questions and concerns, and yes, some jealousy.

25 Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification.

- Given the immediate context of these verses, this discussion probably involved some debate about the authority and efficacy of John the Baptist's baptism.
- "Which was more effective in producing purification—the baptism of John or the purification rituals of Judaism?"
 - John's baptism was a baptism of repentance which produced an inner spiritual purification that the external rituals and ceremonies of Judaism could not produce.
 - A religious system is no substitute for a personal relationship with God!

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."

- Jesus' ministry was beginning to eclipse that of John, and John's disciples were concerned, and maybe even a bit jealous!
- "We Christians must always remember the primary focus of our ministry: to exalt Christ and point people to him. Healthy relationships with other Christians will include our recognition of certain leaders, pastors, and teachers. But we must always remember that they, too, have the same commission. We should not allow ourselves to become prideful of the particular church, group, or leader with which we are associated. And we must do our utmost to resist any kind of competitive spirit. All of us are under the sovereignty of God. Envious or bitter comparisons make us ineffective. Our task is to follow Christ and see that he is exalted." (*The Life Application Commentary Series*)

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

- Our ministries and the resources to carry them out are all gifts from God.
- We are privileged to be used by the Lord in His work, but we are the instruments—He is the One who causes our work to be effective.
- Therefore, it's not about our success or popularity—it's about glorifying God and advancing His kingdom in the hearts of men.
- How do we define "success" in ministry? John and Jesus were both successful in their ministries but John lost his head and Jesus was crucified! God's idea of success is quite different from ours. He calls us to be faithful in the ministry He has given to us. Don't fall into the trap of defining success the way the world does.

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

- John was very careful to not overstep the boundaries God had established. He knew what his role was, and he sought to fulfill it.
- He was content to serve as the forerunner of the Messiah, and was careful to make clear he was not the Messiah.

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.

- Obviously, the bridegroom (Jesus) is a far more important person in the wedding than the best man (John).
- The best man rejoices in the honor and success of the bridegroom. It was John's joy and delight to see Jesus prospering in His ministry.

30 He must increase, but I must decrease."

- "The entire object of John's ministry is summarized in this verse. He labored ceaselessly to point men and women to the Lord, and to make them realize His true worth. In doing this, John realized that he must keep himself in the background. For a servant of Christ to seek to attract attention to himself is really a form of disloyalty." (*MacDonald, p. 1436*)
- This should be the attitude of our hearts—that Jesus increases and that we decrease. With regard to our character and our conduct, we want people to see more of Jesus, and less of us. With regard to our ministry, it is all for His glory and honor, not ours!

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.

- "From above" emphasizes Jesus' divine nature, while "from heaven" indicates his preexistence. In other words, Jesus already was in what we call the beginning; he was with God and he was God. From every perspective Jesus proved to be the one who is above all. The depth of our understanding and gratitude for the new birth that God offers us in Christ will always be shaped by our vision of what Jesus set aside when he came to earth. The one who was "above all" set aside all that was rightfully his in exchange for the single privilege of being our Savior. (*The Life Application Commentary Series*)
- Philippians 2:5-11 – Jesus gave up the glories of heaven to become a man and die on the cross as the perfect sacrifice for our sins in order that we might receive the forgiveness of our sins and God's gift of eternal life.

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.

- Jesus is a trustworthy and authoritative witness of what He had seen and heard, but mankind, in general, does not receive His testimony. But those who do, those who trust in His words, receive God's gift of eternal life. And those who don't remain under the wrath of God.
- Are you under His grace or His wrath?