

John 3:22-36 | “The Center of Attention”

Please take your Bibles and turn to John chapter 3 this morning, and we will be in verses 22 through 36.

We are have been working through the Gospel of John lately, and today we come upon the end of chapter 3.

So far in the Gospel, John the Baptist introduced and testified to Jesus, being a great witness for the Savior.

Then Christ had some disciples begin to follow him, he turned water into wine, cleansed the Temple, and talked with a man named, Nicodemus.

Now as we round out chapter 3, we find John the Baptist reappear back into the narrative once more.

When John was first introduced, he showed us that a witness for Christ says, “Not me, but Him.”

Now as John comes back onto the scene, his attitude and emphasis are the same - it’s all about Jesus. *[pause]*

The center of attention: some of us like it, others don’t.

Sometimes there is a battle for being the center of attention.

You often see this in school settings.

Maybe there are two very outgoing kids who want to be the center of attention in class, and they often try to beat each other out for the spotlight.

They will come up with jokes, behave badly, or talk a lot to get the focus back upon themselves.

Maybe you were one of those kids when you were in school.

Influence and popularity regularly come from being the center of attention.

Those who talk the most or speak up the most usually have more influence among others.

Realistically, we all like some degree of attention from others.

If it’s your birthday party and no one gives you any attention, that doesn’t feel so good.

What can be very painful is if you *were* the center of attention for a while, and now the focus turns to someone else.

If you want to see a clear example of this, just look at how a child reacts when their parents bring home their newborn brother or sister.

**I think about how Silas acted when he suddenly realized that Dawson was here to stay.**

He tried everything he could think of to regain the focus of Kate and I.

**He would ask for us to play with him, or start to act up in order to be the center of attention again.**

I think he has finally comes to terms with the fact that the world doesn't revolve around him; there are probably some adults who still need to learn that as well.

**There's a certain feeling that comes upon someone who is used to getting the attention.**

They enjoy it and start to expect it all the time; it becomes the norm.

**Now if you suddenly take that attention away and place it on someone else, there's bound to be some ruffled feathers.**

As John the Baptist re-enters the story, he faces this type of situation and the way he handles it is often the opposite of what we witness among ourselves.

**READ JOHN 3:22-26.**

*After a few verses explaining the setting, a conflict immediately arises...*

### **I. Conflict: Jesus is getting the attention! (22-26)**

Verses 22 through 24 give us the setting.

**Jesus and his disciples leave Jerusalem and go into the Judean countryside.**

He remains there with his disciples and is said to be baptizing.

**Now this is interesting because in John 4:2, it says that Jesus did not baptize, but his disciples did.**

So how do you harmonize these two texts?

**Well, although Jesus isn't technically baptizing, he is named as the author of the baptisms.**

Meaning, Jesus is using His disciples as His agents. They are in a sense, baptizing in his name.

**Christ, the leader, is authorizing and overseeing these baptisms being done by his disciples.**

Think about it like this: without Jesus' authority, his disciples would not be baptizing at all.

At the same time that Jesus is doing this, John is baptizing at Aenon near Salim because water was plentiful there.

People are coming to John and being baptized.

Now this is obviously before John the Baptist is imprisoned, as the author points out.

The other Gospels start Jesus' ministry *after* the arrest of John, but here in this book, we see that John and Jesus were ministering at the same time *before* his arrest.

Now from our standpoint, this is great, right?

John and Jesus are both baptizing at the same time.

Everything seemed fine, but it wasn't fine for some of John's disciples.

We notice that some of John's disciples are discussing purification with a Jew.

The reason there is a debate over purification is probably because they were trying to understand the relationship between ceremonial washing and baptism.

It's important to remember that the kind of baptism that John was performing wasn't usual for Israel, this wasn't a widespread practice at this point.

Gentiles were baptized after they were converted to Judaism, but baptism for Jews did not happen.

Ceremonial washings to become clean happened, but not baptism.

Since this kind of baptism was unusual, it helps you understand why John's disciples bring up their concerns about Jesus to their leader.

Somehow this discussion leads the men to approach John with the fact that Jesus is also baptizing.

But notice two things about what they say (and don't say).

First, they don't name Jesus, but say, "he who was with you across the Jordan."

There seems to be some bitterness towards Christ.

And secondly, they exaggerate the facts.

They say, "*all* are going to him".

Is this true? No, we just heard how a considerable number of people are *still* going to John to be baptized.

In fact, he had to go somewhere where there was plentiful water because of the amount of people still coming to him.

The issue for them was jealousy.

John used to be the only one baptizing, and now someone else was getting attention, and they don't like it.

Certainly, they had failed to see not only John's role in redemptive history, but also Christ's.

The implied statement is, "Look, John *the Baptist* someone else is baptizing! What do you think about this!?"

John's disciples show us an example of how we can turn something good into something bad.

Good things can turn bad when we elevate them to a place they should never be.

Let's say a man was the organist for a church.

He played the organ every Sunday for years, and he gained a lot of recognition by his church because of his organ-playing.

But now a young girl started to grow in her talent of organ-playing, and now she desired an opportunity to serve.

So what does the man do? Instead of being happy that someone else can use their talents for God, he becomes bitter that someone else will share "his" spotlight.

The man's organ-playing ability was a good thing, but it became a bad thing when he elevated it to a place where only he could play and get the recognition.

Have you turned something good in life into something bad by the way you think or view it?

Has your service for the Lord become about you?

Has your growth in your spiritual life turned into a platform of pride?

Has one of your talents become a stumbling stone *for yourself*?

John and his baptisms were a good thing. But John's disciples raised it all to a place it shouldn't have been in their minds.

The popularity that their leader had gained and the benefits that they received from being his disciples were their idols.

Now Jesus' popularity was challenging all of that.

'Look, Jesus is baptizing too! What about you, John? What about your ministry now that he is ministering?'

*But John's answer is shocking, for he essentially says...*

## **II. Resolution: That's a good thing! (27-36)**

READ JOHN 3:27-36.

John's response to his disciples' inquiry is untypical.

It's not normal for us to hear this kind of answer from someone whose popularity and influence are diminishing.

**What we expect of someone whose influence is decreasing is anger, bitterness, and resentment.**

That's why sometimes you will see celebrities whose influence is declining try to reinvent themselves, or do something newsworthy so that the spotlight is back on them.

It's what they crave and live for, it's what they have been accustomed to and they delight in it.

Yet John shows us that it's a good thing for Jesus to get the attention.

*Why is that a good thing?*

### **A. Because you have a role. (27-30)**

It's a good thing that Jesus gets the attention because our role isn't made for all the attention.

Look at how John responds to his disciples.

He starts out by giving a general statement of truth, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven."

**Now who is John talking about here?**

Commentators are split on this question, but I tend to view it as John is talking about himself mostly, but it also has hints towards Christ, too.

The truth is this: anything that we receive must come from God.

THERE'S NOTHING THAT YOU POSSESS THAT DOESN'T ULTIMATELY COME FROM GOD!

Our influence, our talents, our belongings, our family, our career - all come to us from heaven, that is, from God.

Therefore, we can't be discontent over God's sovereign gifts or even lack thereof.

Because we don't have anything that we ultimately provided for ourselves; all good gifts come from the Father of lights.

Did you create your own life? Did you give yourself the talent to play music or build something?

Did you bring into being your own mind to make wise choices or have a successful career?

What John is saying is this...since no one can receive even one thing unless God gives it to him, then I must be content with what I have and the role that I play.

John has been given the role of witness and preparer for Christ, and he humbly accepts that role, and understands that it has served its purpose.

John isn't going to wish he had something better, because what he does have comes from God alone, not his own striving.

This also relates to Christ's ministry - if Christ is receiving the attention it's because God has given this to him and in that I rejoice. *[pause]*

The truth is, they should have known that he wouldn't always receive the spotlight.

Inherent in his ministry was pointing and emphasizing someone else.

He's like, "You were there when you heard me say, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.'"

You should know that my ministry has never been about me, but about Him.

Yes, I may have received the attention of the people for a while, but that was all for a purpose, to put the rightful attention on the sent Son, Jesus.

He then gives an illustration of his role, and how his role was never made to be the end-all.

The illustration is of a wedding scene.

You have the bride, the bridegroom, and the friend of the bridegroom.

John is the friend of the bridegroom, Jesus is the bridegroom, and believers in Jesus are the bride.

The friend of the bridegroom is the ancient equivalent of a “best man”.

Yet in those days, it was actually more involved than what best men do today.

They served as a witness, provided general oversight, and made sure the bride was prepared to meet the groom.

That’s what John did! He prepared the bride for her groom, he made sure everything was ready for the Messiah to arrive.

As the best man of a wedding, what you care about is *not* getting the attention, but about the joy of the groom.

Imagine a best man getting upset because he wasn’t the center of attention at his friend’s wedding.

We would all be like, “Dude, it wasn’t your wedding! It wasn’t about you!”

“You should just be happy that your friend is happy!”

As a best man, you want everything in the wedding to go well and for your friend to be happy - in that you have joy.

And your joy is complete when all of that comes together.

So it is with John the Baptist.

He has heard the voice of the groom, for the groom has arrived and has the bride.

John is flooded with great joy; this is what his role was made for, this is what he had worked for.

THE FACT THAT EVERYONE IS GOING TO JESUS IS THE POINT! THE BRIDE IS GOING TO HER GROOM!

So it’s as if John tells his disciples, ‘You may be upset and jealous because he’s getting attention, but I am in utter joy because I have completed my task.’ *[pause]*

What John the Baptist did excellently was that he knew his role.

How do *you* keep Christ as the center of attention in your life and ministry? Understand your role.

We are witnesses and servants of Christ, we are not Christ.

You accept your role because you remember that God gave it to you.

Without him, you wouldn't have anything in life.

So in essence, John understands that he didn't even deserve to get any attention since God provided him with this task.

Keeping that perspective in your mind keeps you humble, and it aids you in thinking realistically about your job.

John could have easily overemphasized his job.

He could have said, "Wow, no one else is getting the attention that I am."

"Look at me everyone, I prepared the way for Christ!"

But he didn't. He always turned the emphasis back to the Lord.

And it's all summarized in John's statement in verse 30, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

John's role is done, Christ has arrived on the scene, so now it's time for John to fade into the background, as Christ steps forward.

This "must" happen for it is God's will and plan for redemptive history.

Is that your attitude, or would you rather increase to the detriment of Christ?

Maybe you even think, "Why can't we both increase?"

But are you accurately viewing your role? And are you accurately viewing your Lord?

*That leads me to the second reason why it's a good thing that Christ gets the attention...*

### **B. Because Christ is supreme. (31-36)**

That's the view that John had: I don't deserve this, but Christ does.

Imagine that you were just an amateur singer, yet somehow you got chosen to be in a worldwide singing competition.

Now let's say that you lost hands down to the best singer in the world, who trained non-stop since the time he or she was young.

What would be your thoughts about the outcome?

Most likely you would admit that you didn't even deserve to be there in the first place, and that the person who won certainly deserved it.



And you are happy for the person because they rightfully merited it.

That's how John was with Jesus.

He knew that Jesus is supreme, and deserved every single bit of attention.

Because as we find out, John and Jesus aren't even in the same category. There is no comparison. *[pause]*

Like what we found with verses 16-21, the verses of 31 through 36 seem to be the author's commentary.

Really, these verses are an explanation of why Jesus is supreme and why he must increase, while John decreases.

Jesus is supreme because he comes from above.

He's the Son of God, who came down from Heaven.

So while John, as well as every other human, is from earth and speaks as one from earth - Jesus is from Heaven and so he can speak and testify of heavenly things.

I'd say that makes you greater than others.

What he reveals and tells us is far greater, for he tells us the very Word of God from God Himself.

While John's disciples thought of Jesus and John as competing on the same level, the author shows us that they don't even compare.

This isn't comparing apples to apples, this is comparing a million dollars with a bread crumb.

One is from above and above all, and the other is from the earth.

Yet the sad reality is that there are many people who do not receive his testimony.

Really think about that: the One who was in Heaven came down and spoke of heavenly things, yet he was rejected.

But isn't that still going on?

Now Jesus isn't here in the flesh on earth, but his words have been preserved for us, and people reject his words.

Thankfully this isn't everyone though, as there are some who *do* receive his testimony, as the Gospel of John has emphasized.

And the person who receives his testimony certifies that God is truthful.

By believing in Jesus, you believe God.

To not believe Jesus is to call God a liar, as 1 John 5 brings out.

Each Christian is a witness to God's reliability and truthfulness.

How is this possible? Because as verse 34 says, "For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure."

Jesus and God the Father are so connected that a response to Jesus is a response to God.

And Jesus is so supreme that unlike the Old Testament prophets, who received a *measure* of the Spirit for their task - Jesus receives the Spirit without measure.

But not only does he have the Spirit without limit, but he has been given all things by the Father, who loves him.

Nothing is beyond the reach of Jesus, all things are given to Him by God the Father.

So Christ's supremacy is evidenced by the fact that he came from Heaven.

And that he has a loving, inter-connected relationship with God, whereby all things were given to him.

Since he is so supreme and he has the words of God, then belief in the Son brings eternal life.

Receiving his testimony is the only way to have eternal life.

On the other hand, not obeying the Supreme Son is the equivalent to not believing in him and it means you remain under the wrath of God.

That's the final reason he needs to be in the spotlight, because he is the lifeline of salvation to a world under the wrath of God. *[pause]*

Jesus is supremely qualified to be the center of attention of the world.

So always understand your Savior!

Remember who He is - He is the supreme Christ, deserving of all glory.

We don't compare to Him, we can never compare to Him, and that's a good thing.

A right view of Christ leads to a right view of who should get the focus.

Is your view of Christ in line with Scripture?

Do you truly understand that Jesus came from Heaven to Earth and spoke the very Words of God to humanity?

*So although John's disciples are jealous over Christ's rising popularity, John reminds them that...*

**The center of attention must always be Jesus!**

John had a great mindset when it came to himself and His Lord.

He accurately understood his role, and his Savior.

That's what each of us needs to do - understand your role and understand your Savior.

When that happens, humility rises and pride descends.

You remember that everything that you have is from a gracious God.

And you remember that every good thing that Christ gets is because He is supremely worthy of it all.

When we understand these things, we fade into the background, and Christ comes to the forefront.

You see, the problem arises when we want to put ourselves or something else in the spotlight of our lives and ministries.

But it's not about you, it's about him.

It's not about someone else, it's about him.

What people need is not more of us, but more of Him.

We certainly have important roles, but we aren't the end game.

If God is getting glorified in another nearby church and that church is successful, are you jealous because our church isn't getting the attention?

Would you still do something for Christ if he got the glory, but you never got any recognition or attention?

Is your life about your happiness, pleasure, or reputation?

Or is it about Christ's name being exalted?

May our church always be able to say, it's all about Jesus.

And may our lives be able to demonstrate the same thing. *[pause]*

The fact that God *wants* to give us a role and use us should blow us away.

**We aren't entitled to anything, but God entitles us to meaningful roles in His service.**

Each of us has a role to play in God's work, and we must always remember our role.

We aren't John the Baptist, in the sense of a special preparing ministry, but we are all witnesses for Jesus.

We serve him in various capacities.

No matter how much notoriety or influence that we have in our task, it's all so that God is glorified.

Yet it also means that even if we never get any spotlight or any recognition, our joy can be complete.

Our joy is complete when we know that Christ is getting the glory.

No one may know your name, no one may ever remember you in history, yet you can be full of joy because you did your part in signaling others towards your Savior.

That's where true joy is found.

True joy is found in glorifying God, not in glorifying yourself. *[pause]*

The Son of God, the bridegroom, came from above to come down to a world under the wrath of God and in desperate need of eternal life.

He died on the Cross for our sins to provide the way to receive this life.

And we can only receive this extraordinary salvation because it is given to us from Heaven.

What more can we say then what John said, "He must increase, but I must decrease."