

He Must Increase, I Must Decrease

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[0 : 0 0] Well, with all that's been going on in our world lately with COVID-19, there was a part of me that wondered whether we should continue in the series that we've been doing as a church through the Gospel of John, or if we should focus on some scriptures which speak directly to the present state of things going on in our world with this whole pandemic.

As I've thought and prayed about that, there are many Christian brothers out there who are writing articles and blog posts and preaching sermons that pertain to COVID-19 directly, and I've tried to share some of those resources online and through email with some of you.

I think one of the questions on all of our minds is, when will this all be over? How long will it be before things finally get back to normal? Some of us are probably feeling a little bit worn out with just thinking and hearing about this pandemic and are eager to hear something else from God's Word.

And so as I prayed and thought about this, I think we're going to continue on through our series in the Gospel of John. When we started this series, what we saw very early on was that this is about Jesus.

John said in the first chapter of this Gospel, we saw His glory. That's what we've set out to do in this series. It's to see more of the glory of Jesus.

[1 : 4 1] We want to know Him more. Not only that, but we believe that the good news about Jesus is what people around us need to hear in order to be saved, in order to have the life that God offers to people.

And so we want to also be familiar with this story. We want to know it well. And so these are at least two good reasons we have to continue on through the story of Jesus as told by John.

And so that's what we're going to do in the weeks ahead. We picked the story up this morning in John chapter 3. If you have a Bible, I encourage you to grab it.

Pause the video if you need to. But get your Bible. Open it up to John chapter 3. And we're going to be reading starting in verse 22.

Now what we're about to read comes what's happened up until now. Jesus has gone up to Jerusalem and He celebrated the Passover there with His disciples.

[2 : 5 5] There was that week of feasting or festival, the festival of unleavened bread. Jesus had that conversation with Nicodemus about being born again. And if you haven't heard any of that, the sermon audio for those messages is available on our church website.

So this kind of comes after all that. Sometime after Jesus was up in Jerusalem, this is what we read in verse 22 of chapter 3. After this, Jesus and His disciples went out into the Judean countryside.

Where Jesus spent some time with them and baptized. Now John also, this is John the Baptist, John also was baptizing at Anon near Salim.

Because there was plenty of water. And people were coming and being baptized. This was before John was put in prison. An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing.

They, referring to John's disciples, came to John and said to him, Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan, the one you testified about, look, he is baptizing and everyone is going to him.

[4 : 24] So John sets the scene for us here. After Jesus' time up in Jerusalem, he and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside.

Where Jesus spent some time with them. And what were they doing out in the countryside? John tells us that Jesus was baptizing.

He also tells us that John the baptizer at the same time was baptizing people in a different place.

And so you have people going to Jesus to hear his teaching, to see these signs that he's doing.

And you have people going to John the baptizer. And somewhere in the middle of all of this, verse 25, an argument develops.

[5 : 19] There's a dispute between some of John's disciples and a certain unnamed Jewish man. And interestingly enough, we're not really told what the argument was really about.

I mean, John tells us it's over the matter of ceremonial washing, but we don't really know the details. What we do see, though, is that out of this argument, John's disciples, John the baptizer's disciples, end up coming to him.

And they say this. They kind of give him a bit of a report on what's going on. Rabbi, verse 26, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan, the one you testified about, look, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him.

So this is an interesting moment in the story of Jesus. And I don't want to read into it too much. But at the very least, I think we see here that John the baptizer's disciples are deeply concerned.

They're worried. There's the appearance here of some rivalry, of some competition between Jesus and John the baptizer.

[6 : 40] And I don't want to, again, read too much into it. But I think at the very least, we might say that there's some deep concern here.

Some maybe even just mild form of rivalry. We notice, first of all, that this all sparked out of a dispute or an argument.

Second, we notice that John's disciples, even the language that they choose seems to be kind of really showing what's going on in their thoughts.

They say, look, or behold, that man is baptizing, referring to Jesus, and everyone is going to him.

Not just some, everyone is going to him. You can almost hear a tone of lament, or at the very least, deep concern, if not more.

[7 : 44] Everyone is going to him. You can imagine for a moment that you were the owner of the A&W; that's just south of town here in Davidson.

Business is going well enough. You're selling lots of hamburgers and french fries. Life is good. You're the only fast food joint on the south side of town that's visible from the highway.

And then suddenly, one day, out of nowhere, someone decides to start selling hamburgers right across the street. And Dairy Queen just pops out of nowhere.

Now, I wasn't here before the Dairy Queen was built, but I imagine that the people over at A&W; had some pretty slow days just after it first opened.

Now there's competition for every potential customer that comes rolling through town. And suddenly, here at the A&W;, you know, the service that we've been offering people just doesn't feel like it's as appreciated.

[8 : 50] Everyone is going over there now. I imagine that this captures at least something of what John's disciples are feeling.

Look, John, he is baptizing now, and everyone is going to him. Well, how does John the baptizer respond to this?

We read his response in verse 27. To this, John replied, A person can receive only what is given them from heaven.

You yourselves can testify that I said, I am not the Messiah, but am sent ahead of him. So, what is John's response?

As John hears this report about Jesus baptizing and everyone is going to him, the first thing that he says is this, A person can receive only what is given them from heaven.

[10 : 02] In other words, this is part of God's sovereign plan. It's heaven that has decided how things should go.

God. And then, after this, he clarifies again. And I love the words that he uses. You yourselves testify to me that I said.

He calls them as witnesses. You heard what I have clearly said. And we saw this back in John chapter 1, when the Jewish religious leaders sent delegates to ask John the baptizer who he was.

He made it crystal clear. I am not the Messiah. I am not the Messiah. He calls his disciples as witnesses again here and reminds them, I said, I am not the Messiah.

I am not the Messiah. But, don't miss the but, but I am sent ahead of him.

[11 : 21] From here, John goes into this analogy of a wedding. Let's read it together in verse 29.

I am not the Messiah, but, but I'm sent ahead of him. The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice.

That joy is mine and it is now complete. He must become greater. I must become less.

So, to kind of give an explanation of what's going on in this situation, the way that John sees it, how he's reacting to all of this, he gives the analogy of a wedding and we don't know exactly or have the clearest picture of exactly how a wedding, what a wedding was like in the first century Jewish culture.

So, I'm going to try to just translate it into our culture for us and, and maintain some of the, the elements that are here in his analogy.

[12 : 42] The bride belongs to the bridegroom is the first thing that John says. And he compares himself to the friend who attends the bridegroom.

So, we might think of groomsmen or think of the best man. So, imagine here you are, you've, you've come for a wedding and you have an important question to ask, maybe where to put your gift or something like that.

You've, you've showed up nice and early. The bride and the bridegroom are not even in the building yet that you know of. And, you can see the, the, the bridesmaids and the groomsmen, they're, they're kind of doing set up.

They're kind of attending to those last minute details. And you can see one of them is kind of giving orders or instructions to some of the other guys and they're moving things around and carrying things here and there.

So, who are you going to ask about where to put the gift that you have brought? Well, probably that guy. And, perhaps, he's, he's the best man.

[13 : 59] And, for the time being, he's kind of in charge. Um, helping make sure that everything gets in its place. He's been here for the rehearsal. He knows what's going on.

He's the best friend of the groom. So, who better to ask than him? At the moment, um, he, he's kind of has the attention of people.

They're, they're looking to him for guidance and for instruction. We get, we got to get all these last things taken care of before, uh, the wedding starts. We need these chairs set up over here.

We need this table moved over there. Now, fast forward a little bit to just before, uh, just as the wedding is starting.

Um, suddenly, and I don't know what your experience has been at weddings, but I know that at a number of weddings I have been to, um, the groomsmen have been kind of the first to come into the room or come onto the stage and, and sometimes even without the groom.

[15 : 13] Um, so they'll walk out from the side and in that moment, up until then, during the setup and, and up until that moment, um, your attention is on the groomsmen.

Your attention's on the best man. You're looking at them and how sharply dressed they are. But then all of a sudden there's a massive shift as the groom comes walking out onto the stage and takes his place in the center beside his groomsmen.

And in that moment, everybody's attention just shifts all at once from the groomsmen to the groom. It's, it's his wedding.

It's his day. He's the one that we've come to see get married. And, and from that moment on, the groomsmen just kind of fade into the background a little bit.

They kind of go into our peripheral vision. And if we look at them again, it's, it's just to see what's their reaction for a brief moment to what's happening here in the room.

[16 : 30] I've had the opportunity to, um, to serve as a groomsman on a couple different occasions. and, there's been a couple moments where I've been there up on the stage and I, I distinctly remember that I was, I was overcome.

In fact, I, I was almost at the point of tears. Tears of joy. because, in that moment, one of my best friends was about to get married to a wonderful young lady.

And I still remember some of those moments. Here I am, standing in my place, and the bride appears at the back of the aisle.

And eye contact is made between her and between one of my best friends. And I just, I'm just drinking in that moment.

What is this like for my best friend here? I look over at him and I can just, I can see, I can feel the emotion just welling up inside of him.

[17 : 56] The joy, the, the, the awe at just how beautiful she is in that moment. Dressed in white. Precious moments.

Moments that I was overwhelmed with joy in. Because my best friend is getting married to a wonderful young lady.

And so, I think that's the kind of thing that John is trying to get us to, to, to see, to feel with him as he helps us understand what's going on here between Jesus and him.

It's, it's like a wedding. And Jesus is the bridegroom. And the people, they're, they're the bride. He's the one who should have their attention.

John, he's, he's just like the groomsman, the, the best man, the friend who attends the groom. He's been working to get things ready, to, to, to make preparations, but now this moment has come and it's good.

[19 : 13] It's right. I am happy that I am fading into the background and that the attention is now on him. He's the one.

It's, it's his day. This is what I've been working towards. John's disciples give this report of what's going on and it comes across as negative.

It comes across as, there's some, we've got some competition here. We've got some rivalry. And in stark contrast to that, John's reaction is the opposite.

It's, yes, I am so happy. My joy is now complete because everyone is going to him.

that's what I've wanted to see. That's my role. That's what's been given to me from heaven, from God.

[20 : 14] My job has been to point the spotlight, to make preparation and now the moment is here. So look at him. Everyone is going to him and I couldn't be more happy.

He must become greater. I must become less. The spotlight needs to get bigger on him and it needs to get smaller on me.

He needs to have, he must have more of people's attention and I must have less. This is good. This is right. This is how it's supposed to go.

So what are we to take from this interaction? Well, I think that one of the natural places for us to go is to think of this as John is giving us an example of humility and I think this is here.

We naturally understand the feeling of rivalry. we understand that feeling of seeing someone else succeeding or of someone else getting the attention when we had it before.

[21 : 36] I think we do get a bit of a snapshot of the mentality of our world or of the just that desire that we have in our sinful human nature.

we love the attention of others. We love the praise of other people. We want others to think much of us. And John the baptizer stands in stark contrast to that.

Here he is and he is just, he is a wonderful example of godly humility. He knows his place in all of this.

He knows his place before Jesus. He knows his place before God. He knows his place as it pertains to other people. A person or a man can only receive what is given them from heaven.

I am not the Messiah, but I am sent ahead of him. I'm just a voice. I've come to prepare the way. I'm just the friend who attends to the groom.

[22 : 40] But the bride belongs to the groom. The attention is rightfully his. There's quite a contrast here. It's all too easy to seek our praise from people, but it's God's commendation that we should be seeking.

So I think John the baptizer is a great example of humility in contrast to the desire of our flesh to be exalted in the eyes of others.

And one of the places that it's easiest to see this right now perhaps, I mean, we're in social distancing mode, is in our relationships with our family members.

We've been spending a lot more time with them because of COVID-19. some of you parents are with your kids a lot more than you were before now that sports have been cancelled, now that classes have been suspended.

As you consider your relationships with the people in your house, does it bother you when those you live with don't notice the ways that you serve them around the house?

[23 : 55] Do you feel the need to inform them of all that you did today for them so that you can get your thanks and praise? Or, on the flip side, do you see some of the work of your home and your family as beneath you?

Oh, that job is, you know, are you happy to leave that undesired work to your spouse? Kids, do you think it's mom and dad's job to clean up all the mess that you have made so far today?

Because you've got more important things to do. John is a wonderful example here of a humble attitude, of a desire to serve, and of how we can have joy in serving one another.

And so I want to encourage you this week, how can you joyfully serve your wife, your husband, your kids, those you live with in the week ahead?

God. While we do get this wonderful example from John, it's not the main point that I think we're to take from all of this.

[25 : 19] It's a meaningful thing, it's a wonderful example, but I think more than anything, what we need to take from this is what John, the baptizer, wants us to take from his words.

What is he saying here? If we listen in again to these words, I hope that we hear it and that we don't miss it.

In verse 28, you yourselves can testify that I said, I am not the Messiah, but am sent ahead of him.

Him referring to the one who was with you, who you testified about before. Do you hear what John is saying?

I am not the Messiah, I'm sent ahead of him. John is happy to see people not coming to him and instead going to Jesus, because Jesus is the Messiah.

[26 : 26] He's here, he has come. God's chosen king, the one foretold by the prophets long ago, he's here.

I'm not him. I'm happy that they're going to him, because he has come. I should have less and less of people's attention, and he should have more and more.

He is the Christ, the one that we've all been waiting for. God's God's disciples are really listening to him, then there's only one thing for them to do, and it may not happen right away, but sometime soon they need to be packing their bags and leaving John, the baptizer, and going to follow the one who is greater, the Messiah, Jesus.

The bride belongs to the bridegroom. All of our attention, all of our loyalty belongs to him, because he is the Christ, he is the Messiah.

And so, I want to ask you, as you listen to this, does Jesus have your attention? Does Jesus have your loyalty?

[27 : 51] if he doesn't, then what or who does? Even in the midst of this pandemic, let me encourage you not to give it more attention than it deserves.

I'm not saying that we should be ignorant, that we shouldn't read the news, that we should, there's nothing wrong with being informed, but one greater than all of this has come, and he is worthy of our attention over and above and through all of this.

Perhaps it's not COVID-19 so much for you, maybe it's just your smartphone, or your television, or Netflix. Let me encourage you not to give those things more attention than they deserve either.

And I'm speaking to myself here as well, because I know how easy it is to just get swallowed up in the glow of the screen, in the palm of your hand, or on the wall, or on your television cart in my case.

And there's that desire to just go back to it again and again and again, to pull that phone out. But do you know that one greater than Google is here?

[29 : 11] my oldest daughter, five years old, and she's already telling me that if I don't know something, I should just ask Siri.

I should just search it up online. And so I don't think I communicated it the best way to her, but I tried to remind her this week that Google is not God.

YouTube is not the definitive source for wisdom on the planet. The World Wide Web is a vast treasure trove of information, but at best, it's a collection of human wisdom, and at worst, it's a pooling of human ignorance.

No, we have something better, one greater than Google, has come, and his knowledge and his understanding are truly out of this world.

They are from heaven, because he is from heaven. And so we should listen very carefully to his words. He is worthy of our attention.

[30 : 29] And so my question this week is, does he have yours? It doesn't matter what's going on. The things that are going on are important.

They're significant. But whatever is going on, Jesus is still worthy of our attention and of our loyalty.

Does he have your attention? Does he have your loyalty? Does he have your love? love? Let's pray.

Father in heaven, thank you for these words. Would you seal them in our hearts? And would you remind us again of just how wonderful a gift your son is that you have sent him into our world?

Draw each one listening. Draw me into your presence again and remind us of the truth. Help us to see the glory of Jesus.

[31 : 38] We ask this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen.