

John: The Word Became Flesh - John 3:22-36

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, 4th. There's always one.

Go ahead and turn open to John chapter 3. We're going to finish up this chapter this morning. We just read the passage together. Let me as well pray ask God's blessing on our study here and then we will just dive into the text.

So would you join me? Lord, we were so thankful this morning to be reminded that for those in Christ there's no condemnation.

Lord, I pray that we would live into that, believe that. Father, that we would experience your joy today because we know that our sins past, present, and future have been forgiven.

Lord, I pray that we would hear your voice this morning.

[1 : 05] That if there are things that you want to expose in our hearts, ways in which we need a bit of spiritual surgery that you would do that this morning.

Because Father, we want to be as useful as we can in this life for your namesake. And so we thank you for the opportunity to again consider our brother, John, the baptizer this morning, might his life affect us today.

And we will give you thanks for all that you accomplished in this time. It's in your name we pray, Jesus. Amen. Well, Jesus says in Matthew 11, 11, he said, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.

Now, I can't think of a higher commendation in this life than to have Jesus Christ say, of all the people that have ever walked the planet, the greatest is this man, John.

Today we're going to reacquaint ourselves with this man. We were introduced to him in chapter one. This is the final scene that we have of John in the Gospel of John.

[2 : 37] He is arrested and then ultimately put to death by Herod. You can read about that occasion in Luke 3 and Mark 6, but we don't have a record of that in John.

So this is ostensibly the last time the final appearance of John the Baptist in this Gospel. So let's just dive into the text and first consider the setting that we have.

Luke 11, verses 22 and 24. John the Apostle records says, after this, Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside and he remained there with them and was baptizing.

John also was baptizing at Aenon near Selim because water was plentiful there and people were coming and being baptized for John had not yet been put in prison.

So we know that Jesus, he's just finished celebrating Passover in Jerusalem. He does so by cleansing the temple, performs a set of miracles. He then interacts with this Pharisee, a guy by the name of Nicodemus, explains salvation to this man using the metaphor of spiritual physical birth.

[3 : 54] And now he heads out northwest to the Judean countryside. Jesus is with a small band of his disciples and he spends a bit of time there. He says in the text that he remains there and scholars believe that he could have been out there as much as six months.

And so Jesus is there in the countryside of Judea. He's teaching, he's training men, he's baptizing those who came out to see and hear him.

We actually know that Jesus didn't actually perform the baptizes because in John chapter four, the first couple verses, what we find out is that Jesus didn't actually baptize.

That it says in John 4, 2 that although Jesus himself did not baptize but only his disciples. And so there's probably wisdom in that. Can you imagine if you were one that Jesus baptized?

Sure, yeah. Yeah, Pastor Eric baptized me. Oh, yeah, well, I got baptized by Pastor Scott. Well, that's nothing. I got baptized by Jesus, right?

[5 : 00] And I think in the wisdom of God, Jesus orchestrated the baptisms but he was having his disciples perform them. All to say word is starting to get out about Jesus.

Now nearby what we find out is John and his followers, they're baptizing. Says they're baptizing at Anon, which just translates springs. So at these springs near Salim located in northern Samaria.

And it says that John is there. John the baptizer is there baptizing because water was plentiful there. It's interesting in terms of the mode of baptism, you don't need plentiful water if you're going to sprinkle.

And so we have in this text, it seems to be just implied that immersion is the form of baptism here from the very beginning.

It's a great symbol of identifying with the death of Christ and the resurrection of Christ as it talks about in Romans six. John the baptizer, however, is baptizing as a baptism of repentance, simply preparing for the Messiah.

[6 : 09] But what's interesting here in this scene is that we have this overlap occurring in terms of these two ministries. John the Baptist and Jesus, their ministry is just for a brief moment overlap until Jesus finally takes center stage.

A little bit of review in terms of who is John the baptizer. He's an interesting guy. Matthew says this about John in Matthew three, four. He says, now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist.

And his food was locust and wild honey. So what we need to know about John is John is what we would just define as he is a man.

Okay. His wardrobe, it's like trapper fashion, hunter fashion of the day.

He only eats what he can forage. I don't know if in my mind I sort of think of John the baptizer like this first century version of Yukon Cornelius from the Rudolph claimation.

[7 : 18] What we find out in terms of his job description, he is the herald of Jesus. Zachariah, John's father in Luke 176 said this, he says, and you child, speaking of John, will be called the prophet of the most high, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways.

And Zachariah there is simply echoing the words that the angel Gabriel gave to him when he spoke to Zachariah about John when he said he will go before the Messiah in the power of Elijah preparing people for the Lord.

So the purpose of John's life, I think Eric directed us this when he spoke about this in chapter one was simply to point people to Jesus.

John is a herald of Jesus. He is heralding good news, the good news that the entire Old Testament is building towards, that there is a king that is coming.

The Messiah, he's arrived. The snake crusher that is talked about in Genesis 3.15, Jesus, he's the one, behold the Lamb of God.

[8 : 29] And John's baptizing ministry was preparing people actually to meet the king, to meet their Savior. And so the ministry of John at this time, things are going well.

They're firing on all cylinders. He's doing his job, but not for long. A complaint arises and let's look at it verses 25 and 26.

This is now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification 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.

Now, we don't know the exact nature of the discussion that was occurring here between John's followers and this unnamed Jew. It just says that they're talking about purification.

We know that the Jews, they love their purification rituals. We recall that Jesus retired some of those purification barrels of 30 gown barrels at the wedding of Cana.

[9 : 37] But the Jews love their purification rituals. And perhaps here they're wondering why are people having to be baptized? Maybe they were thinking, yeah, the Gentiles, they should be baptized, but Jews, we don't need another.

Like this is an unsanctioned dipping. Like what is going on here? And so there was some sort of upheaval theological discussion that's taking place, but in the course of the conversation with the Jew, John's men get derailed on a factoid unrelated to the theological discussion.

Have you ever had that happen before? You're having a conversation with someone and you're listening and then all of a sudden you're unable to listen. You ever had that?

I shared with Julie the other day, I was talking about just the day's events and I had said, yeah, I've scotched myself. We went out to Carousels and we were talking about kind of the year plan on discipleship and man, we've mapped some great things out.

And I began to proceed and share these things and she didn't hear a word I said. Like it was like the peanuts cartoon because what had sort of stopped her mental process was the word Carousels.

[10 : 52] She heard nothing after that because all of a sudden she's starting to think about like, why is Jay having a nice lunch without me? And then it's like, it's been like a month before we've been out on a date.

And then it's like, does he know what I had for lunch? I had some yogurt and he probably had one of those pesto sandwiches. He better have not had his own pizza.

And so that's what's going on mentally and just completely derailed. Well, what's the information that derailed John's disciples' ability to process and follow the conversation here?

It's that Jesus too was baptizing. Jesus was baptizing and Jesus is getting a bigger crowd.

Don't you love the absurdity of this scene? John, his disciples, they knew what John's ministry was about, right? Behold the Lamb of God.

[11 : 50] Go to Him. And can you imagine the disciples of John? It's like, yeah, go to Jesus, he's the Lamb of God, but wait, we're losing numbers.

Some of you come back. And my favorite is verse 26, where his men describe what's going on because they say, Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan to whom you bore witness, look, he's baptizing and all are going to him.

They're not saying this in celebration, right? But I love the fact they're so bothered they can't even name Jesus, right? He's simply that guy.

I mean, God, but he's just that guy right now. He's taking attention away from us. It's like a couple of schoolgirls who are like, you're my best friend. No, you're my best friend.

We're best friends. And then one of them gets the attention from the guy and all of a sudden it's like, you're not my friend, you're my enemy, right? I hate you, right?

- [12 : 58] I love the fact that John's guys, they're even speaking in hyperbole here. They're saying all are going to him. All are not going to Jesus, all right?
- But they're something's got them. What is their complaint expose in terms of what's taking place in their heart?
- We see jealousy. We see envy. We see pride. In fact, it's reminiscent of King Saul and after David killed Goliath says in 1 Samuel 18, where the women are singing, right?
- Saul, he struck down thousands. David, 10,000. And I love how scripture just explains where Saul's at in that section.
- It just says, and Saul was very angry. And that's what we have going on here with John's disciples. In fact, they're chapped.
- [14 : 00] They were kind of a big deal for a little bit in terms of ministry for a brief moment. In fact, they were they were connected with with John the baptizer, this guy that that actually it was prophesied back in Isaiah chapter 40 verse three.
- Isaiah talks about the voice of the voice of one crying in the wilderness and Matthew applies that in John or in Matthew three, three says, you know what? Isaiah was speaking about John there.
- So 700 years before John shows up, it's already being talked about that there's this guy, this Herald of the King that's coming. Jesus says a similar thing in Matthew 11.
- He says in Matthew 11, nine and 10. But then did you go out to see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.
- This is he of whom it is written. Behold, I send my messenger before your face who will prepare your way before you.
- [15 : 05] And Jesus here is quoting Malachi three one Malachi being the final writing prophet of the Old Testament. He wrote that back in 400 BC.
- And so it's been 400 years of silence and all of a of a sudden God starts speaking again through John the Baptist.
- We're talking about greatness this morning. Jesus says John was the greatest. Why? Maybe for his followers, for John the Baptist, his guys, what was greatness for them?
- For them in that moment greatness was being connected to the right ministry, having the attention directed towards them.
- Very Corinthian, isn't it? I'm something, I'm somebody because I follow Paul. Oh, well, I'm connected with the Paulus.
- [16 : 14] Well, I'm connected to Cephas. Well I follow Jesus. I'm above all of you. Very Corinthian, actually it's very human.
- You ever struggled to rejoice with someone? You know, as Paul says in Romans 12, 15, rejoice with those who rejoice. You ever struggled to do that?
- They get the good, the thing that you wanted, the thing that you longed for. You're wanting their fame or you're wanting their followers.
- Maybe you're wanting their accomplishments or maybe you even put it in the category of blessing, of God's blessing. Like man, I want God's blessing like they have.
- I remember a time when I was pastoring a church of about 250 in downtown Bellevue and I had just, I was a year into having planted the church and a lot of joy in those days.
- [17 : 20] But a hard ministry and all of a sudden there was a multi-site mega church that decided to move into town.

And not just any part of town, right across the street. And I was in an office park, my office was. I couldn't have signage where we were so we were in a Boys and Girls Club on Sunday mornings and then just in an office building during the week and then across the street there was an entire building that was purchased.

And a giant sign goes up. And it was like getting sucker punched because they had like 10,000 people.

And I was like, Lord, what, what, I should rejoice. I should be thrilled that people are hearing the gospel and yet I'm thinking about me.

And it was a process of the Lord sanctifying me to where I could rejoice and where I could be okay with simply being ordinary.

[18 : 27] You know, even the great theologian Sylvester Stallone, he understands this. He says this, every actor dies twice and it's the first death that is the more difficult.

I think it's kind of insightful. When you are finally not in the spotlight anymore, you're done with your acting career.

Every actor dies twice and it's the first death that is the more difficult. And yet, guess what? God delights in that.

God delights in using the ordinary. And John's guys, they're just not okay with that in this moment. Well, let's see John's response to their complaint.

Look at verse 27 to 29, John answered, a person cannot receive even one thing unless it's given him from heaven. You yourselves bear witness that I said I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.

[19 : 33] The one who has the bride is a 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.

And here it is church where we begin to sniff out some of what makes John so great. We see here John's theology and it's sound.

And what's remarkable is it's not just a set of axioms or assertions of this is what I believe like he actually believes this.

He says in verse 27, a person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. John is so different than the posture or the perspective that we saw in Pilate or that we will see in Pilate.

In John 19 interacting with Jesus versus 10 and 11, do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?

[20 : 40] And what does Jesus say back? He says, hey, you would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above.

Just drop the mic. And yet John the Baptist believed this. For John he was okay with his crowd dwindling.

Why? Because he truly believed that God was sovereign over the entirety of his life. He believed it. It was real to him.

And if it meant his followers leaving, cease to have fame for John, it was okay.

The role of being this final Old Testament prophet, this evening star of the Old Testament, God was in charge of that as well.

[21 : 48] Here's the thing, fourth, God is sovereign over the entirety of our lives. Amen? Amen? I mean, if we believe that just 75% of the time we're doing well.

He's sovereign over the entirety of our lives. That includes our salvation. This isn't John 6:44 that no one comes to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.

So if we are here today in Christ, it's because the Father initiated something in our lives to draw us unto the Son. He's sovereign over our salvation.

And not just that, but now this new life that we have in Christ, that which He wants us to carry out. We're His workmanship, but He used to determine how we're each utilized because the gifts that we possess, He decides those as well.

He's sovereign over that. Paul said it this way, for those of you that don't like your spiritual gift, 1 Corinthians 12, 11, all these are empowered by one and the same Spirit who apportions to each one individually as He wills.

[23 : 07] Paul goes on and says it again, verse 18, 1 Corinthians 12, 18, but as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them as He chose.

Friends, there's great freedom when you believe that God is the one that distributed gifts. There's great freedom there.

We just get to use what He's entrusted as faithfully as we can for the edification of the body and that glory is directed to Jesus.

Folks, we have got to be okay with being part of this grand play that God has given us, without us to participate in, regardless of the role.

Stop looking at somebody else's gift and saying, man, I wish I had theirs. You don't want my gift or Scott or Eric. We spend a lot of the week studying.

[24 : 13] Do you realize that the life of a pastor is sort of like being in school the rest of your life and doing homework so that you can give a speech?

I just thought it was kind of neat that you could talk to people. Be okay with whatever part the Lord gives you to play.

If you're included in God's family, if you're in Christ and Jesus has you play in a rock or a tree, like you've got a non-speaking part, then be the best.

Slay the role. Be the best darn dogwood that has ever been up on stage. It's perspective to delight in.

I love quoting all these great theologians, Geno Smith, the quarterback for the Hawks, who talks about being a backup for a decade.

[25 : 16] And I love his perspective. He says, my tough times would be a dream to someone else. Boo hoo, I was a backup in the NFL.

C.S. Lewis, I think, says it best when he says this, we have been called to play great parts without pride and small parts without shame.

Amen? And this was John's perspective because church, he knew his role was small and temporary. We don't know how soon after this he was arrested, but it was in short order.

His role was temporary and small in the grand scheme of things. And his role, he knew what his role was because he tells us in verse 28, he says, you yourselves bear me witness that I said I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.

And he's just repeating what he already said in chapter one, verse 20. I'm the herald of the king. But note, I am not the king.

[26 : 29] And I love what John does here for his men then. He's like, I'm going to now tell you a story so that it will sink down into your hearts. And he uses this metaphor of a wedding.

He's like, I'm not the groom. I'm not the bridegroom. I'm a friend. I'm just the friend.

Like the best man in our day. And that's an glorious task. If you're a best man, you're putting down a lot of cash on a tux, right?

You have to like write a toast and you have to be thoughtful and appropriate. It's a lot of pressure. Then you have to return all the tuxes for all the guys, typically.

Now in John's day, this was to be the friend of the bridegroom was a little bit bigger of a job. You were actually responsible to guard the bridal chamber until you brought the groom to the awaiting bride who was inside after the ceremony and celebration.

[27 : 36] You were there to protect. Nobody else gets in. Only the groom. You let the groom in the chamber. Your job is done. Job well done.

Jesus, you have arrived. I have announced you. My job is done and I love what John says. Then he says, therefore, this joy of mine is now complete.

Where was joy? What was greatness for John? It was just doing his job and just using his life to point others to Jesus.

And I would say, what's the secret to John's greatness? It's simply this church, John's life was not about John.

Too many of us are often chasing false joy, making life about self. Oh, I'm happy if I get the raise, happy if I get the promotion.

[28 : 46] My accomplishments, so it makes me great. My wealth, power, attention, fame.

Joy is found in being someone. So I occasionally name drop because it helps me be someone.

Or sometimes even in ministry, I like to talk about the things I've done. Little shout out to me.

Pastors could get stuck here. We can get stuck here. How many folks are in your church?

Deep joy is not in these things, church. Joy happens when our lives and we see the lives of others transformed.

[29 : 51] When we see people meeting the Lord. Man, it's the best. I got to share with a gentleman yesterday I drove who was a heroin addict and I got to just share with him things of the Lord.

I got to share with him the gospel. It's the best. And I would say just like John the Baptist, there was just great satisfaction in doing his job.

You want to be great, you want to have joy, just do your job. Just do your job. Well, what's your job? It's very similar to John's. Saint Corinthians 5.20 says we're ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.

An ambassador's life is defined by making much of someone else. And there's actually great freedom and there's great joy in that.

And if that's too complex, John just brings it down for all of us in this very simple, concise, marching orders that he gives us for life in John 3.30 where he says, hey, he, Jesus, must increase, but I must decrease.

[31 : 05] Amen? Paul the Apostle. I love what he says in 2 Corinthians 4.5. He says, for what we proclaim is not ourselves.

I'm not here to name drop, to promote what I have done, why I am great, why you should look at me, affirm me. I don't proclaim myself, but Jesus Christ as Lord.

Who am I with ourselves as your servants for Jesus sake? I'm just a servant. And I love how Paul continues that, that, that thought line in 2 Corinthians 4 in verse 7 where he says, hey, where is clay pots?

Your earthen vessels. Bring that up to today. You're, you're a plastic container from Costco. You're a cardboard box.

Well, I'm insulted. Well, that's the equivalency. Clay pots are everywhere in Paul's day. Just a plain container.

[32 : 11] Why is that good? Because it magnifies what's inside the treasure. I love what the great New Testament theologian says.

A.T. Robertson says, there always have been men in the world so clever that God could make no use of them.

I would venture to guess as we consider John 3.30, he must increase that we're probably aligned there. I think as those in Christ, we want people to see the Lord. The problem is we want that to be commensurous with our increase as well.

Yeah, I want Jesus to increase. I just want to join him just a little bit. And I think that those in ministry, which is actually all of us, every member is a minister of the gospel.

We're all in ministry in this life. We can get hopped up on people following us, thinking well of us. And I would say for the congregation, don't love your pastor more than you love your Savior.

[33 : 26] For some of us, I know it's easier. Hey, I mean, but you'll figure that out.

Why? Well Paul tells Timothy very clearly in 1 Timothy 2.5, for there is one God and there is one mediator between God and men.

And his name isn't Scott or Eric or Cole or Josh or Jay. It's the man Christ Jesus.

I drove a young man about a week ago who found out he asked what I did other than drive Uber professionally. I said, I mean, it's kind of a big deal.

But my side hustle is I'm a pastor. But then he actually proceeded to just share very personal things about man, can I just confess some things to you?

[34 : 28] I think he had this very Catholic mindset of I'm here to play priest and absolve him. He shared these things said, would you forgive me, Pastor Jay?

And I said, I'm not the one you need to be concerned about. But I can point you to the one who you need to be forgiven from.

And I got to talk about Jesus with him. It's such an absurd thing. Is it not? When we start losing sight of what we're about, of where we're supposed to point, of where the light.

It's like a couple of flashlights. It's been weird like all week. I've had these flashlights. I don't usually use props. This is a little bit dangerous for me. But these guys have been arguing all week on who the better light is.

And this little guy right here, I was prepared. Before this, I was like, Josh, you got some batteries? So we'll see how long this lasts.

[35 : 33] But this little guy here, he's wanting to be this guy. Because this guy is a name brand. This guy is like an old light. This guy, he's kind of a big deal.

Okay? Yeah, he's kind of a big deal. He's like, guys, I have a bracket. This guy doesn't have a bracket. And he's like, I don't have that.

But this guy is like, yeah, you can attach me to a firearm. And he likes to talk to all the other flashlights about the big deal that he is. The problem is, this guy's doing his job.

This guy likes to talk a big game. What's success for a flashlight? I mean, what's success for a flashlight? It's like that they illuminate.

A great flashlight is not a flashlight. It says, check me out, look at me and gaze at me. It's not even functioning correctly. You should never even think about it because it's directing light somewhere else.

[36 : 42] And John says, hey, that's what we need to be about. People need to think less of us. We need to decrease. We need to shine the light of Christ, of the gospel, so that others can see.

They can come to know the Savior. Success in this life for a flashlight is illuminating darkness. Not saying, hey, let the light shine on me.

Success in this life, church, greatness in this life, for us, it's when people see Christ. Amen? It's when they remember Jesus, when they find Jesus, when they confess Jesus, when they worship Jesus because we lived.

It's so counter to what the world and the enemy wants to promote. That you're something and you're great if you make this life much about yourself.

And John the Baptist, he doesn't actually confront us necessarily with his words. He confronts us with his life. He did his job.

[37 : 49] And he was okay with whatever influence the Lord allowed him to have in the time that he served. Well, let's finish up. It's interesting because in this passage, at the very end, we move from John the Baptist to actually John the Apostle making comments about the story of John the Baptist.

And what he does at the end here is he gives us a list of reasons why Jesus ought to get all the glory. And he says here in verse 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. He bears witness to what he has seen and heard. Yet no one receives his testimony.

Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this that God is true. For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand.

Why ought Jesus increase and not us? And John the Apostle gives us five reasons here. First, he says, Jesus, he comes from above.

[39 : 00] We don't. Secondly, Jesus has first hand knowledge of truth from the Father. We don't.

As God, Jesus agrees with the Father and always tells the truth. We don't. Jesus experienced the full power of the Holy Spirit without measure.

We don't. Some of us rarely even walk filled controlled by the Spirit. Jesus was always controlled by the Holy Spirit.

And then finally, fifthly, all authority has been given to Jesus from the Father, which I think it emphasizes Christ's full deity. And essentially what John the Apostle is saying is, hey, we're not God.

Jesus was and is. That's why we make much of Jesus in this life. And how important is that? It's everything, church, because John finishes in verse 36 where he says this, whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.

[40 : 14] Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life. But the wrath of God remains on him. How important is it? When we steal attention away from the Lord, when we make ministry about us in some measure, essentially what we're doing is we're throwing a veil over the gospel to those that need to hear.

We're putting up a roadblock. I mean, could you imagine if John the Baptist decided his disciples were correct at being upset about the attention going to Jesus?

What would have happened? Well, he would have ceased to do his job. They would have ceased to proclaim the King. I'm not going to say, behold the Lamb of God. I'm not going to tell people they need to meet the Savior.

I'm not going to direct them to the Lord. And yet, John the Baptist leaves us such a remarkable testimony.

Church, what a gift to be okay with being ordinary and whatever the Lord wants to accomplish through us in the lives of those around us.

[41 : 28] What a gift we would be to them. Why was John great? John was great because John's life had nothing to do with John.

Amen? Father, thank you for this example. Our brother, John, we will meet some day.

A man who is okay simply to be useful in your hands. Lord, we want to be a people who have been called to play great parts without pride and small parts without shame.

And Lord, that you would use any of us to advance your kingdom. We truly, it's remarkable, we have few words.

Just simply thank you. And would you help us to be faithful to that task this week?

[42 : 41] And Lord, when we see pride well up, might we be quick? Lord, would you convict us quickly that we might quickly confess that to you to repent of that?

Or that we would then experience a fresh year joy, the joy of your salvation, just to be used? Lord, I'm so thankful that you're a God that uses just ordinary plastic containers, cardboard boxes, so that you, your glory, it can be on full display.

We love you, Jesus. We do. Let us walk with you closely this week in your name we pray. Amen.