

Greater Groom

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[0 : 00] Yet another week of the Gospel of John. This is good stuff, guys. It's really good stuff. Open your Bible to John chapter 3.

John chapter 3. John chapter 3, verse 3. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

John chapter 3, verse 5. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Two parallel statements, which were so beautifully implaced by Aaron last week. It's made quite obvious by Jesus that being born from above and being born by water and the Spirit are the same thing.

And it's made quite clear by Jesus as well that no human being can have anything to do with God, his kingdom, and his reign and new creation in the world if they are not born again by this water and by the Spirit.

[1 : 17] That's why we take baptism so seriously. That's why last week, when you saw those four people being baptized, they were being dunked into a bunch of water and coming up, and we prayed for them that they would indeed live life by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Because baptism symbolizes new birth. So I think it's no mistake that in our passage at the end of chapter 3, Jesus goes out into the countryside and he starts baptizing there.

Verse 22. Jesus was baptizing, John tells us. But John the Baptist was also baptizing. Lo and behold. And we're told that there was plentiful water in verse 23.

John the Baptist got the plentiful water. And so what you have is you have two kind of parallel leaders, two parallel baptisms, and two parallel kind of discipleship movements happening at the exact same time.

And what happens is it causes quite a stir amongst the Jewish community. Verse 25. Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification.

[2 : 33] Why purification? Because that's what baptism is all about. Purified from your sins. So John's disciples and the Jews are discussing. There's a rivalry brewing.

There's competition in the air. There's envy and jealousy brooding in the hearts of John's disciples because they realize that this Jesus movement is starting to take priority and gain popularity and they don't like it.

Verse 26. Rabbi, they say to John, he who is with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness, look, he's baptizing too and everybody's going to him.

And you can almost sense in their voice the sense of dismay and disbelief over this Jesus movement. They feel threatened by it. They feel threatened by Jesus and his disciples.

How many of us feel threatened when others start to gain prominence over us? Prominence that we wish we had.

[3 : 37] Prominence that we believe we deserve. Prominence that feels so close to the core of our identity. And when it looks threatened, we get confused. John answers his threatened disciples in verse 27.

Look at this crazy verse in verse 27. A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. A person can't even receive one thing unless it's given him from heaven.

It's as if John looks to his disciples that are becoming jealous over this Jesus movement and he says to them, everything and anything we have is just a gift from the sovereign hand of the living God.

So who are we to cling to it as if we own it? A person can't receive one thing unless it's given to him from heaven. John is not threatened by this Jesus movement.

He sees his whole ministry as this wonderful gift from God. So when it's succeeding and life seems to be going well, what does he do? He says, gift from God. And when it seems to be declining because Jesus is increasing, what does he do?

[4 : 48] He says, well, gift from God. I wonder, brothers and sisters, if we can learn from this that there is a wonderful confidence and contentment, a wonderful solidity and groundedness and rootedness for the person that knows that their vocation actually comes from the sovereign hand of God with all of its successes and all of its failures, all of its highs and all of its lows, God is there.

A person can't receive one thing unless it's given them from heaven. John goes on in verse 28, you yourselves bear me witness that I said, I am not the Christ, but I've been sent before him.

not only is John content, but he knows who he is not. He is not God. He's not God.

And this was one of the greatest mistakes of all of humanity. If you go all the way back to Genesis chapter 3, what do Adam and Eve want to do? They want to be like God, separate from God, rule their own lives, take control of their way, do what they want to do.

And here, John shows us that to be a true human being is actually to realize that we are not God, most fundamentally. How much easier would it be if we knew that we were not God?

[6 : 19] How much less time would we spend masquerading like we have it all together? How much less energy would we try, would we expend trying to control every detail of our lives?

How much less effort would we exert trying to seek our own glory and prove ourselves to the world and put ourselves at the top and put ourselves on the stage if we just realize that we are not God?

I'm not the Christ, says John. I've simply been sent to point to Him. The Baptist goes on in verse 29. He tells us a bit of a parable about a wedding.

The one who has the bride is the bridegroom, he says. And the friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him, i.e. the best man, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice.

Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete. So here's the picture. Jesus is the groom, the bridegroom. God's people are the bride.

[7 : 23] bridegroom. And John is the best man. Now, if you know anything about best men or maids of honor, they have certain responsibilities.

My best man had one responsibility because he was out of town, so he didn't plan anything. He just showed up. He had one responsibility and that was to hold on to my wedding ring along with my wife's wedding ring and just not lose it for the day of.

Don't worry, he didn't lose it. But you should have seen him sweating bullets. He looked more nervous than I was going into the wedding trying to figure out how he's going to hold the wedding ring so that he doesn't lose it.

So literally, we're about to go out there. I'm nervous because I'm getting married. And he's asking me, Jordan, how should I hold the wedding rings? And I said, like this, tightly.

When he handed off those wedding rings, the look of joy on his face was magnificent. He just, all ease and smiles. It was glorious. He had a really simple job.

[8 : 33] In the ancient world, if you were a best man, you literally had to plan the whole wedding. You had to make sure all the guests were there. You had to make sure all the food and wine was there and that nothing would run out.

You had to make sure the bride was there and the bridegroom was going to come there. I mean, you had to prepare the whole thing. And so it's no wonder that John talks about the joy that is in his life when the bridegroom finally comes.

When Jesus Christ shows up on the stage and his job is finally done. Look how he describes this joy. The friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him and the Greek literally says it this way, rejoices with joy at the bridegroom's voice.

Therefore, this joy of mine and the Greek says it literally, has been fulfilled. Three times the idea of joy and rejoicing in one single verse.

John is so excited that his job is done and he can slowly but surely and quietly take a step off the stage of world history as the savior of the world steps onto center stage and all his glory shines out in the midst of the darkness.

[9 : 51] John fades into the background forever because the bridegroom has come. So in verse 30 we see him say that.

He must increase but I must decrease. John gladly bows out because someone so much greater has come.

what a powerful verse. What a countercultural verse. What a life-giving and freeing verse this is. I must increase but he must increase rather but I must decrease. Brothers and sisters, I don't think this is just describing John the Baptist ministry.

I think this is showing us what it means to be a true human being. I think it's showing us what it means to be a Christian. What it means to live a life of joy and blessing and freedom.

[10:52] He must increase but I must decrease. It was a bit fortuitous that Aaron actually spoke of the church calendar and set it up nicely for me.

So I'm going to talk a bit about it. The early church was so astonished by this verse particularly Augustine who was early century bishop in North Africa.

They actually used this verse to shape the whole church calendar in an interesting way. So the early church placed the festival or the celebration of the birth of John the Baptist on June 24th which is summer solstice.

Why June 24th? Because that's the longest day of the year. And from there on out the days are getting shorter and shorter and the light is decreasing and decreasing. I must decrease, says John. And where did they put Jesus' birthday? They put it none less but the very end of that decreasing on December 25th, the winter solstice, which was the shortest day of the year, they thought.

[12:00] And then the days would slowly grow longer and longer and the light would increase and increase and increase. He must increase. And so the early church was so convinced that this was at the heart of what it means to be human and a disciple of Jesus Christ that we're going to shape all of time according to this.

He must increase and I must decrease. Brothers and sisters, what would it be like if we made this what shaped our lives? He must increase.

decrease. What would it be like? What would change in our lives? What would be different? What would be made new?

What would be reprioritized and reoriented? What would it look like if our marriages and friendships were the places where we said I must decrease and Jesus Christ must increase in this relationship?

What would it look like if the way that we parent or the way that we act towards our parents if we actually said I must decrease but Jesus Christ must increase in this family?

[13:14] What would it look like if our job aspirations and our education every time we woke up in the morning and we walked into a classroom or into an office we said I must decrease but I want Jesus Christ to increase in this place today.

Jesus increase please. What would it look like if Aaron and I every time we led a service we stepped into the pulpit to proclaim God's word we said I must decrease but he must increase.

How would that change our life? How would that radically change our witness to the world?

Brothers and sisters what would happen if verse 3 was the motto of our life?

What would that life? What would that love? John was all about. He was the most content satisfied and humble and joyful man we could ever imagine.

Now at this point some of you may not be convinced yet. Maybe you're wondering you're new with us or feeling a bit cynical about this verse.

[14:24] Maybe you're wondering why would I want to make my life about this one man? This one Jewish man who lived 2,000 years ago. Why would I want to make my life about this one man take backstage while he takes center stage?

Who is this guy anyways? And why does he out of all the people in all of history deserve to be in center stage? Why not Buddha?

Why not Allah? Why not Oprah? Seriously though. Why not Martin Luther King Jr.?

Why not Gandhi? Why not Mother Teresa? Why not Barack Obama? Why this man? That's a really good question I think. So if you're asking it keep asking it.

And keep watching because the answer is found in verses 31 to 36. He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way.

[15:32] But he who comes from heaven is above all. This is a clear reference to Jesus Christ coming from heaven down to earth.

As Christians we call that incarnation. So we celebrate at Christmas. But notice what it says at the beginning and end of this verse. He who comes from above is above all.

In Greek you can say all can mean all people or all things. And here it literally means all things. So it's saying not only is Jesus Christ the greatest human being who's ever lived.

But he is also greater and more supreme than the whole entire universe. In a sense. And if you like reading anything about cosmology or you just like googling pictures on the internet.

And you've checked out the Hubble telescope anytime lately. You'll see how crazy this statement actually is. Do you know they took that telescope and they aimed it out into a space.

[16 : 35] In a kind of an area that is about half an inch by half an inch. And they just stuck it out into space and said see what you can see. And in that small portal into the seemingly endless universe there were a billion galaxies.

And each in each of those galaxies there was an average of a billion stars. He is above all things. Really?

Yes. He is. Incomparably and supremely great says verse 31. But there's more verse 32. He bears witness and this is even greater.

He bears witness to what he has seen and heard. So he comes from heaven but then he bears witness to what he's seen and heard. What has he seen and heard?

Flip the page over to chapter 1 verse 18. We have to see it there. 118. No one has ever seen God. Why?

[17 : 41] Because if human beings see God they die. But the only God who is at the Father's side. That's a reference to Jesus Christ.

He has made him known. And if you go all throughout the gospel of John what you realize is the one who has seen and heard who God truly is is Jesus Christ because for all eternity he has dwelt with the Father and gazed into his glorious face and listened to his beautiful voice.

He bears witness to what he has seen and heard. And we get to know who God is. The living God. God. I woke up this morning and looked out the window like the last few mornings and realized I was trapped in a mysterious haze of fog.

I seriously couldn't see much further than 15 feet out the window. Brothers and sisters without Jesus Christ piercing the heavens and coming down here we would have no clue who God is. It's like we're in a fog about who God is and we can't see him and we don't know who he is at all. And what happens is Jesus Christ is like the bright morning sun that rises in the east and it burns away the fog and shines this bright light, a light like that we saw today on us and we all of a sudden get clarity about who God is.

[19 : 13] But there's a tragedy in verse 32. No one receives his testimony. I was reading a book yesterday called the drama of atheist humanism.

Just some fun reading on a holiday, you know, and in there the guy quoted somebody. And this guy was a German dude back in the day and he said this.

Dietrich Heinrich Körler. He said, even if it could be proved by mathematics that God exists, I do not want him to exist because he would set limits to my greatness.

Brothers and sisters, that sounds really radical. It is, but I think he's expressing what lies so deeply in many of our hearts. Even if God could be proven, I don't want him to exist.

No one receives his testimony. It says, we have that all in our hearts. We don't want him to exist.

We don't want to receive him. But behold, mystery of all mysteries, God overcomes our resistance.

[20 : 31] Verse 33. Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. God is true. What happens when we receive Jesus' testimony?

Basically this. We say, the one that Jesus is pointing to, the father who is the creator and savior of the whole entire world, the one who is more gracious and merciful than we could ever imagine because Jesus has showed it to us.

That one is true. He's not a myth. He's not a lie. He's not a figment of our imagination. He's not a projection of our desires and emotions onto the screen of eternity so that it just ends up being a human creation.

No, in Jesus Christ we see that this God is very God of very God. He's true. He's the deepest reality of our lives.

He's the deepest reality of the universe. How do we know this? Verse 34 explains. For because he whom God sent, namely Jesus Christ, utters the very words of God.

[21 : 47] Verse 34 again. For because he gives the spirit without measure. Are any of you confused at this point?

Because I am too. No, I'm not really that confused at this point. But listen to this guys because this is pretty crazy. God says that he whom he sent utters the very words of God.

Why? Because he pours out his spirit upon him. Now there's a question here. Who pours out the spirit upon whom? Is it Jesus pouring out the spirit on believers?

Because we know that's true in the gospel of John. Or is it God pouring out the spirit upon Jesus Christ? And here, I think, given the verse that comes after it, look at verse 35.

The father loves the son and is given all things into his hand. Where the subject and object is father's son. I think it's clear to say that it means the father pouring out the spirit upon the son.

[22 : 54] Why does this matter to us? Because we are getting a glimpse into the very life of God as Trinity. Father, son, and Holy Spirit.

And Trinity is one of those words that we don't like using very often. People get scared when they hear that word. You don't have to be scared. This is at the center of the Christian faith.

You can't be a Christian and not be thoroughly immersed in Trinity. So what do we learn about God? When we look at Jesus Christ, we get a window into the eternal life of God.

And what we learn is that for all eternity, there is a father who loves the son and gives life to the son. And for all eternity, there is a son who reflects glory to the father and delights in the beauty of the father and reflecting his love.

And for all eternity, the father pours the spirit out upon the son and the son and the spirit unites the son to the father and they enjoy a delightful, mutual, eternal relationship and blessedness and knowing and loving of one another.

[24 : 09] God is not some distant monad. God is not some vague spiritual force. God is three eternal persons in the perfect unity of love and relationship.

That's why we can call God love. God is not one of the things that that's the inner life of God. And what happens when Jesus Christ pierces the fog of our darkness and comes down to heaven is that he shows us that that's who God is.

But he doesn't just show us that that's who God is like a painting in the sky that's impersonal. No, he shows us who God is and then he says you can enter into that life.

God doesn't just want us to see him. God wants us to enter into him. And we see that in verse 36. Verse 36.

Whoever believes in the son has eternal life. Notice the present tense. Doesn't say whoever believes in the son will have eternal life.

[25 : 17] Says whoever believes in the son right now has eternal life. Now the question we have to ask ourselves is what is eternal life? I'm ending here so don't don't worry I'm not gonna go too much longer.

I think when we think of eternal life we often think in terms of duration of life. So the gift of eternal life is God's helping us live forever. And that sounds cool but we often don't really know what we're gonna do forever.

So it seems a bit confusing and we're not sure if it's the greatest gift we've ever known. So I think that's true and that's really great gift. If we know what we're gonna be doing.

But I think in the gospel of John eternal life is not meant to be mainly about duration. It's meant to be mainly about the quality of life. So what kind of life do we have when we believe in the son?

What is the quality of life that we're given? And in the gospel of John eternal life is the quality of God's very own life. Eternal life is God's own life as father son and Holy Spirit.

[26 : 29] He's the eternal one. And so what does it mean to believe in the son and have eternal life? It means that whoever believes in the son literally gets swept up from heaven into from earth into the heavenly life of God.

God. I mean that's what this verse is saying. It's saying that we get to experience the communion and the intimacy and the joy and the beauty and the blessing that God has always known for all eternity in his life.

love. We get to know the father who loves infinitely. The son who blesses us infinitely and the spirit who perfects and beautifies us infinitely.

What an amazing offer. Whoever believes and trusts and embrace the son has eternal life. God's own life. Oh how the human heart longs for that life.

Oh how we look for it in so many other places and right here in this flesh and blood person Jesus Christ of Nazareth. God is saying come and see.

[27 : 44] Come and drink. Come and receive. Come and enjoy. And it's such a good offer.

It's such a good offer that the verse actually ends with a really really serious warning lest we forsake the offer. Verse 36. Whoever does not obey the son shall not see life.

To turn your back on the source of life is to choose death. Turn your back on the fullness of truth is to choose a lie. To turn your back on the light of the world is to choose darkness.

And to turn your back on the mercy of God is to choose wrath. End of verse 36. But the wrath of God remains on him.

It's the only time in the gospel of John the word wrath is used in the whole gospel. It's a present tense verb once again. Just as those who believe have eternal life.

[28 : 53] So those who don't obey the son. The wrath of God presently rests and remains on them. The righteous and just anger of God against those who refuse his life.

Friends trust me. I wish this passage didn't end here. I wish this wasn't the last word. But it is. And I can't do anything about that.

We've heard so much good news and we've heard so much life and we've heard so much to rejoice in. That this passage ends with a warning lest we decide to forsake what God is so generously offering.

Brothers and sisters do not miss out on eternal life. Don't turn your back on it. Because whoever believes in the son will have it.

Forever and ever. In the name of the father and the son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[29 : 58] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.