

John 3:22-36 “He Must Increase”

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Contrary to popular belief, I am Will Spink. We're often confused when we're out in his will. Yeah, no, it's a privilege to be here as one of your ruling elders to get to share God's word with you. So let me pray for that.

And then we will take a look at John chapter 3. Lord, we do thank you that we can surrender all.

And I do thank you for that inscription on the Stony Brook altar as you go there to preach that says, Sir, we would see Jesus. A reminder of when the Greeks came to hear Christ.

And I pray that now, that we would see Jesus, Lord, that you would strike a straight blow with this crooked stick. And I pray it in Christ's name. Amen.

So we are going to continue in John 3, if you have your Bibles. It might say what page it's on, the Pew Bible, page 887. And it's John 3, 22, the end, till the end of it, chapter 3.

[1 : 20] You know, I love that Will chose the book of John, the gospel of John, to lead us through this season. I love the book of John. I love it for several reasons.

I'm going to give you three. One, it was written by John, John the apostle. John, who knew Christ better than anyone else on earth. Arguably his closest friend.

And this friend of Christ writes this about Jesus. He says at the end, I could have written volumes and volumes and volumes, but these I've written that you might believe.

So I like it was written by John. And I like also that as we read it, we find new reason to believe in Christ. It's written that we might believe. You can read it in a sitting.

I'd encourage you sometime as we're preaching through this series, that you sit down and read it for yourself. Whether you know Christ or not, read it.

[2 : 20] See really who he is, as his good friend John writes. And then also I like that there is the element of light and darkness throughout the gospel of John.

I'm an imagery guy. I like to see things. And that comes out throughout it. And I like the thought that he brings me out of darkness, out of darkness into light.

It was funny as I was awakened in the night last night with a stiff neck. And I thought the Lord was saying, Mark, yield to me. Don't be stiff necked.

So may that be the case. Let's read then these verses from John 3, 22 through 36. 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 Anon and Salem because water was plentiful there and people were coming and being baptized. For John had not yet been put in prison.

[3 : 30] Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. And there 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.

John answered, a person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness that I said, I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.

The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice.

Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease. 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.

[4 : 46] 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.

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

There's an outline in the bulletin, and I've divided it into four sections. An ironic opening. Ironic opening. Who's who?

Who's who? Less is more. And a final warning. I did talk a little bit about John the Apostle, sometimes called John the Evangelist, because he said, I wrote these things that you might believe. And this John is writing about another John, John the Baptist. John is, we heard earlier in these sermon series, John the Baptist is a prophet, and he's the greatest prophet of them all.

[5 : 49] Jesus said that about him, and it's because of the message that he brings. He's announcing the Messiah. Like most prophets, they have a difficult life.

John ate locusts, lived in the desert. He had a message from God of great hope. But like most prophets also, it's a double-edged sword.

And so we do close with a warning from John the Baptist. So this opening, I call it an ironic opening. The scene is that the disciples of John the Baptist apparently go over to see Jesus and the baptisms that are going in his area.

And they come back to John. And as you can see here, it's even exaggerated a bit. They say, everybody's going to Jesus. And they're actually upset about it.

[6 : 53] And they get into an argument over purification and over baptism, apparently. Can you see the irony of that?

They're arguing about what Christ is doing and that Christ is increasing. Have you ever had that in your life where as Christ gets nearer to you, he calls you to something that, oh no, all of a sudden you feel threatened that your life might be diminished?

Or he moves in a relationship of friends of yours, and they're experiencing Christ in a new way, and it's not good for you, and you feel threatened.

Also, these men, just think about it, you know, they're hanging around one of the most godly guys of all time, John the Baptist, and then Jesus himself.

And yet, I don't think they treated each other very well. So if it can happen to them, it can happen to us. You know, I'm an elder here, love our brothers, but do we have conflict, sometimes sharp conflict?

[8 : 02] We do. That's just part of who we are without Christ. For those of you who pray for us, thank you. Continue to pray. And I will brag on our pastor, Will, does an exceptional job of putting down his agenda.

Our meetings are not always efficient, but they are godly. And we work it out. God's economy is on a whole different timetable. And thank you, Brother Jeremy, for leading us in that today about rest and quietness.

Let's look at a couple of verses where this was common to the early church. In 1 Corinthians 4, 6, and 7, 1 Corinthians 4, 6, and 7, Paul writes, and again, the same kind of deal about conflict.

I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another.

You know, there it is, in favor of one against another. For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

[9 : 20] And then we're going to read another section, a chapter earlier in there. And again, the antidote will be the same thing. And I do thank the Lord that whenever he calls us to something, he doesn't call us to do it by our own grit and willpower, though there is effort, but he gives us a power, a power to suppress the evil and walk in the good.

So even earlier he says this, for you're still of the flesh. While there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?

For when one says, I follow Paul, another, I follow Apollos, are you not merely being human? And in this case we see, you know, they were following John the Baptist instead of identifying with John and his purposes instead of Christ.

And it's like that in our life, even in church life. And I would refer to that as church life, that they, anytime a cause, even a good cause, if Christ isn't at the heart of it, might there be selfish ambition and personal gain?

That's often the case for me. James summarizes it this way. Who is wise and understanding among you?

[10:46] By his good conduct, let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. That's hard for us, in the meekness of wisdom. We want it to be arrogance. We want it to be boastful.

At least I do. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast, be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but it's earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

For where jealousy and selfish ambition exists, there will be disorder in every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. An ironic opening, conflict amongst the godly, and a conflict about Jesus rising in importance.

And we'll see how John answers this and how it'll work out in our hearts. So that's the opening. Secondly, who's who?

[12:00] Who's who? So when the disciples come to John, what does he say to them? You know, does he say to them, look, I told you guys, you guys are slipping a lot. You need to get up a little earlier, work a little harder.

Your marketing plan is failing. You need a new marketing plan. We need some gimmicks out there. We need to be more efficient. You guys are missing it. Of course not.

That would be, as the British like to say in their translation of the Bible, rubbish. Rubbish. What does John say? He says, who's who? He says, I am from the earth.

I speak from the earth, earthly things. He's from above. He's different. I can, I have a great calling from the Lord.

I'm bringing Israel to repentance to get ready to meet the Christ. A huge, huge, huge calling from the Lord. Very important man of God. But he says, compared to Christ, I am nothing.

[13:03] I am nothing. I can't give you anything that was given, that wasn't given to me. But Christ, he can give you, and we'll learn next week, and with the woman at the well, he can give you wells of salvation that never run dry.

He can give you life. Don't compare me to Christ. There's no comparison. And then he says these haunting words. He must increase, and I must decrease.

He must increase, and I must decrease. One quote from D.A. Carson, there's a great commentary on John.

He says this, deep discontentment over God's wise, sovereign disposition of people and things would in that instance betray not only unbelief and faithfulness, but the worst form of the perennial human sin, arrogance that wants to be God and stand where God stands.

And we'll talk about that in a few minutes. So John sets it straight on who's who. And then he talks about less is more.

[14:23] Less is more. So how can less be more? How can making him increase be of benefit to me? Or is it?

Is Jesus coming to conquer? Well, he is. He is. When we follow him, do we follow him in fear? Well, there is a certain element of fear.

As we read earlier, though, he says, come to me, I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you'll find rest for your souls. But we also read where he cleared the temple. Jesus was the prophet of prophet. He came with a double-edged sword as well. But what's it mean, like, to be, for him to increase and for me to decrease in my life?

Does he take over my personality? Do I become a robot? Do I only follow him and him alone in some ritualistic type of way?

[15:22] Do we all start to sound the same as believers, look the same, dress the same? Again, again, rubbish. That is what the enemy would want you to believe.

But that's not at all Christ. C.S. Lewis uses two analogies. I'm not sure if we have kids here, but any kids, you're familiar with the Chronicles of Narnia?

Anybody? Any adults familiar with this Chronicles of Narnia? Great. Great series. Well, this author also in Mere Christianity talks about this and he uses two analogies, salt and light.

And let me talk about light first. Let's pretend we're in this room now and all the lights are out. It's so dark that we can't see the hand in front of our face.

And some voice from above, probably Will Spink, right? It says, I'm going to shine something down and it's going to reflect back up so I can see you.

[16:25] It's going to be the same beam on each of you and reflect back up. Will we all look the same? Of course not. The clearer the light, matter of fact, the more individualities show up and our differences, our uniqueness.

And that's kind of what it's like in Christ. We have a certain gift set personality, but it only comes to the true fulfillment in Him. I think about Christ who healed a man with a withered hand, it said.

I think it was on the Sabbath. He had a hand. It was partly functioning, but Jesus healed it so it had full functioning. That's what He wants to do with us, with our persons, to set us free, to do things we weren't thinking about doing, didn't even know we were capable of doing, and running from others. Then He also uses the analogy of salt. of salt. Again, about how can more, less of me be more. So when you put salt on food, does it make it all taste like salt?

Does it make it all taste the same? No, it brings out all the unique flavors that are in a dish. That's what salt does. And having Christ in our life brings out those unique gifts that God put you in you and you alone.

[17:44] and He wants to bring it out to advance His kingdom for you to bring justice to the poor, to bring hope and light to people, to go to, as we say in our mission, the least, the loneliest, the littlest, the left out, the lonely.

He will change hearts like mine to want to do that instead of to promote myself. C.S. Lewis concludes when he writes about this in this way, It is something like that with Christ in us.

The more we get what we now call ourselves out of the way and let Him take us over, the more truly ourselves we become.

There is so much of Him that millions and millions of little Christs, all different, will still be too few to express Him fully. He made them all. He invented, as an author invents character, in a novel, all the different men that you and I were intended to be.

In that sense, our real selves are all waiting for us in Him. It's no good trying to be myself without Him. D.A. Carson also writes, John finds joy not in grudgingly conceding victory to a superior opponent, but in wholeheartedly embracing God's will and the supremacy it assigns to Jesus.

[19:28] A great deal of later Christian piety has turned on this same truth. So, we are faced with that battle, that challenge every day.

We've talked about this some in the Connect Community class that several of us are teaching, Kevin, today. Studying a book called The Fight, a book of Christian living, and it talks about every day is a fight, but it's not a grind where you have to win it with your own strength, but it's a victorious life in Christ and in Christ alone, but it's there every day.

It's there every day. So, I want to look some, a couple of brief studies of how the tempter uses this over and over to eclipse Christ in our life and make us promoted, where we feel threatened, like John's disciples, that Jesus is rising.

He's up in the polls. I don't know what's happening. It's out of control. I'm going down. In Isaiah, there's a chapter that talks about what many authors think is actually Satan himself.

It's referred to a king, but I think it's on several levels. And this king wants to exalt himself to heaven and in the end says, I will be God.

[20:57] I will be God. And I think that was the ultimate fall of Satan. He wanted to be in the place of God, though he was an incredible angel of light, the Bible says. And he fell and he wants to bring you and me with him.

And he has a fury about that. It worked on him and he wants it to work on us. The battle is there every day. You can go back to Genesis, right?

Genesis 3. The tempting of Eve. We won't go through it all. There are three levels there. You know, the food was good for food.

It was beautiful. But also, if she took it, it would make her like God, Satan said. It will make her like God. There again is that so-called perennial sin, wanting to ascend to be the Lord.

You know, you think, I don't want to be God. I just want to get my way. Well, think of where that impulse came from, ultimately. And so, yes, Satan did the serpent, as it says in the garden, reach out to Eve and say, take it.

[22 : 07] And that's the issue when we take something before the time. You saw in those answers to John and also in 1 Corinthians where there was strife.

They were reminded, what do you have that you weren't already given? What do you have that you weren't given? It's when we try to take it prematurely that we get into trouble. And that's time and time in the Bible.

Fast forward from Genesis to Matthew chapter 4, another temptation scene. This time with Jesus. And it's the same playbook for Satan.

He tempted him again on three levels. He tempted him on beauty. He tempted him on physical lust. And then he tempted him on what's called the boastful pride of life.

I don't know what all happened, but Satan presented to Christ all the kingdoms of the world. And he presented it in such a way that it sure looked like it was his. And he said, I'll give you all this.

[23 : 09] This will all be yours. Just worship me. Just worship me. That's the temptation we always have about grabbing something that we think is rightfully ours that's not.

The wisdom from above isn't like that. It comes in its own time and it comes peaceably. Thank God that Jesus said to him, get behind me, Satan.

It's written, you shall worship the Lord alone. There was the standard bearer for us. Our old elder brother, he faced that temptation and he said, I'll be with you when you face that temptation.

We will all be tempted. That's just the way it is. That's just life in the Christian life. If you're serious in serving the Lord, you will be tempted. But in Christ, you can have that victory.

Let's go to 1 John 2. Again, John, writing in 1 John, John, who's the writer of the gospel, also wrote three epistles.

[24 : 20] And in 1 John, he says, for all that is in the world, the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life or boastful pride of life is not from the Father but is from the world.

Those three levels. He'll tempt you on lust of the flesh, lust of the eye, and the pride of life. It goes from the beginning. It's going to go on to the end.

That's our enemy's playbook. And in Christ, we can stand up against it. Matter of fact, there's an amazing section we're going to look at now in Philippians 2 where we can look at the very thoughts of Jesus Christ when he was a man.

Very amazing section of scripture. I commend it to you to meditate on in contrast to how we often find ourselves. Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus who though he was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death even death on a cross.

therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

[26 : 02] Can you kind of see that going through Christ's mind as he's faced with Satan Satan offers him all the kingdoms of the world? No, he humbles himself.

He doesn't grasp it. He humbles himself and then in God's good time he exalts him. He has spiritual victory. So an ironic opening who's who less is more and finally a final warning.

the last few verses of John 3 are not John the Baptist but it goes back to John the Evangelist and he says things about the wrath of God.

He says whoever believes in the Son has eternal life but whoever rejects the Son will not see life for God's wrath remains on him.

God's wrath remains on him. You know often and before I knew Christ I didn't feel God's wrath was on me. Maybe occasionally maybe guilty feelings but we can't trust our conscience without the Spirit leading it.

[27 : 17] It can be false but the wrath of God remains on them. I look at it like this in 2 Thessalonians it talks about the coming of the Lord.

You know he came as a servant he's going to come again to set all things right to set up his kingdom on earth and it says we know what restrains his wrath right now and one day that will be taken away and it'll be a terrific scene it'll be a terrible scene.

It's it's like in physics where in the universe you know if the right potential builds up in the skies lightning strikes lightning just strikes it's just that's how it is.

One day Christ will return he will take his presence away from this earth and automatically God's wrath will occur. It's being restrained it's God's grace that we're hearing this message today it's God's grace that I believe that Jesus is the Christ and if you don't know the Christ there is a consequence for not following Christ it's not like choosing your candidate to vote for once confronted with Christ you have a decision to make not to make a decision is to make a decision and the wrath of God friends John the Baptist says or John the Apostle in this case rests on you that's an awesome thought you know we often go to the doctor thinking I'm fine I feel fine well is that what the results show when they look inside you one day the spirit will show the secrets of our heart by God's grace may we abide in Christ and may we experience that victory and be covered from our sin by the Lord so we talked about the Aaronic opening who's who less is more and the final warning and I do want to say that at the end if anybody would like to discuss more about Christ the person of Christ who he is or get to know him more or have discussion I'll be up front Jeremy probably will too and we would love that as well thank God for his indescribable grace amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org iyi