

More Christ, More Joy!

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Date: 23 April 2023

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[0 : 01] It's always, always a privilege and a joy to open up God's Word with you and to continue walking through the Gospel of John. We're going to, Lord willing, conclude chapter 3 this morning.

So if you would take your Bibles, open them up to John chapter 3, and we will be reading this morning from verses 22 through 36. If you didn't bring your own Bibles, you can find that on page 835 of the Pew Bibles there in front of you.

The Bibles open. I will read from John chapter 3, verse 22 through the end of the chapter. Follow along with me as I read. 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 Enon near Salim because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized. For John had not yet been put in prison.

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.

[1 : 22] 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 all, 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.

[2 : 30] 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.

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God endures forever. Would you please bow as we pray once more? Lord, as we look to this chapter and these words, these verses, Father, we pray that we would not just hear a sermon, Lord, but that we would look and see you. That you would give us eyes to perceive your glory and your worth this morning. That we would set ourselves aside and magnify your glory. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

At Sea Wee Bay Baptist Church, we have a mission. A mission statement that we repeat often. Our mission is to magnify the glory of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And we want to keep that in front of you and repeat it often. One, because we are prone to forget. But two, because that is not our default setting.

[3 : 50] Our default, if you are like me, is not to point upwards and outwards to magnify the glory of God, but instead to flip it around and point towards us, point inwards and magnify the glory of self.

And one of the biggest lies that we tend to believe is that this is what will make us happy. That this type of inward self-magnification is what it's all about.

We think that we're happiest when our needs are met, when we're celebrated, when we're at the center, when our ego is stroked. But what I want us to see in this passage this morning is this.

You will never find a deeper, more lasting satisfaction for your soul than when your life is not about you, but about the glory of God.

That's the main idea for our passage this morning. In other words, true joy is found when it's less of you and more of Christ.

[4 : 56] John the Baptist in our passage, he understood this. He got it. He knew that when you, by the grace of God, when you see, when you perceive the wonder and the glory of who Jesus is, when you behold him in all of his goodness, all of his worth, then the deepest joy of your heart will be to make much of him.

And so this morning, what we're going to see is three keys to true, lasting joy. This will be our outline this morning if you're taking notes. Three keys to true, lasting joy.

First, first key, we must reject a hostile division. We must reject a hostile division.

We see this in verses 22 through 26 in our passage. Look there with me to verse 22. John, he sets the stage here and gives us the context for a dilemma.

Jesus and his disciples, they went out into the Judean countryside. They were baptizing, although we'll see in chapter 4, Jesus himself was not baptizing, but his disciples were there baptizing on his behalf.

[6 : 13] And in verse 23, John the Baptist, we see, also was baptizing at Enon near Salim. Why? Because water was plentiful there and people were coming to him and being baptized for John had not yet been put into prison, which tells us, just as a side note, if you want to understand the chronology of the Gospels, all of John 2 through 4, what we've been studying together over the past several weeks and months, John 2 through 4, that happens before where Matthew, Mark, and Luke pick up their ministry of Jesus at the beginning of his ministry in Galilee after the arrest of John the Baptist.

Now, here's the issue, verse 25. It tells us, We don't know exactly what the discussion was, what the conversation was, but I think we have a pretty good idea based on what follows.

We saw from chapter 1, in our first encounter with John the Baptist from chapter 1, that his baptism was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

It was a baptism of preparation, preparing the way for the coming Messiah. It was a baptism that communicated purification from sin. But it seems like now, at least one Jew was confused.

Because some were coming to John to be cleansed, but now some are coming to Jesus to be cleansed. So which is it? You see the dilemma in this Jew's mind.

[7 : 56] This Jew, he is comparing options here. Why should I receive John's baptism and not Jesus's? Whose baptism do we receive? Whose teaching do we listen to?

Who do we come up under? How can I be purified? By coming to John or by coming to Jesus? Now we don't know whether this Jew was genuinely questioning or whether he was attempting to stir up some sort of division or trouble, but either way, this one conversation with this one Jew, it set off the alarms in the minds of John's disciples.

Look there to verse 26. It says, they came, verse 26, they came to John and said to him, Rabbi, he who is with you across the Jordan to whom you bore witness, look, he is baptizing and all are going to him.

Do you see the tension here in their minds? Rabbi, what do we do? Isn't your name John the Baptist? I thought baptism was your thing. And here's Jesus out here baptizing.

See, they're concerned that their teacher is losing ground while another teacher is gaining influence, that their teacher is losing popularity while someone else is out and becoming more influential.

[9 : 18] And to them, this is deeply, deeply concerning. Why? It's because they are wrestling with the same desire that every single one of us has in the flesh, which is to magnify self, not to magnify Christ.

Do you see this? Do you struggle with this? I know you do. I do. Romans 8, 7, it tells us that the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God.

There is in their heart and in ours a battle. It's a battle between self-glory, a desire to magnify self, and Christ's glory. And this hostility, we need to know, is often so subtle, it's often so difficult to notice that it often just slips completely by us without our even noticing what we're doing.

It happens when we sin, obviously, a rejection of the glory of God. We choose our desires over obedience to the commands of Christ, but it also happens when we intend to do good.

This is incredibly, incredibly subtle, incredibly dangerous. Many good deeds, good ministries, good acts have been done in the name of Christ, but for the praise and the attention and the glory of self.

[10:54] We want the credit. There's an innate hostility to the glory of God that must be rejected. We must, by the grace of God, respond like John the Baptist responds here in this passage. Look there to verses 27 through 30. This is our second point, second key to true lasting joy. We must respond with a happy deflection. A happy deflection. Look there to verse 27. John's disciples were upset.

They come running to their rabbi, probably expecting him to join them in their frustration, probably thinking that they're bringing John some bad news by telling him that Jesus is gaining influence, gaining more followers.

But instead, look how John responds. John answered, a person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.

[12:00] Four times in this chapter. Four times in this chapter. We have seen that word unless. That necessary condition.

And every single time here in chapter 3, it speaks to something that God must do. Otherwise, it cannot be done because it is humanly impossible.

That word unless, it points our attention upwards to God's work away from us and our work. We saw it in Nicodemus when he said, no one can do these signs unless God is with him.

We saw it in Jesus' response to Nicodemus. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Again, truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

And now here from the lips of John the Baptist, a person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.

[13:05] Rabbi, your ministry is being overshadowed. What do we do? What's John's response? My ministry. Any ministry that I have, any influence that I have, any popularity that I have, anything I have is given me from God.

Don't you see the very point of my ministry is to make much of him? John's response. This is a total deflection of all credit, all praise, all attention, all glory.

Of course, we have to understand that John the Baptist, he had worked and prepared his entire life for this moment. Did John not work hard? Of course he did.

Of course he did. A life spent wandering in the wilderness, eating bugs, living in difficult circumstances, difficult environments, preaching a message that would eventually get him imprisoned and then killed.

Does he not deserve some credit? He deserves as much glory and honor as a hammer deserves for building a house.

[14:24] John the Baptist knew that he was just a tool formed and fashioned and shaped and mobilized and utilized for this purpose in the hand of God.

Does not the master builder deserve much more glory and credit and honor for wielding the tool with skill and wisdom and building whatever he sees fit with the tool?

Church, we need to know if you have accomplished anything. If you have anything. If there's anything in your life worth being proud of.

If you are anything at all. It's because God has done it. He deserves the credit. John, he deflects the attention back where it belongs, away from him and back to God.

He knows whatever following I have, God has given it to me. Whatever ministry I have, God has given it to me. By the grace of God, I am what I am.

[15:32] This sounds a lot like Paul, doesn't it? The greatest missionary in the history of the church. The author of about half of the New Testament books. Surely he has something to boast about, right?

Not according to him. He says, I am the least of all the apostles. Unworthy to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God.

But by the grace of God, I am what I am. And his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them.

And though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. What would happen if we took this posture?

What would your life look like if every time someone attempted to praise you for something you said, something you did, some way you acted, some way you responded, if right away from the heart, genuinely, you deflected that praise back where it belonged?

[16 : 39] What would your life look like if every time you felt that tug of pride, that desire to pat yourself on the back for a job well done, that you remembered that a person cannot receive even one thing, unless it was given him from heaven?

I'll tell you what the result would be. Joy. Joy. Joy. I love what John says here to his disciples. He says, were you not listening? Were you not paying attention? You want to follow me and my ministry? Have you not been listening to a word I've said? Verse 28, you yourselves bear me witness that I said I am not the Christ.

I've been sent before him. Then he gives this illustration. I love this. The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom who stands and who hears him rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice.

Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase and I must decrease. You've probably been to your fair share of weddings, I would assume.

[17 : 56] Our culture does weddings differently than they did back then, but the idea is the same. I want you to picture that wedding day in your mind. The preparations have been made.

The details are taken care of. The food is ready. Family and friends are filling the seats. The day has finally come. There's the bridesmaids who stand on one side.

The groomsmen stand on the other. The groom is there in the middle. The music begins to play. And what happens next? The doors open. The bride comes walking down the aisle.

Where is she looking? Her eyes are on the groom. Where is the groom looking? His eyes, along with everyone else, is fixed on the bride, watching her proceed down the aisle and come to be united with her husband.

It's a joyful moment. If you're sappy like me, you probably get some tears in your eyes. We know that this is a picture, a beautiful picture of Christ in the church. I have never, not yet, to this point, been to a wedding where the bride came down the aisle, anticipating being united with her groom, and instead the groomsman steps out in front of the groom.

[19 : 20] Takes this opportunity to make it about himself. Try to steal away the bride from the groom. John says, these people are going where they belong.

The bride is going to be with the bridegroom. Why would I step out in front? They're not here for me. They're not coming to me. My role is to help the bride make her way to the groom.

And I rejoice. My joy is complete that this is being done. It's complete to see it happen. There's a word here, church.

There's a word here, both for leaders in the church and for all Christians. For leaders in the church, pastors, teachers, we have to constantly be reminded.

We have to know it is not about us. It is not about us. Seaweed Bay Baptist Church is not about the ministry or the glory of anyone but Christ.

[20 : 35] This is not my church. It's not Treg's church. This is Jesus' bride. It is a dangerous thing for a sinner week in and week out, week after week after week, to stand and to be given a microphone to talk into.

That's why James warns us. He says, Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers. For don't you know that teachers will be judged with greater strictness.

And so I would ask you, church, for your prayers. Would you pray for me? Would you pray for Treg? Would you pray for any who would stand and deliver God's word?

That we would be protected from the subtle but powerful lure of pride to make it about us. It's not about us.

It's about Christ. But this is not just for leaders, is it? This is a word here for all believers, for everyone in the church.

[21 : 41] This famous mantra of John the Baptist is for all of us. He must increase, but I must decrease. I can't get past the weight of that word.

Must. Must. Must. It's a necessity. This is not optional for John. It's not optional for us.

The throne is only big enough for one king. We must decrease. He must increase for his glory and for our joy. How can we make it about him this week?

How can we make it about him? Our thoughts and our work when we get up tomorrow morning and go about our way, the way we spend our time, the way that we speak to one another, the way that we pray for one another, the way we care for one another.

Father, we must step aside and serve that the bride might make her way to the groom, not let us get in the way.

[22 : 46] This type of happy deflection, it makes much of the glory of God, but you know what else it does? It makes the world around us wonder why.

Why? What in the world? Why this deflection? What makes you act this way? And we get to respond that there's only one possible explanation. It's because we have seen that there is no one anywhere, anything like Jesus.

And because we have seen him for who he is by the grace of God, we know that he alone deserves all praise. It's the third key to true and lasting joy.

Church, we must rejoice in a holy distinction. A holy distinction. The only way to kill the pride in our hearts and to magnify the glory of God is to fix our eyes on Christ and to see, to be overcome by the fact that he is utterly distinct from every other teacher, every other religious figure, every other person who has ever lived and ever will live.

We see this in verses 31 through 36. And I want us to see four ways here that Christ is distinct. Four ways here in 31 through 36.

[24 : 23] Number one, Jesus Christ is distinct in his supremacy. Jesus Christ is distinct in his supremacy. He who comes from above is above all.

Above all. Who else can we say this of? Only Christ. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. But he who comes from heaven is above all.

He is supreme. No one else can claim this authority. He is before all things, as Paul says in Colossians. And in him, all things hold together.

He's the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. No one else.

No one. No one can rival the supremacy of Jesus Christ. The Father has given all things into his hand.

[25 : 22] He is supreme. Not only that. Second, Jesus Christ is distinct in sight and speech.

Jesus Christ is distinct in sight and speech. If you want to learn about World War II, you might ask a historian.

You might read some books. You might go to a museum, watch a documentary. But I'll tell you what, if you really want to know what World War II was like, you speak to someone who lived it. You speak to someone who has seen it and who has heard it. Someone who has first-hand experience of World War II.

There were just 167,284 remaining veterans from World War II, still living as of last September. There's just over 2,000 here in South Carolina.

[26 : 23] And museums are moving quickly with urgency to capture their stories, to record their testimony, before it's too late because they know their witness is so valuable.

Church, Jesus Christ is one of one. If you want to know about heavenly truth, where else can we go but to the words of Christ?

Who else should we listen to but the one who has descended from heaven? If you want to know about eternal life, who else should we listen to but him who speaks words of eternal life and he has spoken that we might hear his words and believe.

John says he bears witness to what he has seen and heard. Yet in the most tragic display of the foolishness of sin, no one receives his testimony.

But whoever does receive his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. Friend, to listen to the words of Jesus is to listen to the words of God.

[27 : 36] To reject the words of Jesus is to reject the words of God. For he whom God has sent utters the words of God.

Four, third, he gives the spirit without measure. This is the third way. Christ is distinct. Number three, Christ is distinct in his measure of the spirit.

He is distinct in his measure of the spirit. He is not like Jeremiah or Ezekiel or Isaiah who by the spirit spoke and uttered the words of God in times and in seasons.

He is full of the spirit. The spirit always validates the word of Christ. He always speaks the word of God. He's not like Samson, not like Joshua, not like Gideon, not like Saul who had temporary waves, temporary experiences of the spirit of God that empowered them temporarily for service to God.

He is full of the spirit. He always does the will of God. It says God has given Christ the spirit without measure.

[28 : 55] Four, the father loves the son. Number four, Christ is distinct in his sonship.

Christ is distinct in his sonship. Who else can we say this of? Jesus Christ is the only beloved son of the father.

Do you see what John is showing us here? John is peeling back the curtain here of the infinite depths of the wonder and the beauty of the mystery of who God is.

He's showing, he's unveiling to us in pieces here the mystery of the Trinity, the Godhead. We see all three members here at work.

God the father sending God the son, loving the son, giving the son the spirit, giving the son all things. The son coming willingly, submitting willingly, bearing witness, coming, bringing a plan of salvation, coming to live and to die and to suffer rejection at the hands of men, coming to rise to accomplish the plan of God.

[30 : 10] God the spirit validating the message of Christ, proving over and over and over and over again that he is the Messiah. Breaking through the hard hearts of men and opening up their eyes to see the truth.

See, John is telling us here that Jesus is not just another man, that he is the beloved son of God.

Do you see what he's telling us here?

If Jesus is who John makes him out to be, then he and he alone deserves all praise.

If Jesus is who John claims him to be, then there is no other way to respond to him than worship, than rejoicing.

And Jesus Christ is God. In his presence, there is fullness of joy at his right hand are pleasures forevermore. If Jesus is who John claims him to be, then we who believe ought to rejoice because he's come to us.

[31 : 25] He's come to purchase our salvation. He's come to offer us eternal life. He's come to pay for our sin. He's come to rise and to secure eternal life for any who would believe in him.

But not all believe. Not all believe. There's a final distinction here that we need to see, and this is where we close.

It's the distinction between those who believe and those who reject the Son of God. Look there to verse 36.

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.

Church, there is an infinite, eternal, clear distinction between those who believe in the Son and those who reject the Son.

[32 : 33] Those who believe have eternal life now, here, now, and into eternity. Those who do not obey remain under the wrath of God.

Did you catch that? John switched it up on us, didn't he? Read it again. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.

We expect him to say, whoever does not believe in the Son shall not see life. That's not what he says, is it? What does he say? He says, 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. Why does he say this?

It's because our faith is invisible, but our works are not. Our faith is invisible, but our lives are not.

[33 : 35] Belief is invisible, but it is seen, it is played out, it is manifested, it is worked out in lives of obedience. You can believe, intellectually, every single distinction that we just named as facts alone with no impact on your life and die and go to hell.

The devil believes everything we just said about Jesus. Every demon in hell believes everything we just said. The devil knows Christ is supreme. The devil knows Christ is the Son of God.

The devil knows Jesus is full of the Spirit. And what difference does it make? Yes, we are saved by faith alone, let the record show. Yes, we are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone.

It is always accompanied by good works. It is always accompanied by a life of obedience.

Imperfect, flawed, but genuine from the heart obedience to Christ.

Genuine from the heart desire to make much of His glory. How can we claim to believe if we don't obey? What does this look like?

[34 : 59] Jesus tells us, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.

Humble yourself. Serve one another. For the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.

Count the interest of one another above your own needs. Church, do you believe Him? Do you believe the words of Christ?

Then let's step aside and devote ourselves to magnifying His glory above our own. Let's pray. Lord, it is all of our battle.

Every one of us wants to make much of ourselves. Every one of us wrestles with this. We pray, Lord, for Your help. We pray for Your power.

[36 : 17] Would You remove our tendency to pride? Would You remove our tendency to self-exaltation and instead, Lord, make it our deepest joy to make much of You, we pray.

In Christ's name, love to do it. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.