

## THE ATTITUDES REQUIRED FOR MINISTRY, PART II

John 3:22-30 (No. 22)

Treasuring Christ Church – Pastor Boyd Johnson

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### INTRODUCTION

#### John 3:22-36

<sup>22</sup> After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. <sup>23</sup> John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized <sup>24</sup> (for John had not yet been put in prison).

<sup>25</sup> Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. <sup>26</sup> 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." <sup>27</sup> John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. <sup>28</sup> You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.' <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> He must increase, but I must decrease."

<sup>31</sup> 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. <sup>32</sup> He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony. <sup>33</sup> Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. <sup>34</sup> For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. <sup>35</sup> The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. <sup>36</sup> 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.

This is a pivotal moment in salvation's history—in the way God relates to man. In this passage, the Apostle John marks the transition of ministry from John the Baptist, who was the last of the prophets under the old covenant, to Jesus, who brought in the new covenant and ratified it by his blood.

In order for this transition to occur, John the Baptist's ministry had to fade. His whole ministry was to prepare the way for the Messiah to come and to point to him when he arrived. John the Baptist did just that when Jesus began his public ministry. He pointed to Jesus as the Messiah, the Lamb of God, the Son of God. So built into God's mission for John the Baptist was that his ministry would fade and be overshadowed.

Now, in the passage we're studying, John was with his disciples baptizing not far from Jesus and his disciples. A discussion of some sort arose between a Jew and John's disciples about purification. The details of the discussion aren't known, but it had led John's disciples to reflect on the longevity of their ministry. More and more people were flocking to Jesus and Jesus' ministry was now more popular than John's. John's disciples were recognizing that their ministry with John was fading and was less popular than Jesus' ministry. They brought this very concern to John the Baptist:

John 3:26: "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.'"

How did John respond? What did he say? Last week, we began to look at his response. We have much to learn about ministry from what he said. He was a humble prophet.

Jesus said of him “among those born of women there has arisen no one greater” (Matt. 11:11).

John’s humility is on full display in his answer to his own disciples. In his response, we find three humble attitudes we must have in order to magnify Christ in our service. The first one we covered last time, but I’ll just remind you. First, John had the proper perspective.

## **I. PROPER PERSPECTIVE**

John 3:27: "John answered, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.”"

John acknowledges the sovereign grace of God in his service to God. He understood that the ministry he had was a gift—a grace—from God. He understood God is sovereign in establishing, growing, and removing ministry. He knew that he was doing exactly as God would have him to do. His ministry was fading, not because he was unfaithful, but precisely because he was faithful. He wasn’t threatened by Jesus’ ministry. He wasn’t covetous of Jesus’ ministry. He had learned that a faithful servant of God must serve with open hands.

Ministry is a gift from God and we must hold it with an open hand as we steward his gift for his glory. With an open hand, we can receive. With an open hand, we can give. A faithful servant of God must learn to serve with open hands. So the first humble attitude we must have in order to magnify Christ in our service is a proper perspective.

Second, we must have the proper posture.

## **II. PROPER POSTURE**

Look at what he says next:

John 3:28: "You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’"

John appeals to his prior testimony about Christ—testimony that his own disciples heard him give. We read his testimony in:

John 1:19–28: "And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.” And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.” So they said to him, “Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.” (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) They asked him, “Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” John answered them, “I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.” These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing."

The next day, John testified again:

John 1:29–34: "The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.""

So the disciples of John should have known his role. The words, "you yourselves," are emphatic in the Greek—"you of all people know this!" John had his role given to him by the Father. He was a man, according to 1:6, "sent from God." He fulfilled the prophecy of Malachi 3:1 that he would be the forerunner to the Messiah, as John alludes to in the words, "I have been sent before him." He denied he was the Christ as he does here once again: "I am not the Christ."

But his disciples did what many people do: they passed over the things they didn't like. Sometimes we ignore what we don't want to hear or overlook the things we don't want to see. John's disciples remembered John's testimony. They knew what John had said about Jesus. But they didn't want to remember it. Made blind and deaf by their jealousy of Jesus' ministry, they hoped to overlook Jesus and outshine him. In view of Jesus' ministry, suddenly they felt small in comparison.

If you're going to magnify Christ with your life and ministry to others, you must not only feel small, but embrace being small. This is what John the Baptist did. He's emphatic: "I am not the Christ!" Don't think of me more highly than you ought. I have a role, but I'm not the star. I'm a sign along the journey, but I'm not the destination. I am small and Christ is big.

Every person whose ministry grows in popularity has to be careful that followers don't magnify him and his ministry and lose sight of Christ. Certainly, the man himself must be careful, too, that he doesn't lose sight of Christ and magnify himself. But there is an additional danger that followers will lose perspective and the proper posture towards Christ. John was not looking to make his name great, but Christ's name great. John was like a meteor that blazes the night sky and then burns out. But Christ was the sun rising in the sky and never burns out.

Ministry is about magnifying Christ not ourselves. So we must have the proper posture. This means that we must learn to serve with bowed knees. Jesus is our Lord. He is our Master. Is the servant greater than the Master? Should the servant of Christ receive more praise than Christ himself? Should a subject's following be greater than the kings? Should the moon shine brighter than the sun? No. The proper posture is the bowed knee. Worshipping our God and not our ministry. Magnifying Christ and not ourselves. Subservient to the Master. Living to make his name great from our knees.

We've seen John's perspective and his posture. The third humble attitude on display here is his passion. He had the proper passion.

### III. PROPER PASSION

The final words recorded in this Gospel from John the Baptist are these:

John 3:29–30: "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."

John gave his disciples an illustration of the joy he was experiencing even as Jesus' ministry gained prominence. He used as an illustration a situation that would be familiar with and one that usually finds people at their happiest: a wedding.

At the wedding there is the bride and the groom (called the "bridegroom" here). And there is another man in the wedding party. He plays a critical role. He isn't the groom, he's the friend of the groom—someone we might call the best man. The role of the best man—this "friend"—is to oversee the affairs of the ceremony. The best man selflessly serves the groom. But he never takes center stage. He knows the day belongs to the groom who will receive his bride. The best man had another important job beyond managing the affairs of the ceremony. He also brought the bride to the groom. He knew the bride wasn't his. The bride belonged to the groom. He wasn't jealous of the groom. His joy was in bringing the bride to the groom. When he had done so, effectively his job was done. His mission would be fulfilled. The joyful voice of the groom receiving his bride would fill the best man with joy.

Again, John says in v. 29: "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."

His joy was complete! John pictures himself as the best man to Jesus, the groom. His role was to bring people to Jesus. Having faithfully done that, he now turns them over to Jesus. Nothing could have made him happier. He had fulfilled his mission.

John was a voice crying in the wilderness, preparing the way. But now a greater voice was heard—that of the groom, the Messiah, the Son of God. And this fills John with gladness. He had no remorse, no bitterness at Jesus' arrival. Bitterness comes when you think you deserve more than you've received.

But John had the proper perspective as we've already seen. He knew all that he had was a gift—including his ministry—so he couldn't become bitter. He didn't deserve any of God's grace. He wasn't jealous of the groom, wanting to steal away the bride for himself.

Calvin warns us that "those who win the church over to themselves rather than to Christ faithlessly violate the marriage they ought to honor." All who divide the church through dissension, gossip, slander, unfair criticism, disharmony, and the like do this. They separate the bride from the groom for their own purposes. John would do no such thing. Instead, he was full of joy. His cup was full. His heart flooded with happiness. All his hopes for his ministry were complete. He desired to point people to Christ, and this he did faithfully. He wanted his voice to fade and the groom's voice to increase. So he said in summary (v. 30): "He must increase, but I must decrease." We can't minimize the word "must." This is required. Divine necessity requires

that Jesus increase and John decrease. This is the right result, the proper consequence. It is fitting. All is going according to God's will. Jesus is going higher. John is going lower. This isn't a temporary state. The present tense of the Greek verbs indicate that Jesus must continually increase even as he continued to decrease.

It isn't easy to gain a faithful following. John had his faithful followers. It is even harder, though, once you've gained a following to turn them over to another. This is what John did because Jesus must increase. When Jesus increases, joy increases. There is no other way.

If you get bigger and Jesus gets smaller, your joy will decrease even as your pride swells. But if Jesus gets bigger as you serve him even as you get smaller, joy will increase. And then you'll learn one of the secrets to ministry that endures: joy in an ever-increasing Christ. Joy comes from contentment in how God uses you and a desire to see Jesus magnified.

I make it my aim to be a happy pastor. Yes, there will be disappointment, discouragement, pain, and sorrow. The work of the pastor is never done because the sheep always require sanctification until they are glorified. So in that sense, the nature of ministry is always discouraging. The sheep sin and are led astray. The sheep bite, even the hand that feeds them. But still the sheep need a joyful shepherd.

So joy comes in contentment in how God uses you. You're a slave. You can't feel sorry for yourself. You must decrease as Jesus increases. Never let them take your joy in Christ. Live to magnify Christ alone and your joy in Christ will be an ever-flowing fountain.

So we must learn to serve with full hearts. Hearts filled to the rim with who Christ is and what he has done—even for us. We must serve humbly with this proper passion: hearts filled with Christ.

## **CONCLUSION**

In order to magnify Christ in our service to God, we must have three humble attitudes:

The Proper Perspective: learning to serve with open hands.

The Proper Posture: learning to serve with bowed knees.

The Proper Passion: learning to serve with full hearts.