

**The Word Became Flesh
(Week 8)
John 3:22-36
“He Must Increase”**

Introduction

He who has the bride is the groom. But the groom’s friend, who stands by and listens for him, rejoices greatly at the groom’s voice. So this joy of mine is complete. He must increase, but I must decrease. **John 3:29-30**

There are no “quotation marks” in the original greek manuscripts of *The New Testament*. Therefore, in chapters like this **Third Chapter of John**, where so many different characters are being quoted, it becomes more of a challenge to know who is speaking, and where their conversation ends and others begin. This really isn’t all that important for we know that *The Bible* is The Word of God, inspired by The Holy Spirit, so in essence no matter who is speaking, it is God’s truth being conveyed.

But nevertheless, the human side of us wants to know who is speaking. Many scholars differ on where each separate conversation in the **Third Chapter of John** begins and ends. For what it’s worth (absolutely nothing), I will give you my opinion on the matter at hand. In **verses 1-21**, I believe we have the conversation between Christ and Nicodemus the Pharisee. The words of Jesus end, I believe, (though others dispute this) with **verse 21**.

Then we are made privy to a conversation between John The Baptist and his followers in **verses 22-30**. Followed by, in my humble opinion, a brief summary if you will, offered by the disciple John to give us insight into all that has been covered in **Chapters 1-3**. Many dispute this, and that’s fine. As I said before, it doesn’t matter that much. Many scholars believe that it is John The Baptist speaking all the way through to **verse 36**. But the statement **“He must increase, and I must decrease.”**, to me sounds like an “end of story” statement. I think that this was the last words that John had to say on the matter at hand. And then from there on, I believe that John the disciple takes over.

There are four “**musts**” in this chapter. There is the “**must**” for the sinner: “You **MUST** be born again.” (**Vs. 5-7**). There are two “**musts**” for the Savior: The Son of Man **MUST** be lifted up (**vs. 14**), and He **MUST** increase (**vs. 30**). And finally there is a “**must**” for every follower of Jesus: *I **MUST** decrease* (**vs. 30**). These “**musts**”, my friends, go to the very heart of Christianity. In order to follow Jesus we **must** be born again by faith in The Son of God. In order for us to have the salvation that He offers, He had to die as a sacrifice for our sins. This too was a “**must**”, for we could never hope to save ourselves by our own good works. And finally, in order for us to become sanctified in Him, He **must** have preeminence over every aspect of our lives. In short, for the believer, this means that it becomes all about Christ and not about themselves. These are the “**musts**” of Christianity.

As we conclude our discussion of **John Chapter Three**, we begin with a dispute among the disciples of John The Baptist and end with some very definitive truths about The Son of God and how we are to place our complete faith and trust in His finished work upon the cross of Calvary. The apostle John wants us to understand completely the truths set forth in the previous three chapters. We must see Jesus as “The Groom”; The One Who is from above, The One that God has sent, The Son The Father loves. And consequently, we must also recognize the penalty for those who reject The Son. For God so loved the world that He Gave (**vs. 16**), and woe unto those who reject this wondrous gift.

There are three important truths that we see in this passage, which wrap up what we now know as the **Third Chapter of John’s Gospel**. They are as follows: *The First Born Son*, with *First Hand Knowledge*, and the *Fiery Wrath* that remains on those who choose to ignore God’s message from above. Please allow me to explain further.

The Firstborn Son, (vs. 22-30)

After this, Jesus and His disciples went to the Judean countryside, where He spent time with them and baptized. John was also baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water there. People were coming and being baptized, since John had not yet been thrown into prison. Then a dispute arose between John's disciples and a Jew about purification. So they came to John and told him, "Rabbi, the One you testified about, Who was with you across the Jordan, is baptizing — and everyone is going to Him." John responded, "No one can receive anything unless it has been given to him from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Messiah, but I've been sent ahead of Him.' He who has the bride is the groom. But the groom's friend, who stands by and listens for him, rejoices greatly at the groom's voice. So this joy of mine is complete. He must increase, but I must decrease."
John 3:22-30

John is the only gospel writer that offers any insight into the early days of Christ's ministry, before John The Baptist was arrested and placed in prison. The other gospel writers tell of Jesus' ministry after John had already been arrested. But here we are given a bit of insight that shows the ministries of Jesus and John did in fact overlap for a short period of time.

John was continuing to baptize and warning sinners to repent for the kingdom of heaven was at hand. Jesus began His ministry in much the same way. This can best be described as a "relay race" where one runner hands off the baton to another runner. For a short time, those two runners will run together, but eventually, it is the one to whom the baton is passed that continues the race and leaves the other runner behind. The first runner stops running, because his part of the race is over.

John The Baptist represents the end of an era. He was the last of *The Old Testament* type of prophet. Jesus was ushering in a New Covenant, and John was there as a herald that the old was ending and the new was beginning. And the selflessness with which he accomplished his calling is something to which every believer should aspire. John never once thought that his ministry was about himself. He knew that he was there to promote the coming of Christ.

I find it fascinating that this particular narrative begins with a dispute over ceremonial cleansing. For in this lies the very essence of our need to be born again! The Jews practiced many types of ritual cleansing in an effort to make themselves acceptable to God. The most sacred of these spiritual washings was, and still is known today as a *Mikveh* (pronounced mik-va). The word actually is derived from a word that means "collection". It refers to a collection (pool) of water in which a person must immerse himself in order to be cleansed, before entering into any religious observance. It was also commended in Jewish law that the water in this pool come from a natural source which the Jews referred to as "living water".

As Christians, we know that all of this is symbolic and represents the born again believer's baptism into Christ Who is the source of living water (**John 4:10**). Later in John's gospel, the full meaning of living water is described for us when Jesus attended the feast of Tabernacles.

On the last and most important day of the festival, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. The one who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, will have streams of living water flow from deep within him." He said this about The Spirit. Those who believed in Jesus were going to receive The Spirit, for The Spirit had not yet been given because Jesus had not yet been glorified.
John 7:37-39

In the original text John tells us that The Baptizer's disciples had a dispute with "a certain Jew", over the true meaning of ritual cleansing. We do not know who this Jew was, but many have speculated. I personally cannot help but think that it was John the disciple. For he had left John The Baptist to follow Jesus. Therefore, it would not be surprising to see him being confronted by those who had remained loyal to The Baptist. This fact, combined with John's unwillingness to call himself by name, leads me to

believe that it was he himself that is the “certain Jew”, who found himself in the argument that day. Needless to say, the discussion led to the disciples of John becoming jealous that so many were leaving their beloved preacher in order to follow Jesus. The Baptizer refused to “take the bait” as it were. He was not trying to build up a following for himself, but instead, he was consumed with introducing the bride to her groom. He wanted all the world to go to Jesus. How this must have shocked his followers! How much better would this world be if every preacher of the gospel only cared about sending others to Christ, rather than building up glorious ministries for themselves?! Preachers aren’t called to be “rock stars”. They are called to point the world to the one and only “star”, and that star is the First Born Son of God.

In Jewish culture, the “first born son” was entitled to the greatest share of his father’s inheritance. It is the firstborn who is given dominion over his brothers. Jesus is the Firstborn and Only Begotten Son of God The Father. And as such, He, and only He, is to have preeminence over all of creation. John The Baptist was a very great man indeed, but he realized that everything was ultimately about The First Born Son. He wasn’t interested at all in sharing in The Son’s glory. And he told his disciples as much. He shows us in this famous passage the relationship between the follower and the Master. Two of the “musts”, if you will, of the Christian experience.

He MUST increase, but I MUST decrease.

John 3:30 (emphasis added)

If you have truly been born again; if you have ever truly seen Christ for Who He is and believed in Him; if you have truly been cleansed by the Living Water of the Spirit of God, then you know exactly what John is speaking of in this verse. Jesus must increase, and we must decrease. He is The Firstborn Son to Whom all glory belongs.

The Firsthand Knowledge (vs. 31-35)

The One Who comes down from above is above all. The one who is from the earth is earthly and speaks in earthly terms. The One Who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what He has seen and heard, and yet no one accepts His testimony. The one who has accepted His testimony has affirmed that God is true. For The One Whom God sent speaks God’s words, since He gives The Spirit without measure. The Father loves The Son and has given all things into His hands.

John 3:31-35

As I have stated earlier, at this point in the narrative, I believe that we are seeing a summary of the preceding events explained by the Apostle John (and not the Baptizer). He reminds us that the testimony of all men (including John The Baptist), who speak of heavenly things, have received their message from above. But only The Son Himself has actually come down **from** above. It is as if God had, up to this point, spoken through His prophets much the same way as someone would use an interpreter to speak to others in their own language. But in Christ, God has spoken to us face to face. When He speaks to us of heavenly things, He is speaking from the position of firsthand knowledge and experience. This is exactly what Jesus told Nicodemus in the passage above (This is also why I believe that John is summarizing for us here).

To dismiss the testimony of Christ is to dismiss the very word of God. For He IS God. Listen to what the writer of Hebrews says:

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors by the prophets at different times and in different ways. In these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son. God has appointed Him heir of all things and made the universe through Him. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the EXACT expression of His nature, sustaining all things by His powerful word. And making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Hebrews 1:1-3 (emphasis added)

And what does this passage tell us? That Christ has firsthand knowledge of the very heart of God, because HE IS GOD. And to reject His words is to reject God Himself. John's disciples were using hyperbole, when they said that "everyone was going over to Jesus." This misstatement of facts is afterwards clarified for us by John the disciple. He reminds us that this certainly was, and is not, the case. Not everyone will be "going over" to Jesus. Many will reject the message of God's Firstborn and Only Begotten Son. And for this unbelief there is no remedy. To despise the one who came down from heaven is the unpardonable sin.

The Fiery Wrath To Come (vs. 36)

The one who believes in The Son has eternal life, but the one who rejects The Son will not see life; instead, the wrath of God remains on him. **John 3:36**

In this verse, I believe as well that John is summarizing the previous words of Christ, spoken to Nicodemus when He stated that He had not come into the world to condemn it, for those who have rejected Him were in fact condemned already (**vs. 17-18**). Jesus came from heaven to offer a pardon to all who would believe in Him. It is a means to escape the fiery wrath of God that is coming to the world.

Allow me to attempt an illustration. When I was a kid, I had a magnifying glass. I used to take that glass and hold it in such a way that the light of the sun would be intensified and concentrated into a tiny beam of light. When I held that beam upon an object it would eventually burst into flames. Can I get a witness? I'm quite certain that I was not the only little boy to ever do such a thing!

The Bible tells us that **"Our God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews 12:29)**. He is infinitely holy, while conversely, we are desperately wicked. Each of us deserve the very fires of hell for our sin. And this wicked world has already been judged and convicted, meaning that the consuming wrath of God is but a forgone conclusion.

But God, Who is rich in mercy, because of His great love that He had for us, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace! **Ephesians 2:4-5**

God... in an amazing act of mercy, took his magnifying glass, as it were, and concentrated all of His fiery wrath upon His One and only Son. Jesus endured the wrath that was meant for us on Calvary's cross. All of God's fiery indignation over our sin was concentrated on Him, much like that beam from that old magnifying glass I had as a kid. And it is by believing in Him, that we have our only hope of escape. Through faith in Christ, we can be sure that God's intense wrath for our sin will never be aimed in our direction. Jesus took **all** of it... for **all** of us.

But what happens when you refuse to accept this great gift from God? Then tragically, the fiery wrath of God remains upon you. And one day, that intense beam of His holy fire will be concentrated on you. So, which would you rather have today? Would you prefer the grace that is offered in the person of Christ Jesus, The Firstborn Son Who came down from heaven to offer you a pardon, the One Who took upon Himself the consuming fire of God's wrath? Or would you rather have a Holy God turn the magnifying lens of His consuming fire upon you? Heed the warning of John today:

The one who believes in The Son has eternal life, but the one who rejects The Son will not see life; instead, the wrath of God remains on him. **John 3:36**

So weak and wounded sinner, come to Jesus. Come to Jesus... and live!

Any let all those who have tasted the living water say... **TRUTH!!**