

## THE GOSPEL OF JOHN [PART I] BEHOLDING CHRIST – THE SON OF GOD

TEXT: JOHN 3:22-36 #6. THE PREACHER WHO LOST HIS CONGREGATION

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### INTRODUCTION:

Let's just imagine for a moment, that there was such an award as "The Man of the Year". Just entertain me for a moment – but if such an award existed, and you were one of the judges for this award.... What qualities would you look for? Well, we certainly have many kinds of awards that are given out in our world, even Logan City has it's business achievers awards, A safe city awards, volunteers awards, sports awards, just to name a few. Something you will notice with all these awards handed out is that the emphasis is always upon success, achievements, creativity, or even outstanding works of charity, but Jesus gave His highest praised to a surprising, even shocking, individual.

I'm going to ask you a question and I want you to fill in the blank: Who was Jesus referring to when He said, **"I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than..."**? (Matt. 11:11). Who could it be?

It sounds like it should be Moses, doesn't it? He led Israel out of captivity and received the Law of God. Maybe David? The humble rigged shepherd who slew the giant and became Israel's greatest Monarch. Or Daniel? The God-fearing Prime Minister when Israel was in her darkest hour. Possible Isaiah? The prince of the prophets. However, it was none of these. Not even Noah, Abraham, or any of the disciples. Jesus was speaking about John the Baptist. *John the Baptist???*

I say that with an inflection in my voice because John didn't have the public appeal associated with successful people – he wore funny clothes, he ate strange food, and he lived in a weird place. He was simply different. Some words that could describe him would be austere, ascetic, strange, a loner. Definitely no church around the place would have wanted him as their pastor nor would any businessman take him on board. Yet Jesus honours him remarkably above anyone else. Why? Because John did the job God gave him better than anyone else could have, and he did it with delight.

John had three primary tasks – with the third being the toughest:

(1) *to clear the way* – to remove obstacles from the minds and hearts of others so they would be ready for the Messiah. People were expecting a conquering, Roman-government-destroying Messiah, yet John was to present Him as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29);

(2) *to prepare the way* – to promote repentance on the part of the nation so He would be accepted, and in fact to show genuine repentance by being publicly water baptised; and

(3) *to get out of the way* – to step aside once the Messiah had been introduced.

Today, we'll see John *getting out of the way* – this probably would have been the toughest part of his job description and, undoubtedly, the reason Jesus called him a great man.

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## HE MUST INCREASE (vv.22-36)

John was like a small lamp held high in some obscure corner of a dark house – he held the only wick of testimony about Jesus, the true Light of the World. But as others began to follow him, John became well aware that his ministry and Jesus' ministry had all the potential for competition. But because this wick was content to serve the Light, any shadows of conflict were quickly dispelled. I want you to watch how a potentially volatile situation arises – and how John humbly handles it.

### A. Location of Jesus and John (vv.22-24)

To begin with, notice that their two ministries were operating on the same turf. Jesus' ministry had been in Galilee up to this time. Now, He moves into John's domain. He didn't spend only a couple of days there, but was there for some time as it says. Not only that, but He also was baptising people. Just think of it! I don't want you to miss that competition was a very real threat in this situation. John's ministry here was established – and Jesus' ministry just began. Because humans are very territorial creatures, mere geographical proximity could have created conflict... just like it did between herdsmen of Abraham and Lot (Gen. 13:1-12). In fact, although John wasn't bothered, a little friction from his disciples does begin to heat up the Judean wilderness.

### B. Discussion among John's disciples (vv.25-26)

So there was this one bloke, the Bible calls him a Jew – and I'm sure he was one from Jesus' camp – he sparks up a debate with John's disciples about ceremonial washing or purification. We don't know the specifics, however this would be very similar to if one Bible college student with a particular persuasion went amongst another college's students, without a doubt a few interesting heated conversations would arise. This verbal confrontation, apparently rooted in whose ways of purification were best or correct – John's method or Jesus' method – made John's disciples go to him and complain that he is losing some of his flock to this new preacher.

It probably sounded like this, "Hey Pastor John, you gotta do something! Attendance is way down, and we're losing a lot of members to that new church down the street!" What you need to understand here is that this doesn't phase John in the slightest, but his followers are feeling the crunch of competition. You know sometimes its not the leaders but the people who can cause strife and trouble between churches because they are constantly comparing one against the other.

Let me show you another similar situation in **Numbers 11:26-29** and how Moses dealt with the competitive spirit amongst his followers. Moses knew these men, and understood they had no divisive heart – and longs for everyone in Israel to have the same filling of the Holy Spirit. Moses is never afraid of a genuinely Spirit-filled man being a rival or a divisive person!

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### C. Reaction of the forerunner (vv.27-36)

Instead of inventing some glitzy gimmick to recapture the thinning multitudes, John pulls a different strategy out of his camel-hair sleeve. He reacts in such a way that throws cold water on his inflamed disciples, quickly quenching the conversation and their competitive spirit. I want to point out the *four ideas* which are shown in John's response:

1. God is in charge – not people (v.27). We can't have anything if God hasn't given it to us. He is in charge of ministries and careers, duties and responsibilities, and their successfulness. Why am I preaching such a message to you today? The beauty of preaching through a book by exposition is that you are able to cover so many various areas of life and see it from God's viewpoint. Today, some of you may be in situations where you have not experienced a promotion for some time, or a newcomer passes you on the corporate ladder, or maybe you have just lost your business while others seem to flourish. Let me give you a passage that ought to speak volumes to you – **Psalm 75:6-7. *For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. It is God who judges: He brings one down, He exalts another.***

How do you handle things like promotion, position, or prosperity? Concrete this into your minds.... *He brings one down, He exalts another.* What John is basically saying to his disciples is, "Men, won't you ever learn that God is the one in charge? Not me."

**What trust John demonstrated. What a man!**

2. All work is significant – but only one work is pre-eminent (v.28). Some people have the strangest view of humility. They think that humility means *insignificance*. They think it's a terrible thing when another Christian is very successful or prosperous. Let me tell you something: humility doesn't mean insignificance! There is no scriptural basis for that. John said that he wasn't the Christ but was the forerunner. In other words, his work is not pre-eminent, yet its not insignificant either. He says, "My job is not the top job, but it still is important."

Envy and jealousy are often used interchangeably, but there is a difference. Envy begins with empty hands, mourning for what it doesn't have. Jealousy is not quite the same. It begins with full hands but is threatened by the losing what is has. It is the pain of losing what I have to someone else. We must be on guard against the ugly heads of envy and jealousy or else, like muggers in a dark alley, they'll do us in. You see, John didn't let envy or jealousy get in the way. **What humility John showed. What a man!**

3. Joy comes from being obedient, not from getting glory (v.29). John refers to himself as "the friend of the bridegroom" – a rough equivalent to our culture's Best Man. According to Jewish tradition, the friend was a liaison between the bride and the bridegroom. He would arrange the details of the wedding – such as sending out invitations, making announcements, and presiding over the marriage feast.

His special duty, however, was to guard the bridal chamber. This is where it is so different to our custom and understanding. The bridal chamber was a specially prepared room where the couple would go to consummate the marriage. The Best Man, however he would let no one into that chamber except the bride who secretly slipped away from the celebrating crowd to join the groom. Sometime later, after the union was consummated, the groom came out and announced the fact with a shout. Upon hearing the groom's voice, the friend of the bridegroom would be happy and relieved. His job was done. His joy was full. He could now step out of the way and for the Groom and the Bride to emerge.

John says that he is like that friend – happy and relieved – and now he can step out of the way. You see, true joy only comes through obedience.

**What obedience John exemplified. What a man!**



4. Humility calls attention to Christ, not self (v.30). Well, you may say, “Naturally. That is so obvious.” But just ask some people how humble they are – and they’ll tell you! Or, hang around them long enough – and they’ll be sure to show you how humble they are!

*Illustration:* One religious leader and his associate were rehearsing a service. To make his point dramatic this minister fell to his knees, beat his chest and cried out, “I am nothing. I am nothing!” Then his associate fell to his knees and cried out, “I am nothing. I am nothing!” A janitor was cleaning nearby and witnessed the scene. He was so moved by what he saw and heard, and his heart was stricken before God that he fell to his knees and cried out, “I am nothing. I am nothing!” When the minister and his associate heard the janitor, the minister turned to his associate and said, “So, look who has the gall to think that he is nothing too!”

Bible commentator F.B. Meyer says it best, “The only hope of a decrease in self is an increase in Christ.” Let Him get all the glory! What about you? Is Christ being increase in you? Are you content to be the faceless, off-stage voice announcing the star of the show? Can you give Jesus centre stage while you operate the curtains and unveil Him to the audience? Can you turn the spotlight from yourself and onto Christ? Here’s the test: When Christ is in first place, you will be happy to be in second place....or you will be happy to surrender any place.

I love John’s view of Christ here in the following verses:

**v.31 – The one who comes from heaven is above all.**

**v.32 – He testifies to what He has seen and heard.**

**v.33 – The man who accepts it certifies that God is truthful.**

**v.34 – The One God has sent speaks the words of God.**

**v.35 – The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in His hands.**

If that doesn’t point everything toward Jesus Christ, then I don’t know what does.

**What a testimony about Christ John spoke. What a man!**

## CONCLUSION

And so, today we’ve looked at a man like no other man. A preacher who lost his congregation. Someone who lost everything he had worked so hard for....but he gained Christ. A treasure worth more than anything in this world.

You may be in a situation where you have lost something dear to you – a job, a friendship, a loved one, and everyone else seems to be going so much better than you are. Sometimes when this happens, Christ becomes more precious to us than ever before. The crippling experiences of life are designed to bring you before the cross. I want to shine the spotlight on Jesus right now and point you to the One to whom you should go. Jesus is the One with all the answers. The One who can lead you and guide you. If you’ve never done so before, this is a perfect opportunity to invite Jesus Christ into your life to give it purpose and meaning.

A final reminder to all listening to these words today, **“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him” (v.36).**

We can never escape the truth that, no matter how much we like or dislike it, that only in Jesus Christ can we have eternal life, but those who reject Him will receive God’s wrath – His perfect judgement upon all to want no part in Him. Charles Spurgeon wrote about George Whitfield and said, “When Holy Whitfield was preaching, he would often hold up his hands, and, with tears streaming down his eyes, would exclaim, ‘Oh, the wrath to come! The wrath to come!’ Then he would pause because his emotions would stop his utterance.”

May we all be reminded today of the salvation that Jesus offers everyone who trusts in Him, but also of what awaits those who reject Son of God sent by God the Father. Don’t delay... call out to Him today! Let us pray.