

The Humility of John the Baptist

John 3:22-36

INTRODUCTION:

This morning, we continue our study of John in finishing up Chapter 3. Our text brings up the topic of humility. John the Baptist is a prime example of what humility should look like within every believer.

There's not great herds of humble people running around in our society even within the church. We are such a "me" society. It is so easy not to consider others, but only how things effect our own lives.

Philippians 2:2-4

Do nothing out of rivalry or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone should look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.¹

What we will see from our text is that the disciples of John are feeling a little competition sort of speak with Jesus' disciples baptizing and through this event we see a wonderful example of John's humility and Jesus glorified.

N.T. Wright states,

That's the image that **John the Baptist** draws on when he speaks cheerfully to his followers about the success that Jesus and his **disciples** seem to be having in baptizing people. John's followers seem to be assuming that he will be jealous.²

John 3:22-36

After this, Jesus and His disciples went to the Judean countryside, where He spent time with them and baptized. John also was 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, and who was with you across the Jordan, is baptizing—and everyone is flocking to Him."

John responded, "No one can receive a single thing unless it's given to him from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Messiah, but I've been

¹ *The Holy Bible: Holman Christian standard version*. (Php 2:3–4). (2009). Holman Bible Publishers.

² Wright, T. (2004). *John for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-10* (p. 36). Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

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.”

The One who comes 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, yet no one accepts His testimony. The one who has accepted His testimony has affirmed that God is true. For God sent Him, and He speaks God’s words, since He gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hands. The one who believes in the Son has eternal life, but the one who refuses to believe in the Son will not see life; instead, the wrath of God remains on him.

NOTE ON BAPTISM:

Before we dive into the passage, I want to first look at a line within the first paragraph and say a few words about baptism. When you survey Christian traditions or denominations, many have differing views of what it means to be baptized. Some believe baptism is a part of one’s salvation, while others focus that baptism should be done in a certain way, and still others believe in “paedobaptism” which refers to infant baptism. Let me explain to you where I am at regarding this discussion.

The word “Baptism” comes from the Greek word, “baptizo,” which means to “immerse, dip, bathe” which is its *translation*. I remember in Greek class my Greek teacher taught us this word and explained its controversy, and this may support the importance of word studies. You don’t need to be fluent in Greek to do word studies, but you definitely need to have an understanding of how to use a lexicon in your Bible studies, Hebrew for the Old Testament works the same way. He stated when the Bible was being translated into English there were already two differing practices of baptism going on within the body of Christ: immersion and also the practice of sprinkling. When translators got into translating the Bible, they avoided the controversial issue and “transliterated” the word “baptizo” taking its English consonant sound, and creating the English word “baptism.”

We won’t today avoid the controversy. Regarding sprinkling or immersion, we will call this the ‘methodology.’ This issue is of little interest to me. I believe in immersion because of this present passage which states, that there was plenty of water there. Why would this be a concern if the early disciples simply sprinkled new converts? So, for me, I will practice immersion because it seems to be the

Biblical practice, but the methodology issue is of secondary importance to me because what if one gives their life to Christ in a desert and only has a canteen of water and desires to be baptized? In other words, if you grew up in a tradition that sprinkled, we are not going to be so legalistic as to say you must be immersed if we hold to the same meaning of baptism.

The other issue, which I believe is the more important issue, is the ‘meaning’ of baptism because it impacts one’s understanding of salvation theology. I do not believe that baptism is a part of one’s salvation but rather is the immediate first step of following Jesus because one is identifying with the work of Christ on the cross and in his resurrection. When he uses the phrase in Acts, “repent and be baptized” there is an immediate expectation that when one repents the obedience of baptism should be quickly followed for identification’s sake as a believer. When Jesus was baptized, he was identifying with what He would do three years later, whereas we through our baptism identify with what He did. I do not believe baptism is a part of salvation but the first step of discipleship. Otherwise, the thief on the cross could not have been saved because he was not baptized which seems a bit silly since Jesus himself said he would be with him in paradise. If baptism is a part of salvation, then salvation is reduced to a least one work which Paul refutes in Ephesians 2:8-10.

Is baptism important then if it is not a part of salvation? Very important! It is both identifying with Christ and a witness to the world. Those who know they need to be baptized because of their faith but choose not to, live in disobedience. Why would you deny the act of obedience to the Lord whom you say you love and are grateful to regarding your salvation and miss out on the joy one experiences through baptism? It is hard to believe one is saved, and only God knows the heart, if their lack of surrender and repentance won’t allow them to be obedient to the first step of obedience. Baptism is a small price to pay for what Christ has done for you.

Finally, I do not believe in paedobaptism, or infant baptism, because I believe baptism is like a wedding ring, placed on the finger after the decision has been made not before. It is an outward expression of an inward decision that an infant is not old enough to make. Nowhere in Scripture are infants baptized. Those who hold to this view see baptism as a sort of replacement for circumcision as seen in the Old Testament.

Now that that is hopefully cleared up regarding baptism lets take a further look at our text this morning.

I. Humility and Joy

- A. John was humble and knew his position regarding Jesus.
- B. Do we know our position regarding Jesus today?
- C. Is our lives in competition with His or are we simply pointing others to Him?
- D. John knew that his position was to decrease in fame so that Jesus' fame may have room to spread and increase because of Christ's importance.
- E. Is this our attitude today? Or do we have a need to be recognized for what we do? If so, that is not a sign of humility.
- F. From a Biblical perspective a "Christian celebrity" is an oxymoron. There is one celebrity and His name is Jesus.
- G. If we do not live in the identity of Christ, then what we do becomes very important to be recognized because it becomes our validation. We say things like:
 - Did you see what I did there?
 - Others are ok at it, but you know I am the best.
 - Yeah, they did a lot, but did you see this over here? This is what I have been up to...
- H. John absolutely balked at the idea of obtaining any recognition because his focus was that Christ was to be the one recognized.
- I. Humility maybe understood as a shedding off of the self, where the "self" is forgotten, so that Christ who is greater than I is amplified.

C.S. Lewis

Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.

- J. When we surrender to this level, we begin to experience joy in our journey with Jesus because our love for him is manifested or revealed by how much

we seek his glory, not our own. Jesus emanates joy, therefore, the closer we get to Him, reveal Him, the more joy we will experience.

- K. This doesn't mean that frustrations don't happen, but our joy comes from the solace of knowing Him and joining Him on his mission which we know He is on.
- L. Many of us struggle with obtaining joy in our lives because we have not surrendered through becoming humble. Jesus is an addition to our lives, not life itself.
- M. The joy of John was seeing Jesus come into His rightful place.

The bridegroom's friend is the nearest equivalent to the "best man" (*NAB*) of our day. This expression is not a technical term in Greek, but represents the "shoshben" of Jewish life. The "shoshben" was the groom's closest friend and he took care of arranging the particulars of the wedding. In the context the primary focus is on John the Baptist, rather than on the bridegroom in the parable-like saying.³

II. Humility and Authority (31)

- A. John the Baptist had joy because he placed his life under the authority of Heaven recognizing Jesus as the Authority of Heaven.
- B. Humans fail to realize this, but God made us to thrive within authority not in rebellion against it.
- C. John the Baptist recognizes that many did not accept the Authority of Heaven because their deeds were evil. Remember the context of the conversation of Nicodemus and Jesus (3:19).
- D. The sad issue within the Church today is that many Christians really have no humility because they still are fighting against God's authority.
- E. We will never find joy as John the Baptist did if we don't position our lives in right relationship with authority of Christ.

³ Newman, B. M., & Nida, E. A. (1993). [*A handbook on the Gospel of John*](#) (p. 99). United Bible Societies.

F. It is from this place that John the Baptist in humility recognizing the authority of Heaven.

C.S. Lewis

Authority exercised with humility, and obedience accepted with delight are the very lines along which our spirits live.

G. Humility was key for John the Baptist to place his life under the authority of Christ.

H. Many in his position without humility would have created a competition between two ministries, but not John the Baptist. He gladly stepped out of the way because his purpose was to let the light shine on the Lord's work.

I. Sometimes we have to disappear for others to be see Jesus.

J. That means we have to sometimes corral our personalities and live intentionally under the authority of Jesus.

III. Humility and Judgement (36)

A. Many people didn't like the judgments Jesus made because He spoke as one not of this world.

B. John the Baptist's recognized His authority and placed his life within it.

C. Jesus is from heaven and above all. He spoke as the very voice of God.

D. God is willing to give Himself without restraint to those who seek Him.

Psalm 59:10

My faithful God will come to meet me; ⁴

E. God's judgement is on the world because we have tainted it by our sins.

F. God's judgment is on the world to anyone who rejects the Son of God.

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: Holman Christian standard version*](#). (Ps 59:10). (2009). Holman Bible Publishers.

- G. God is fair in His judgement because He also judges through a peer, the son of Man, Jesus Christ.
- H. Judgment for the one who bends their knee to Christ is a welcome because God will put to right the world that has gone so wrong.
- I. Judgment for the one who has rejected Christ will be unbearable and the wrath of God will remain on that person.

CONCLUSION

If we are to impact our world, it will never come without humility. We must be bold in our efforts to let go of ourselves and let the light shine upon the Lord. How do we do that? Reveal God in our reactions to the world and stand in the gap for truth.

John Stott

The modern world detests authority but worships relevance. Our Christian conviction is that the Bible has both authority and relevance, and that the secret of both is Jesus Christ.