

## John the Baptist's Loyalty to Jesus

### John 3:22-36

“From the time Jesus began His public ministry, He attracted widespread attention (John 2:23). While John’s ministry began to decline, it did not cease with the inception of Jesus’ ministry. Both preached the same message, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near” (Matt. 3:2; 4:17), and both baptized (John 3:22-23).” J Dwight Pentecost

#### John's Ministry:

**Part 1** – Announced the coming and prepared the way for Christ - Preached repentance, baptized  
Matt. 3:1-6

**Part 2** – Pointed Christ out and announced who He was – continued preaching repentance and baptized but now he “barest witness” of Jesus the Lamb of God. John 1:29-34; 35-37

“<sup>22</sup>After these things ( after the Passover/Jerusalem ministry - A phrase John used to show order - not necessarily an indication of a time frame ) came Jesus and his disciples into the land ( rural; countryside ) of Judaea; and there he tarried (remained) with them, and baptized. <sup>23</sup>And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized. <sup>24</sup>For John was not yet cast into prison.” John 3:22-24

#### I. The Setting

A. When? – “After these things” is a phrase that John the Apostle will use setting events in order, but it is not an indication of time. We are not sure how long Jesus stayed in Jerusalem after the Passover. It does seem He was there longer than the Passover season. Enough time had to pass for His reputation of miracles to catch the attention of the “many” who believed as well as Nicodemus and other Pharisees. (John 2:23-3:2) So after Jesus’ time in Jerusalem, He and His disciples traveled into the rural area of Judaea.

Don’t miss verse 24. It is given to set up a time period unknown when reading the synoptic gospels. After Jesus begins His ministry, Matthew, Mark, and Luke go directly to John’s imprisonment and Jesus’ Galilean ministry or from the temptation of Christ to the Galilean ministry. Here, in the book of John, we find two little-known ministry facts not given in the first three Gospels. John adds what happened in the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus before John was put into prison by Herod; 1) a congruent ministry of Jesus and John the Baptist and 2) Jesus ministering in Judea (John 1:19-4:3). (Matt. 4:11-13; Mark 1:13-14 (remember Mark doesn’t mention the birth of Jesus either); Luke 4:13-14) The first three books have an abrupt end to John the Baptist and his ministry.

B. Where? – We are not sure where Jesus and His disciples were located at this time. The Bible simply says, “the land of Judaea” – or the rural countryside. Most feel He would have gone north of Jerusalem. We do read specifically where John was baptizing. In about 85 AD, when John wrote his book, people must have known where Aenon and Salim were located. But today in 2022, no one is sure. It is suspected John was along the Jordan River near Schythopolis. There is a series of 7 ancient springs and wells in that area, as verse 23 states, “there was much water there:” needed for baptism.

C. What? – We know both the ministries of Jesus and John baptized (John 4:2 makes it clear Jesus did not baptize anyone, only His disciples) and John would have also continued to make the person of Jesus known. Although no miracles of Jesus or discourses are given, we do know both continued preaching the same message as given to us elsewhere in the Scripture. (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; Mark 1:4,14-15) Also, both ministries continued to be popular and large crowds followed each group.

“<sup>25</sup> Then there arose a question (dispute) between some of John's disciples and the (Gk - article “a”) Jews about purifying (ceremonial cleansing). <sup>26</sup> And they (disciples of John) came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.” John 3:25-26

## II. The Situation

A. The Question – Most theologians feel an unnamed Religious Leader came to John's disciples and started a debate about ceremonial cleansing. At the time of Christ, Religious Leaders felt they had the market on all religious activities and purification. The rituals of washing were very important to the Jews. They put much time and effort into making sure they followed the law and traditions. Having first one and now another religious group preaching and baptizing outside the relatively small group of selected leaders, would have made their power and control feel threatened. **Review of Recent Religious Stirrings** – 1) John the Baptist's message and baptism 2) Jesus' arrival and John's confirmation of His person publicly 3) Jesus' cleansing of the temple and challenge to the Religious Leadership 4) Jesus' miracles 5) Jesus' message and baptism How the discussion was moved from ceremonial washing (purifying) to a comparison of the number of followers of Jesus and those of John is unclear. It could have been started with baptism and purifying. Then the deceptive Religious Leader, desiring to stir up strife between the two ministries, worked his evil craft of lies and with skillfully chosen words placed a note of jealousy and doubt in the minds of these disciples of John. These followers of John would have certainly been intimidated by a Jewish leader that would want to ask them questions about their master's ministry. However it happened, the conversation went from purifying to a comparison that caused jealousy in the hearts of John's disciples toward Jesus.

B. The Escalation – John's disciples came to him with what Warren Wiersbe called a wail of despair! Unwilling to even mention the name of Jesus, they told him that the man who he witnessed of, is also baptizing and “ALL men come to him.” This statement seems fostered by resentment! We know “All men...” is an over-exaggeration as both were attracting large crowds!

Now here we see John the Baptist's last testimony concerning Christ; it is sad to note his overall testimony of Jesus was widely rejected. Religious Leaders – Matt. 3:5-10; Luke 7:29-30

“<sup>27</sup> John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. <sup>28</sup> Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. <sup>29</sup> He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. <sup>30</sup> He must increase, but I must decrease.” John 3:27-30

We will see while John's disciples were loyal to John; John was loyal to Jesus! He goes right to the issue of a rivalry and straight to the reality of **who Jesus was!**

### III. The Response

A. God-Given Position – v. 27 John had a God-given position. His father knew of his calling before John was even conceived! He was to be the forerunner of the Messiah. (Luke 1:15-17; 76-79) This was his mission – prepare the way for the Lord!

B. God-Given Message – John the Baptist was the last of the prophets who walks out of the Old Testament into the pages of the New and announces the coming of the Messiah! Here John reminded his disciples that they **knew** He had declared himself not the Christ, but one sent before Him. This was his repeated message! John knew his position as a forerunner – He was not a peer or equal to Christ – no parallel ministry just an announcer not a competitor! He had come to inform men not attract to himself!

Illustration of Bridegroom & Friend: John the Baptist uses this fitting illustration to help ease the distress of his disciples over the rising ministry of Jesus. John has great joy to see his ministry being fulfilled in Jesus! The friend of the bridegroom is much like a best man. This best man is one who seeks to help make sure the wedding is perfect in every detail. He is sent before to prepare and proclaim the coming of the bridegroom. The friend is truly joyful when he sees the bridegroom come and take the bride! After the wedding, the friend is not concerned about his lack of position or prestige. He had a job to do, sought to fulfill it, and afterwards was happy for the bridegroom! This was John the Baptist's attitude towards Jesus.

C. God-Given Reality – Here we see the third “must” of chapter 3. 1) “must” of the sinner v. 7 2) “must” of the Savior v. 14 3) “must” of the servant v. 30 John understood his reality and embraced it! “He **must** become greater; I **must** become less.” He saw his purpose was seeing others understand who Jesus was and to follow Him! John was both allegiant and submissive to Christ! His decrease continued, for the next time we hear of John is his imprisonment!

John McArthur had this to say about John the Baptist, “Instead of jealousy, John exhibited humble faithfulness to the calculated superiority of Jesus' person and ministry.” JMcA p. 92

**“<sup>31</sup>He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all. <sup>32</sup>And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony (In comparison to those who do believe.). <sup>33</sup>He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal (Lit - certified) that God is true. <sup>34</sup>For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure (Lit. without measure – no limit) unto him. <sup>35</sup>The Father loveth the Son, and hath giveth all things into his hand. <sup>36</sup>He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.” John 3:34-36**

From the Lips of John the Baptist or Pen of John the Apostle? Again, this question arises when studying the third chapter of the book of John. The problem is how a seemingly continued dialogue could be a commentary added by John the writer of the book. One of the characteristics of John's writings is how he will break into deeper insights on the subject or perhaps what the characters of the event were thinking. As Warren Weisbe said about the earlier passage, the Holy Spirit is ultimately the author! Here in these verses, there is so much doctrine – incarnation, Holy Spirit, salvation. Really these topics are outside the main purpose of John the Baptist, the

last prophet, and his mission. The majority of scholars who addressed this agreed that this passage was probably John the Apostle. The similarities to John's other writings and themes are stark.

#### **IV. The Summary** These are all prominent themes of John the Apostle and all of the New Testament!

1. Christ is from heaven v. 31 Jesus was not only from heaven but is overall. Jesus was sent from heaven to be the Savior of the world. (I Cor. 15:47) This was His commandment from His Father. Yet, Jesus was over all! He did not lose His power or position! He was God in the flesh! This was so important, John repeated it twice! Without exception, other translations do the same! Here are two important facts – His origin and power! John 3:13; 6:33; 8:23
2. Christ knew the Father v. 32-33 John 3:11; 7:28-29; 8:54-55; 10:15; 13:3; 17:25
3. Christ was sent by the Father v. 34 John 5:23; 7:16; 8:18
4. Christ has the Father's words v. 34 John 3:32; 5:19; 7:16; 8:38; 12:49; 14:10, 24  
Believe Jesus = Believe God; Disbelieve Jesus = God is a liar!
5. Christ is loved and empowered by the Father v. 34-35 God the Father gave Christ the power of the Holy Spirit at the time of His baptism! Verse 34 reads this way in many manuscripts, "He gives the Spirit without measure." The love of the Father for the Son is a theme of John. John 5:20; 15:9; 17:23
6. Belief in Christ brings everlasting life v. 36 Here we see the simple Gospel of faith in Christ. Everlasting life begins at the time of belief and will continue to a greater level in glory! John 3:16-17; 6:47
7. God's wrath falls on unbelievers. v. 36 We see the climax of chapter three in the last verse. Two choices, two paths - Sincere faith or stubborn disbelief. A fitting end to the Gospel chapter! Belief in Christ brings everlasting life with God while unbelief brings the abiding wrath of God on them already and will continue to a greater level in hell, what a contrast!

John only used the word "wrath" once in the book of John, never in John 1,2, or 3, but 16 times in the book of Revelations. Rev. 6:16-17

Read John 1:1-18 in closing.

#### **Believers Application:**

All ministry comes from God - Our responsibilities are God-given, and He gets the glory! –

Comparing our lives and duties with others is a very familiar sin that can plague all of us. We must be **sure of** and **committed to** the responsibilities God has given us at this time of life. Some of these are responsibilities all Christians share others are special only to us.

Christian Responsibilities:

My Personal Responsibilities:

I Cor. 3:5-10; 4:1-7; 12:4-11; Heb. 5:4 Be careful not to look around and compare yourself with others. Be faithful to your calling, strive to do your best before the Lord, and live honestly, righteously, and lovingly before others. Remember, God sees, empowers, and rewards faithfulness!

“Deep discontent over God’s wise, sovereign disposition of people and things would in that instance betray not only unbelief and faithfulness, but the worst form of the perennial human sin, the arrogance that wants to be God and stand where God stands.” DA Carson