



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

John the Baptist

February 2, 2013

John 3:22-36

Clint Pressley

3 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." 3 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." 4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" 5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." 9 Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" 10 Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?"

(Pastor Prays)

The Baltimore Ravens and the San Francisco 49'ers are playing in the Super Bowl tonight and the last week has been filled with a tremendous amount of hype and media attention. One of the major contributors to the me'le of words is a man named Randy Moss, wide receiver for the 49'ers. He's 35 years old, and his NFL career will be over soon. In that context, a reporter asked Randy Moss about his place in football history and Randy Moss wasn't bashful when he said, " Now that I'm older, I think I'm the greatest receiver to ever do it. This, in spite of several down years. In fact, his best year was five years ago in 2007 when he was a Patriot. I'm the greatest receiver to ever do it. I want you to compare Randy Moss's thoughts about himself with the

thoughts that John the Baptist had about himself. John the Baptist was a voice crying in the wilderness; now a greater voice is here and people are recognizing that there is a greater voice in verse 26. *His disciples 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.* They didn't like the growing success of Jesus and the diminishing influence of John the Baptist. In the words of John Piper, "The Baptist rose like a star then burned out like a meteorite." And in the midst of his decline and Jesus's success, in verse 29 John likens himself to the friend of the bridegroom and verse 29 says, *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.* And in verse 30 it says, *He must increase, I must decrease.*

How do you do that? How can you be happy when you are failing and others are succeeding? How? How can you be joyful when others are getting ahead financially and you are getting behind? How? How can you be content when your health is failing or your kids are wayward or your spouse is leaving when others are healthy and their family is intact? How was John the Baptist able to have this attitude? It's not enough for me to say, "Hey, go be like him." What did he see and understand that gave him such contentment and satisfaction and joy? I think we are missing it. You've got your vision too low. Let's get our vision up and see what John sees. There are several things in this text that I know I need to see and I suspect you need to see them as well.

What You See is How You Live

Let's start with God.

We need to see God biblically

Let's set the context in verse 25. There is a conversation going on between the disciples of John the Baptist and the Jews. And in verse 26, look what they said. 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."* All the paparazzi are leaving John the Baptist, all the attention is fleeting, and John's disciples really don't like it. It's as if they are saying, "We need to do something. We need to remake ourselves, update ourselves, we need a new

image.” They say to John, maybe if you wouldn’t say such harsh things, maybe smile more, don’t call them a brood of vipers. I have chewed on verse 27 this week, using it like a scrub brush on my soul to scour out envy and pride and worry and bitterness and competitiveness. I want you to wake up and grab hold of this verse and use it to cleanse out the pettiness, jealousy and bitterness in your heart and see God biblically. Verse 27 says, *John answered, a person cannot receive one thing unless it is given him from Heaven.* As you look back at who God is, John is presenting him as in control of all things. He is sovereign. In fact, in verse 30 when John says he must increase, I must decrease, that little word, must, in Greek, means this is part of a plan that God has and it will come to pass. And John is saying, my joy is great and complete in seeing God’s will come to pass even as it cost me my fame, position, power and notoriety. In verse 30, John is embracing God’s will that elevates Jesus even as it diminishes him. When you start seeing God biblically and not as a crutch for times of sorrow or a magic man to give you what you want, you are able to take joy in the hard things.

One of the major tasks of ministry is getting our people to see. John was what God had given him to be and nothing more. He was a forerunner, nothing else, a voice. God didn’t create everybody here to do something big and fun and exciting. But he did create all of us to glorify him as part of his divine plan. In verse 27, John sees the hand of the Father in everything. If people were flocking to Jesus, that was because God the Father willed it, and John found great joy in the will of God moving forward. Seeing God biblically will inform several things and one big one is contentment. Verse 27 applies to each of you in everything, including your salvation. You can’t receive even one thing unless it is given to you from heaven. Paul asked a rhetorical question in 1 Corinthians 4:7. *What do you have that you did not receive?* Paul asks another deeper question in Romans 9:20-21. *But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, why have you made me like this? Has the potter no right over the clay to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?* We see him in control and we find a holy contentment in the God of the bible. We see God biblically.

We need to see Jesus clearly

There is so much piled into this passage about Jesus that it’s hard to decide where to even begin. In verse 28, he is the Christ. In verse 29, he is the bridegroom, and he speaks. In verses 29-30, he creates joy as he increases. In

verse 31, he is from above, and he is above all. In verse 32, he has a divine but rejected message. In verse 34, he is sent by God, he speaks for God, and has the spirit without measure. In verse 35, he has perfect love from the Father and owns all things. And in verse 36, faith in Jesus is the deciding factor between having eternal life or experiencing the wrath of God, a wrath that remains. It's almost overwhelming, trying to decide where even to begin, so let me just point out a few pictures of Jesus from the text that helps us see him clearly.

In verse 29, John pictures him as the bridegroom. This is a new idea that will be further developed in the New Testament with Christ as the bridegroom and the church as the bride. 2 Corinthians 11:2 says, Paul speaks to the church, *²For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.* Ephsians 5 says, *Gospel marriage finds its anchor in Christ and the church.* Revelation talks about the marriage of the church and Christ. All this to say, the church belongs to Christ. As Christians, you belong to Christ and no other and to live otherwise is spiritual adultery. He is jealous for you. In verse 29, John the Baptist was a voice in the wilderness, now there is a new voice. This voice raises the dead. This voice calls those that are spiritually dead and awakens them to faith. This voice in John 10: 3-4 says, *³To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.* That's the bridegroom's voice. It is the supremacy of Christ. Verse 31, he is above all. Verse 32, he is from heaven. Verse 34, he has the Holy Spirit differently than we do. He has the Spirit without limit. In verse 35, Jesus has control of all things. John the Baptist saw Jesus like that and his treasure became Jesus Christ, and honoring him. And because Jesus is his treasure, John found his center and joy, his purpose and his motivation in putting all his emphasis and spotlight of his life on Jesus.

But what most of us have done is treasured something else, instead of Christ. He has become an accessory in your life and not the center of your life. Something or someone else is the center, and when that something else or

someone else falters, goes away, or dies, then your life is a wreck. But when Christ is the treasure and the center and the focus and the spotlight, then no matter the turn of events, you are looking for a way to honor Christ in that event. In the text, John the Baptist's career is over. After this, he's gone, and yet he is able to say, My joy is complete. This is God's will. Remember the "must" of verse 30. He must increase, and I must decrease. This is God's will, and I will point to Jesus to the very end. We see God biblically. We see Christ clearly.

We need to see ourselves rightly

John talks to his disciples and he says, I'm just a person that receives. I'm just a messenger. I'm a friend of the bridegroom. I'm just a reflector of a greater light. I'm just someone that believes. It's funny when you read verse 36 you see how believing the son of God is equal with obeying the son of God. They are one in the same. And here in verse 36, John has laid out for us only two real alternatives. They are defiance and disobedience. Verse 36 says, *whoever does not obey the son shall not see life but the wrath of God remains on him.* That is defiance and disobedience. Or you can have genuine faith. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. It comes down to genuine faith in Jesus Christ, he who has the Son has life and he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. For John the Baptist, his life was strong because Jesus was his treasure. As we close today, what do you treasure? Do you treasure your home, family, job, money, youth, or looks? Come and lay those down and take up Christ.

(Pastor prays)