

## John 3:22-36 He Must Increase; I Must Decrease

What does John the Baptist mean when he says, “**Jesus must increase; I must decrease.**” The meaning behind these words is the key to life, the key to contentment, the key to joy, the key to understanding. There is nothing more important for you and me today! Therefore, we need these words! He must increase; I must decrease. I have 4 ways I believe this text speaks to what it means for Jesus to increase. But before moving there, I want to give some context to help us understand why John the Baptist says this.

In vv. 22-26 we see we see a rival between John’s (the Baptist) disciples and this “up and coming” group of disciples associated with Jesus. This was before John the Baptist was put into prison, while his preaching ministry was vibrant. And there is some kind of conversation with John’s disciples over the issue of baptism and Jewish purification. And this conversation leads to v. 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.’**” Now, we know Jesus did not himself baptize (his disciples did). But, many people are going to Jesus and not to John. The ministry of Jesus is starting to get all the attention and John’s disciples are wondering what is happening (not sure of their motive). So, John uses this question to wisely bear witness to the long-awaited, promised Messiah. In v. 27 he says, “**A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.**” And then in v. 28, he reminds them again of what he had ALREADY said, “**I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.**” And then he will eventually say in v. 30: “**He must increase, but I must decrease.**”

With these words John is saying, “*my time has come to an end, Jesus’ time has come.*” He is saying, “*my preaching was only for a time, only until HIS coming and HIS preaching. It is now time to listen to Him.*” He is saying, “*the old covenant is coming to an end, but the new IS coming and has now come upon you in Jesus.*” He is saying, “*my teaching and my preaching is good and true, but it is limited and must now end; the TRUE prophet . . . the TRUE King . . . the TRUE priest . . . has come.*” We see this in the ministry of John the Baptist as it comes to an end. Go back to 1:22-23 as the people asked him, “**What do you say about yourself? He said, ‘I am the voice of the one crying out in the wilderness,’ ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.**” Therefore, He must increase, I must decrease.

Before moving to our truths, let me give an application. God give and takes away at his time according to his sovereign purposes. You may ask, “**Why did God take such a young, godly, talented, humble, powerful prophet when he did?**” Of John the Baptist Jesus says, “**there is no one born of a woman greater than him**” (Luke 7:28). It was his time. God was working all things to his good (to Jesus’ good) to our good, as those who love him and were called according to his purpose. This means God does the same today; He gives and He takes away. There is nothing more comforting than to be settled with this truth in your heart! This is one of the keys to contentment and joy, the seat of peace with God’s people. God is working ALL THINGS for

your good and the accomplishment of his plans in this world. It was time for John to decrease and for Jesus to increase! The same as true for us as I hope we will see.

With this in mind, let's consider 4 ways Jesus must increase and we must decrease.

1. Jesus must increase in your understanding of who He is! (Person) Let me show you some ways I get this from the text. Look first at v. 29. John the Baptist refers to Jesus as the "bridegroom." **"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."** This is one of John the Baptist's greatest pictures: the bridegroom. (See also Luke 5:88-39). If you are having a hard time with this word, this is the "groom," the one who is getting married to his bride. And here, John is picturing his own ministry. John the Baptist is the "friend" of the bridegroom. And the day of the wedding is approaching. But, on the day of the wedding, who is getting married? It is not the friend! It is the groom. (Think back to me as Joe's friend when he got married to Jill.) And, in that context, it was the best man (best friend of the groom) that handled all the arrangements. And the friend was happy when the day went as planned. And more importantly, the friend of the groom was happy that, when the wedding came, the focus turned from him to his best friend. It was the "friend's" time to sit back and watch it all take place. In the same way, John was saying, "Enough about me and my role and my place and my own preaching and my own gifts and my own godliness." Enough about me and my person, my preaching, etc.! Look at him!

And who is He, according to John? Verse 28: He is the **"Christ."** Verse 31: He is the One **"who comes from above."** Also v. 31: As God is from heaven, in the same way **"He who comes from heaven is above all."** Verse 34: He speaks the very **"words"** of God. And **"He gives the Spirit without measure."** In v. 35, He is the **"beloved Son of the Father."** And in v. 36, **"All obedience belongs to him."** Thinking back to their conversation about Jesus' disciples and John's disciples and baptism, as this was the focus. Oh, how John elevates the Person of Christ! As they quarreled over words and insignificant "earthly" doctrines, John is saying, "NO! Your focus is not where it must be!" Look to Jesus! He must increase! The same is true for us/you! I think of Prov. 9:10 which says, **"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."** As Christians it must please our souls that Jesus must increase and we must decrease. This is why I love the Book of John, particularly cp. 1 as he tells us clearly who He is. This is why I love to read the "Glory of Christ" by J. Owen every year. How are you doing as you consider this truth?

2. Jesus must increase in your understanding of what He teaches! (Doctrine) This truth simply follows the first. If Jesus is the WORD incarnate, if in his PERSON we find sinless man united with eternal God, then OF COURSE his words are from above. OF COURSE his words are true. In John the Baptist's context, he is saying, **"Yes, my preaching and my words are good. And, they are true. But now, the TRUE prophet has come."** Here, John is comparing all the prophets throughout the history of Israel and Jesus. From Adam to Noah to Abraham to Moses . . .

. . . All these men preached the Word of God with authority. God told them what to say. But these men were just like us as regards sin. And, with regard to their relationship to God (by grace through faith). But, not so with Jesus! Moses spoke of another prophet to come, unlike himself. In Deut. 18:15 Moses says: **“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen . . .”** This is none other than Jesus. Do you remember what Philip said to Nathanael back in 1:45: **“Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”** Look at vv. 32-34: **“He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony. Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.”** In v. 31 John has already said, He is “from above” and because of this, He speaks the words of heaven.”

So John is saying, *“It is time to listen to what He has to say. I am of the earth. HE is from heaven. And He has always been from heaven (John 1:1). And He has the Spirit without measure. He IS Life. He IS Light. And as we will see later, John will teach that the Kingdom of God has Come, the Kingdom of Christ, and He will teach us the ways of the kingdom. He will interpret All the ways of the old covenant, all the types, all the shadows found in the old covenant. Listen to HIM!”* As Heb. 1:1-3 says, **“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.”**

Today, I say the same thing. Do not listen to the ways of this sinful world! Listen to Him. I think of Peter, when asked by Jesus if he will walk away at the difficulty of his teaching. And he says, *“Of course not!” “Where else can we go. You have the words of eternal life.” “And we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God”* (John 6:69).

Today, this translates to ALL the words of Scripture. Faith comes by hearing, and by hearing the Word of God. 2 Tim. 3:16-17 says, **“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”** As a church, we preach, we sing, we pray, we speak . . . the WORD. What about in your families? What about as individuals? How are we doing? I think a good place to start is to always be reading through the Gospels as you pay close attention to the words of Jesus himself (of course with the entire Bible). Another helpful application is to memorize Scripture. This is how we hide the word of God in our hearts as we go through this life. And when you read and meditate and memorize, begin by saying to God, *“These are the words of life. I need them. Help me today!”* His teaching must increase!

3. Jesus must increase in your affections toward him. So how do we see this truth in this text. First, we see John the Baptist speak of himself as the “friend” of the bridegroom (v. 29). Friends

care for one another. Friends love one another. Friends has all kinds of good heart-felt thoughts and emotions for one another. There is nothing like true friendship that brings out the affections of the heart. We certainly see that Jesus has great affections for US as the Bible says He is the “friend of sinners” (Matt. 11:19). And we know that Jesus loves us because he laid down his life for us. **“But while we were yet still sinners, Christ died for us”** (Rom. 5:8). As we read in John 15:13: **“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”**

Is Jesus your friend? How is it when you go into your prayer closet? How is it when you pray and speak with Christ during the day? And when you are busy, do you look forward to your time with him at the end of the day? These are affections. They flow from the heart.

Also in this text, we see that John the Baptist has great JOY as he knows Jesus must increase and he must decrease (v. 29-30). These are affections for Jesus. Brothers and sisters, only friendship with Jesus will bring true joy to your hearts. I would say today if you are not a Christian, there is no real affection for Jesus in your heart. But, if my words make sense to you this morning I would urge you to seek the Lord Jesus and his friendship. Ask other Christians about him. Read your Bible with an intent to treasure Jesus in your heart.

At the same time, (and this is a mystery) this text teaches us that God is sovereign and He is the One who gives such a desire to love and obey and follow Jesus, to know WHO He is, to understand WHAT He has done, and to grow in the affections of your heart toward Him. Look at v. 27. John the Baptist says, **“A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.”** Look also at vv. 32-33: **“He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony. Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true.”** At the end of the day, if you love Jesus, you cannot say, “Wow, I made a good decision to love him” (though this is true). But instead you will say, **“God you have opened my eyes for such love.”** At the end of the day brothers and sisters, **“out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks”** (Matt. 12:34). Jesus must grow in our affections. And, the more our love for him grows, the more we really understand what this life is all about. May Jesus increase!

4. Jesus must increase in your obedience to him. Look at vv. 35-36: **“The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. 36Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”** Here, we see that to believe in the Son is to OBEY the Son. In this context, to believe is to obey. Those who believe have eternal life. Those who do not believe in the Son, the wrath of God remains on him.

This means that if you have believed on the Lord Jesus, and you are truly a Christian, you will be obedient. And, you should see an increase in your obedience as you look to him. If Jesus is “increasing” in your obedience to Him and his commands will be evident to all, starting in your household. As a mother, as a father, as a grandparent, as children who love Jesus, obedience to Him will show.

He must increase; We must decrease! In his person, in his doctrine, in your affections, and in your obedience. This is my prayer for myself; This is my prayer for all of you.