

## ***Jesus and John the Baptist***

***22 After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing.***

***23 John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and people were coming and were being baptized--***

***24 for John had not yet been thrown into prison.***

***25 Therefore there arose a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purification.***

***26 And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him."***

After celebrating the Passover in Jerusalem (2:13) and performing many signs there (2:23), Jesus moved to the country districts of Judea outside the city of Jerusalem where His disciples were baptizing many (4:2). Most likely the baptisms being performed were of the same nature as those of John the Baptist – a baptism of repentance that was preparation for the entrance into the Kingdom. There was no reason for John to believe that his ministry had ended so he continued to baptize as well.

It must be remembered that the Book of John was the last of the four gospels to be written; the other three had already circulated for decades. Because of this, John makes assumptions that certain facts were well known. For example, the imprisonment of John the Baptist is mentioned without any explanation. The author's interest is not really in John the Baptist, but the testimony that he bore concerning Christ. Elsewhere, Jesus' ministry in Galilee occurs *after* John the Baptist had been arrested. By mentioning that John had not yet been imprisoned (Jn. 3:24), the writer clarifies that what is being described here takes place earlier than Jesus' Galilean ministry spoken of in the other gospels.

Though there was never any rivalry between Jesus and John the Baptist, a debate between John's disciples and a Jew over purification rituals apparently raised questions about the durability of their master's ministry. From the comment in verse 26 we conclude that John's disciples resented the fact that Jesus was beginning to eclipse their leader, so they brought the issue to John himself.

***27 John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven.***

***28 You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Christ', but, 'I have been sent ahead of Him.'***

***29 He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made full.***

***30 He must increase, but I must decrease."***

John the Baptist's attitude toward Jesus' success reflects a number of things about John's spirituality that we can learn from.

1. John's ability to respond as he did was based on his understanding of God; it was based on theological truth. John knew that his life was but a part of a greater plan. He was designed and sent by God with a specific purpose and he realized that this purpose was a gift of the grace of God. Therefore, he was not perturbed by the news of Jesus' success, for he realized that all gifts come from heaven, including the call to a particular position in ministry (I Cor. 4:7) and the success of it. John's ministry was that of a herald, and as such, God had not given him the right to intrude on the work of the Messiah. If John the Baptist was discontent or jealous over God's wise, sovereign choice or if he wished to be Messiah, he would annul the excellence of the ministry which God had given him (Isa. 40:3; Mal. 3:1).

The realization of God's sovereignty is the ultimate reason to forsake arrogance. In 1 Corinthians 4:7 Paul is concerned about the Corinthians' boasting, so he asks them, "For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?"

Understanding the sovereignty of God is also the key in avoiding envy or self-abasement. Some within the body of Christ perceive their positions as menial and having little value. Therefore, they depreciate themselves. Paul, however, rebukes this attitude by saying "God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired" (1 Cor. 12:18) and all play a necessary part (I Cor. 12:17). The ability to serve joyfully in the capacity God has put us comes from the realization that GOD has put us in it!

In addition, the failure to recognize our station in life as a gift from God results in ingratitude and a lack of thankfulness. Thanklessness is the attitude of the unbelieving. Romans 1:21 says, "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God *or give thanks*." The present generation with its entitlement mentality has adopted the godless philosophy that we deserve something. In reality, we deserve nothing.

James warns us, "Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights" (Ja. 1:16-17). Do not be deceived in thinking that what you have is not a gift, and remember that a gift is something not earned or deserved.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 says, "Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

2. John the Baptist also desired that Christ be magnified, not himself.

In verse 26 the disciples of John were concerned that Jesus was attracting more people than John, but John could rejoice because he desired Jesus' success. Jesus was the bridegroom of His people, both of Israel (Isa. 62:4-5; Jer. 2:2; Hos. 2:16-20) and the church to come; John was the friend of the groom (in modern terms, the best man). As such, his responsibility was in making plans for the wedding and helping the groom in any way possible. But the bride was not his.

John the Baptist's greatest joy was in watching the bride and the groom united. After that, his task was over. He never expected to take the center stage. He knew Jesus must become greater and his own

influence *must* decrease. “Must” is nothing less than the determined will of God. It is not simply advisable, nor the way things just happened to turn out; it is a matter of divine necessity.

John didn’t grudgingly concede victory to a superior opponent, but wholeheartedly embraced God’s will and the supremacy it assigns to Jesus. It is not particularly easy to gather people around oneself for a serious purpose, but once they are gathered it is infinitely harder to detach them and insist that they follow another (Carson). It is a measure of John’s greatness that he did just that.

### **JOHN 3:31-36 JOHN’S EXTENDED COMMENT**

Within the Book of John it is sometimes difficult to know who is speaking (see notes on 3:16 ff.). Some see verses 31-36 as the words of John the Baptist; however, it seems easier to read these as the words of the writer of the gospel, giving further reason why Jesus must increase (3:30).

***3:31 He who comes from above is above all, he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all.***

First, Jesus must increase because He is superior to John by virtue of His heavenly origin. The things He knows are based on first-hand observation. That in itself puts Jesus in a class above all other men. Unlike John the Baptist, His words are not from below and temporary; they are unlimited, divine and inexhaustible.

***3:32 What He has seen and heard, of that He bears witness; and no man receives His witness.***

***3:33 He who has received His witness has set his seal to this, that God is true.***

***3:34 For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure.***

Secondly, though John the Baptist had the privilege of being Messiah’s forerunner, he was still no different than the other prophets in that he received only a measure of the Spirit. John’s knowledge was limited to what God had revealed to him; the revelation he received was, therefore, only partial. Christ, however, received the fullness of the Spirit (Isa. 11:2; 42:1; 61:1). Jesus speaks as an eyewitness of heavenly realities. Having the Spirit without measure makes Him able to provide the highest revelation of the Father possible (Heb. 1:2). The unmeasured pouring of the Spirit upon Him is what accounts for the fact that He spoke the words of God (v. 34, Alford, 724). The one who accepts the witness of Jesus attests that Jesus speaks the message of God (v. 33, RWP).

***3:35 The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand.***

Lastly, Jesus is superior because of the authority He has received, and the Father’s love for the Son guarantees that He has placed everything into the Son’s hands. Men can trust Christ in all things because the Father has given Him all things (Morris); they can come to Christ as they come to God.

This verse also stresses the dependence upon the Father that Jesus had as man. Though there is no doubt that the Word who was God (Jn. 1:1) became flesh in the person of Christ (Jn. 1:14), there is also no doubt that Jesus is also human, and thus receives what He has from the Father as any other man would.

Verse 36 forms a fitting climax to the entire chapter.

***3:36 He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.***

God's wrath is *not* an impersonal principle of retribution, but a personal response of a holy God to His own world. It is a response of God's justice to a world that has rejected His every effort to save it from impending doom.

Note the contrast presented. One would have expected John to say, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not BELIEVE the Son shall not see life," but he doesn't say this. Instead he says, "he who does not OBEY the Son shall not see life." To some this is a problem, but the problem is only superficial. Faith and conduct are closely linked. Belief involves obedience. Those who believe are those who obey. The thought is like that of John 3:18: those who are not saved choose darkness over the light for they hate the light. These shall not see life for their disobedience cuts them off from life.

To many, the wrath of God is something that needs to be softened to appeal to the modern ear, but the wrath of God is something that should be taken seriously if the Bible is held to be the Word of God. The concept appears in hundreds of passages and to ignore them leaves us with a badly mutilated Bible (Morris, 249). "Unless we are saved from real peril there is no meaning in salvation" (Morris, 250).