



SERMON TITLE: "He Must Increase"
SCRIPTURE: John 3:22-36

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"These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ" (John 20:31). This is how John concludes his own biography of Jesus. He wanted the young, the old, the sick, the well, the despairing, the hopeful, the skeptics, the faithful, and whoever reads his account of Jesus to believe and trust him more fully. But what did John want them to believe? He wanted them to believe that Jesus alone brought eternal life into the present, broken world. And for all who enter this eternal life with God right now, we—like John—are exiles. For all who enter a relationship with Jesus, we will very likely be marginalized and dismissed because we follow him. So, what does it mean to believe? And how do we mature in believing? What does it mean to remain faithful to God when the pressure is on? These are the things that John will help us explore by showing us the glory and beauty of Jesus.

We've all heard the phrase "the end justifies the means." This phrase is often used to say that if you have a good outcome, then you're excused for anything wrong you did to get there. If you have a noble goal, it doesn't matter how you get it done; it only matters that it's done. This doesn't sound right though. It feels like there should be more harmony and consistency between the two parts of this equation. And this kind of thinking misses the point because it presumes a wrong relationship between "the means" and "the end." We have to get this relationship right.

Here are some positive examples: Practice is the means; winning the game is the end. Personality tests are the means; relational intimacy is the end. Money is the means; provision is the end. But if we confuse the relationship between these things, life will be messed up. We'll never win the game. We'll be self-absorbed. And money will have us, rather than us having money. Again, a right relationship between the means and the end is vital to life, and this is especially true when it comes to the life of faith.

A popular theological idea is worded like this: "The chief end of man is to glorify God by enjoying him forever." This means that we ourselves *are* means. The end—the purpose and the point—of all of life is that God would be glorified, and that his worth is celebrated. This also suggests that all of the details of our lives should conspire to draw attention to God, especially as he has revealed himself in Jesus. So, not only are we the means, but all the details of our lives are as well. And we should consider, how do we love and glorify God by loving our families, our jobs, our friends, our hobbies, etc?

Most of the time we want the attention. We try to live for our own recognition, to feel justified in our opinions. But that's not why we were created. We exist to put the spotlight on God, so we have to figure out how to properly consider *the means to...* and *the end of...* living for God's glory and not our own.

In John 3:22 and following, the disciples of John the Baptist's approach him with some questions. And their questions start to reveal what's in their heart. They were jealous. Jesus and his disciples had been baptizing many, so more people were starting to follow Rabbi Jesus than Rabbi John. And in 3:26, this frustrates John's followers. They liked the recognition that they got when John got recognition. After all, he was a hippie-prophet roaming the desert eating bugs and honey. But now their baptism numbers were starting to decline because everybody was going to Jesus.

John the Baptist had already told his followers that he was only a signpost to Jesus. He was a spotlight to the Messiah. He was never meant to be the point. But John's followers didn't like that. However, it was a joy for John (3:29). Too often, we are like John's followers. We don't understand. We want to take center stage. We want the world to revolve around us. We want to be the most important. But there's no freedom in that. Making our most recent desire our god

becomes a prison. But for John, there was great joy and freedom in knowing that he wasn't the hero. And we can experience the same. Meaning and purpose and truth and love aren't determined and defined by us. And that's a relief! Our lives are meant to be a *means* to *the end* of glorifying God. That's where our greatest joy is found. And all of these things are behind John the Baptist's statement in 3:30, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

And if we press on this idea it will help us answer the question—how do we properly consider *the means to...* and *the end of...* living for God's glory and not our own? And if we take John's words to heart in 3:30, humility surfaces as the answer. Humility protects us from confusing *the means* and *the end*, and it keeps us from making life only about ourselves. Humility empowers us to keep the main thing the main thing. It helps us remember that we exist for God's glory, and that he does not exist for ours. It reminds us that we're made in his image, and we shouldn't try to make him into our image.

Furthermore, Christian humility is to be employed in all of life. There is a way to do humility in every facet of life that reminds others that it all revolves around God and not us. And even though it feels backwards to how we normally think, there's no freedom or joy found when we make ourselves the point. Rather, we should think, "how can I parent, work, love, play, eat, think, date, laugh, give, speak, and serve in a way that makes people think that Jesus is the point?" This kind of humility leads us to take great delight in our supporting role.

And humility is never more clear to us than when we see it in Jesus. Paul says in Philippians 2 that Jesus humbled himself by stepping from heaven to earth—by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. And here, John implies the same. The Son of God has come from heaven to earth. The Glorious Bridegroom has stooped down to rescue his wayward bride. He who *is* and *gives* eternal life has come to take the death that should be ours. And his death to overcome sin has averted the wrath that was due us. His crown is thorns. His throne is a cross. And THIS is humility unmatched. This is why all glory and praise belong to him.

And because this is true, now we should mirror his humility, trust him totally, and make our entire lives revolve around his life. Whether it's Disney-World or dating, parenting or working, or sorrows or victories, there is a way to do all of these things for God's glory and not ours. There is a way to trust him that leads to joy and freedom, and this way necessitates humility.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- What could be a possible hazard if we confuse "the means" and "the end"?
- Who is someone you know whose entire life revolves around God and his glory?
- In what ways do you seek attention and glory, wanting your life to be about you?
- How does humility help us accept a supporting role, shining the spotlight on Jesus?
- In what ways did John the Baptist have joy in his supporting role?
- How is humility hard?
- In what ways is Jesus our perfect example of humility?