

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Encounter Jesus – The Son of the Living God

He Must Increase – I Must Decrease!

**God doesn't measure success in gold and silver,
but in our service to Him.**

The exact opposite of the working of the Holy Spirit is the competitive spirit that lurks in all of us. This spirit focuses on 'I', 'Me' and 'My' and the importance of what I am doing rather than seeking the glory of God. The competitive spirit strives to be superior to others rather than inspiring others to trust in Jesus. The competitive spirit should not be present within the family of God but because we are flawed human beings this competitiveness often raises its ugly head but it does not have to be that way. **1 Corinthians 2:12 (ESV)** ¹² *Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.* John the Baptist is a wonderful example of a dedicated life who stayed focused on Jesus and rejoiced when others turned from following him to follow Christ.

John the Baptist acknowledged something astounding at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. He said in **John 1:29 (ESV)** ²⁹ *... he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"* John's mission was to proclaim the appearance of the Messiah – the Savior of the world. We have studied the calling of Jesus' disciples and know that two of John the Baptist's disciples immediately turned and followed Jesus after John had proclaimed that Jesus was the Lamb of God. But, others continued with John. This lesson picks up a conversation where the Baptizer once again exalts Jesus.

Read John 3:22-24 (ESV) ²² *After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing.* ²³ *John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized* ²⁴ *(for John had not yet been put in prison).*

The 'after this' is a reference to Jesus' conversation in the night with Nicodemus. We don't know the exact location of Jesus or John but we are told that both groups were baptizing. Keep in mind that these were not Christian baptisms like today, but rather public confessions of sin followed by immersion in water. The Apostle John makes it clear in the next chapter that Jesus Himself was not actually the one performing the baptisms. **John 4:2 (ESV)** ² *(although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples),*

Even though the Lamb of God had begun His ministry, John was still in the business of pointing others to the Lamb. Remember, Jesus as a Man was limited by the flesh. He was not going to be in the midst of every group – all of the time. John was doing what he was called to do – where he was called to minister.

You might wonder why John the Apostle would state the obvious *(for John had not yet been put in prison)*. Most likely he did this for clarification purposes. Mark had written his gospel approximately 20 years prior and his account took readers directly from Jesus' baptism and temptation in the wilderness to the Baptizer's

imprisonment. John's account reveals that the Baptizer went about his mission for a time before he was imprisoned and beheaded.

Read John 3:25-28 (ESV) ²⁵ Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. 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." ²⁷ John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.'

John the Apostle reports a discussion arose between John's disciples and a Jew about purification. It could have been one Jew or several since some early manuscripts read "the Jews". How many were involved does not matter. Purification is the act of becoming clean and pure before God and people. The Mosaic Law provided instructions for both physical and spiritual purification. These laws and regulations were much more than sanitary instructions.

Have you ever been in a discussion about one thing only to realize that there was something different behind the conversation? That seems to be what happened in the discussion John's disciples had. Apparently, the undertone of the conversation was more about Jesus gaining followers over John. The Jew or Jews had sown seeds of doubt in their minds.

John had been proclaiming that Jesus was the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, and all they could think about was: *look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him*. John the Baptist along with Moses, Paul and Jesus faced the problem of comparison and competition: Wiersbe says, "A leader often suffers more from his zealous disciples than from his critics!"

We think, "Oh, we are not like that!" Wait! Listen to the comparisons: "Their church is bigger – they must not be preaching the gospel." "Their group is better – they just ask anybody to come!" These thoughts take our focus off Jesus.

John said: *A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven*. David Jeremiah comments, "Every believer is uniquely gifted and called by God. This truth should end all unhealthy comparisons with others." As long as WE are doing what WE are called to do, there should be no worry about what anyone else is accomplishing for the Lord other than to help them praise God for it.

John did not fall into the trap of competitiveness over more following Jesus than were following him. In fact, that was the evidence that John had done his job. John was rejoicing in the Lord. He did that even before he was born! John's mother said to the mother of Jesus in **Luke 1:44 (ESV)** ⁴⁴ *For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy..*

John kept his answer simple and just repeated what he had told them before: *I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.'*

Read John 3:29-30 (ESV) ²⁹ *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.* ³⁰ *He must increase, but I must decrease."*

John the Baptist used a beautiful illustration comparing Jesus to the bridegroom casting himself only as the 'best man'. Once the bridegroom and bride had been brought together, the work of the best man was completed. What a foolish thing it would be for the best man to try to 'upstage' the bridegroom and take his place. In fact, if the best man did that, there would be something wrong with the marriage.

John, spoke from a Jewish standpoint. According to the Old Testament, Israel was the bride, Jehovah was the bridegroom and had a marriage covenant with the nation. **Isaiah 54:5 (ESV)** ⁵ *For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called.*

Because of Israel's attitude toward His Son, the Israelite nation has been 'set aside' by God during a period known as the 'Times of the Gentiles' (**Luke 21:24, Romans 11:25**). During this period, God through the Holy Spirit is taking out a people for His Name that are designated as the Bride of Christ. In **Matthew 9:15**, Jesus spoke of Himself as being the Bridegroom. Jesus' Bride is the church (meaning the called out ones) (**Ephesians 5:25-33**) and we are united with Him by faith.

John's response to the questioning is the kind of response we should have to the Lord: *He must increase, but I must decrease*. Those who know the Son of God as Savior should understand that when Jesus increases our joy increases! There is no room in the family of God for pride in one's own popularity or personal accomplishments. Our work should be 'all about Him' and never about us.

The reason John must decrease was because he was not the Messiah – the Son of God in the flesh. It was, therefore, perfectly natural that his popularity should dim. John would not stand in the way of Jesus' ministry! This reminds us that the things we do and say should not stand in the way of others seeing Jesus.

Read John 3:31-34 (ESV) ³¹ *He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all.* ³² *He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony.* ³³ *Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true.* ³⁴ *For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.*

Some scholars debate whether these are the words of John the Baptist or John the disciple. It makes no difference since they are the inspired Word of God. *He who comes from above* refers to Jesus Christ Alone. Both John the Apostle and John the Baptist **and everyone else who has ever lived or will live** belongs to the earth. **Genesis 3:19 (ESV)** *... for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."*

Jesus was not simply called from heaven, or empowered by heaven; He *came* from heaven. The Jews disputed this claim because they knew He was claiming that He was God. It is not that the Jews did not understand the message of Jesus. They understood it! They just didn't like it because it was not compatible with their agenda.

Since Jesus came from heaven, He represents the Father; and to reject His witness is to reject the Father. **John 5:23 (ESV)** ... *Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.* By faith, we know that His witness is true. We can trust it and rely on it.

Even though many did not believe, Jesus' testimony was trustworthy because He came from heaven. His words were the very words of God the Father. Our whole spiritual life depends on our answer to one question: Who is Jesus Christ? If we accept Jesus as only a prophet or teacher, we reject His claim to be God's Son, even God himself. The heartbeat of John's Gospel is the dynamic truth that Jesus Christ is God's Son, the Messiah, the Savior, who existed from the beginning and will continue to live forever.

Seals were used to convey a clear message. A seal indicated ownership to all and expressed a person's personal guarantee. To receive Jesus' testimony is to certify that **God is true** regarding what He has sealed. **Ephesians 1:13 (ESV)** ¹³ *In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.*

Read John 3:35-36 (ESV) ³⁵ *The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand.* ³⁶ *Whoever 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.*

There can be no neutrality when it comes to the witness of Jesus Christ. We either trust Him or reject Him. There is no room for jealousy or competition among the family of God. It is not about us – as John the Baptist knew – it is all about Jesus! Prepare the way for others to come to Him...

In **John 3**, the Apostle John emphasizes a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Our relationship with Christ must be a **living relationship** that begins with our second birth, the birth from above. We will discover that our relationship with Jesus will be a **loving relationship**. He is our Bridegroom and we are a part of the Bride – the church – the called out ones. Like John the Baptist, we desire that Jesus Christ increase as we decrease. He must receive all the honor and glory.

Our relationship with Christ will be a **learning relationship**. We will learn that Jesus is the Faithful Witness who shares God's truth with us as we study His Word, meditate on it, and make it part of our lives.

Let's never forget the cost of these blessings. For us to be born from above into God's family, Jesus Christ had to die. For us to enter into the loving relationship of salvation, He had to endure the hatred and condemnation of men. He had to be lifted up on the cross so that we might experience forgiveness and eternal life. May we never take this for granted!

He must increase, but I must decrease.

John 3:30