

## He Must Increase, We Decrease

In John 3, Jesus has been teaching Nicodemus of the profoundest mysteries of the Christian life—the new birth by the Holy Spirit and the substitutionary atonement of Christ on Calvary's cross. Who is to show us how we are to live in the light of these amazing gifts from God? John the Baptist enters the scene to provide the answer to that question. In this text we shall see that John the Baptist shows us that the one who grasps this great salvation understands both himself and also the Lord Jesus Christ:

### John 3:22-36

**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).

**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.' **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."

**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. **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.

### I. When we embrace the Gospel, we come to know our role. (vv. 22-30)

In verse 26 we see that the disciples of John the Baptist are obviously disturbed that Jesus' ministry is taking people away from John the Baptist's crowds, but the Baptist takes this as an opportunity to teach his followers some important things about true discipleship—especially that we can only understand ourselves properly in light of our relationship with Christ.

#### a. Our role is an assigned role (22-27).

Everything we have, including our ministries and our life circumstances, are given to us by God. Our responsibility is to accept what He has given us and serve Him in those circumstances.

#### b. Our role is a secondary role (28,29).

John denies being the Christ, but says he is, rather, the "friend of the bridegroom," or in today's language, "the best man"; therefore, it would be entirely inappropriate for him to obstruct the way of people wanting to follow Jesus. Just the opposite: his role is to take delight in the Bridegroom and in seeing others do the same.

#### c. Our role is a diminishing role (30).

John the Baptist sums it up by saying, "He must increase, but I must decrease." If we are promoting Christ in our lives, we shall not be promoting ourselves. This leads us to the commentary that the Apostle John now gives us in verses 31-36.

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**II. When we embrace the Gospel, we come to know the greatness of Christ (31-36).**

John here teaches us three primary things about Christ's greatness.

a. He surpasses us (31).

We are of the earth. God made us from the dust of the ground. But Jesus, the Son of God, has come from above; therefore, He is above all others.

b. He speaks to us (32-34).

He Who comes from heaven authoritatively speaks for God. He teaches us the truth—truth that is accompanied by the fullness of the Holy Spirit. We must listen to Him.

c. He saves us (35-36).

Jesus has come to earth, not just to speak to us, but to save us. The wrath of God abides upon us because we are rebellious sinners. Jesus has come to take the wrath of God in our place that we may have eternal life.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Why did John the Baptist have to emphasize that he was not the Christ? Why do believers sometime attach more closely to a Christian leader than to Christ Himself? What's wrong with that?
2. Why must our role be a diminishing one? How do we do that?
3. What inspired John the Baptist's remarkable humility?
4. How does the Apostle John describe Jesus' greatness?
5. What has Jesus done for us that no one else could do?

6. Why does the wrath of God abide on every human being who doesn't believe in Christ?

### **Going Deeper**

1. What is it about the role God has assigned you that you find most difficult to accept?  
Why?
  
2. What is it about Christ that you find yourself sometimes underestimating?