

## Adding and Subtracting

John 3:22–30

*“He must increase, but I must decrease”*

- The 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter of John one of best known chapters in the Bible - Nicodemus and John 3:16
- But John 3 also records an incident that is very important to the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus and a lesson that every disciple should learn

### I. The Conflict

1. Verse 22 begins a new section

<sup>22</sup>*After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing*  
<sup>23</sup>*John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim because water was plentiful there; and people were coming and being baptized*

2. This situation presents the conditions for *the perfect storm* – conflict was inevitable
  - a. Two leaders with two groups baptizing in close proximity
  - b. So we have the setting for conflict between the disciples of John the Baptist and the disciples of Jesus
  - c. It's hard for us to comprehend this – but verse 25 tells us that “a discussion (“dispute”) arose between John’s disciples and a Jew over purification” (KJV says *and the Jews*)
  - d. The dispute is not described in detail - we can only surmise what is being referred to by the context
  - e. It seems that the thing being discussed is water baptism - and its meaning
  - f. The Jews were familiar with ritual washings - *purification* – (see Jn 2:6 – the wedding in Cana of Galilee – *Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification*)
  - g. Both John and Jesus were baptizing – which was correct? – which was valid? – what did John’s baptism mean? – what does baptism “of repentance and for remission of sin” mean?
3. There was confusion over baptism 2,000 years ago – there is still confusion today
  - a. Do you have to be baptized to be saved?
  - b. Do you have to be baptized to be forgiven?
  - c. Is John’s baptism equal to Christian baptism?

- d. If it’s just a symbol, what does it matter?

4. Theological debates sometimes mask or cover the real issues
  - a. vs 26 seems to suggest that the real issue was not theology but jealousy –
  - b. Jn 3:26 -  
*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.**”*
  - c. John’s disciples and supporters were fearful that John’s ministry was being eclipsed by Jesus
  - d. Jesus was beginning to baptize more people than John

### II. The Conversation

1. When John the Baptist is made aware of the dispute, he immediately takes control of the conversation to move it to another level
  - a. He lifts the conversation above the question of who is winning the baptisms war and makes it a conversation about *who Jesus is*
  - b. vv 27-30 –  
<sup>27</sup>*John answered, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.”* <sup>28</sup>*You yourselves bear me witness that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’* <sup>29</sup>*The 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.*
2. The disciples of John wanted to make the “argument” – dispute – debate - about him
  - a. “But YOU were here first!”
  - b. “He” was YOUR disciple – vs. 26 – “*he who was with you*”
  - c. It’s not fair
  - d. Etc.
  - e. It is often the case in the spiritual realm that we become jealous and envious of those who appear to be doing better than we are
  - f. In our churches there is often more competition than celebration over spiritual victories
3. John would not let the conversation focus on him

- a. He pointed away from himself to Jesus and gave Jesus the place of honor (vs 29)
- b. Jesus is the bridegroom – vs 29a – *“The one who has the bride is the bridegroom”*
- c. John is merely the friend (“best man”?) - vs 29b – *“The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him”*
- d. The friend of the bridegroom shares in the joy of the bridegroom - vs 29c – *“rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice”*
- e. John rejoices in what he sees happening in their respective ministries - vs 29d – *“this joy of mine is complete”*

### III. The Cost

1. Those familiar with the Gospel of John will be aware that these themes have already been heard
2. Thus John the Baptist
  - a. John 1:8: He is not the light
  - b. John 1:20: He is not the Christ
  - c. John 1:21: He is not Elijah - not the prophet
  - d. John 1:27: He is not worthy to unstrap Jesus’ sandals
  - e. John 1:23: He is just a voice crying in the wilderness
3. John the Baptist understood his place – his position – in relationship to Jesus
  - a. John humbled himself and exalted Christ
  - b. John’s response to Jesus is exactly the response that we all should have to Jesus
    - 1) But many in our day – as in His day – find John’s response to be unintelligible
    - 2) John experienced great – complete – fulfilled - joy because he was getting smaller and Jesus was getting bigger!
    - 3) John 3:30 – **“He must increase, but I must decrease”**
  - c. It’s not about us – individually or the church
    - 1) It’s always about Him - the bridegroom
    - 2) Our joy is made complete when we give Him His rightful place in our lives personally and in the church – the bride of Christ

- 3) We must magnify Him – it is our purpose to bring glory to Him
- d. John knew that his work was to prepare the way for the One who was to come Vs 29 –
 

<sup>29</sup>*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.*

  - 1) John’s joy was fulfilled because the bridegroom had now come
  - 2) The voice of the Bridegroom - has replaced the voice of the one crying in the wilderness
- e. This is what counting the cost means
  - 1) John knew that this would happen
    - At the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus, on the banks of the Jordan River where the John was baptizing, he had pointed at Jesus and said to his followers, *“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”* (Jn 1:29)
    - *“He must increase, but I must decrease”* (Jn 3:30)
  - 2) This is the cost of following – of being a disciple – we die to self and live to Christ
  - 3) Notice that John said, **“I must decrease, but He must increase”**
    - The “must” of verse 30 is very important
    - This is God’s *must* – a Divine imperative – God’s Will
    - *“He must increase” – “I must decrease”*