

## JOHN THE BAPTIST'S TESTIMONY ABOUT JESUS

John 3:22-36

Key Verse: 3:36

*“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.”*

In today’s passage, we meet John the Baptist again. At first glance, John was a strange man. He wore strange clothes and ate strange food. He lived in the desert among snakes and scorpions. He preached a strong and offensive message to people who came to him. His life was cut short in a very tragic manner. But the Bible says that he was great “in the sight of the Lord” (Lk 1:15). Jesus said of him, *“I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John ...”* (Lk 7:28). Let’s think about why he was great in God’s eyes. Also in this passage, John the Baptist testifies again that Jesus is God who came down from heaven to save us. Jesus gave his life on the cross as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Whoever believes in Jesus has eternal life. May God help us to accept and believe this truth!

### I. “HE MUST BECOME GREATER; I MUST BECOME LESS” (22-30)

Who was John the Baptist? Let us briefly review his birth, his life and his mission.

**First, the faith of John’s parents.** The coming of John the Baptist had been prophesied by Isaiah long before John was born. Isaiah 40:3 says, *“A voice of one calling: In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.”* Finally, John was born to Zechariah and Elizabeth. Humanly speaking, John’s parents were a pathetic elderly couple, because they had no son until they were too old to have children. Jewish people considered those who had no children cursed by God. This was particularly painful to Zechariah and Elizabeth because they were a priestly family. It seemed that God had forgotten to bless them. Still this couple lived a life of faith. Luke 1:5-7 read: *“In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord’s commandments and regulations blamelessly. But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years.”*



In addition to their personal misfortune, Zechariah and Elizabeth lived in one of the worst times of Israel. The Israelites suffered under the cruel dictator Herod and the oppressive regime of the Roman Empire. In this situation, people struggled just to survive. No one seemed to care about God or the word of God. But Zechariah and Elizabeth kept all the Lord’s commandments and regulations blamelessly. This means that they loved God and followed God’s ways. They studied the

word of God faithfully and obeyed. They had good spiritual influence on other people through their life of faith. They became a blessing to the people in despair. They had to sacrifice themselves in order to obey all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly. God was pleased with them. God heard their life-long prayer for a son and sent John the Baptist to the family.

So finally a son was born to the elderly couple, when no one thought it possible. It was the work of God. Luke 1:66 says: "For the Lord's hand was with him." Now when the time came to name the baby, Zechariah and Elizabeth named him John. Their relatives protested that John was not their family name. They probably suggested "Zechariah Jr." But Zechariah named his son John because God had told him to do so. Zechariah obeyed God by naming him John, which means "the gift of God" (Lk 1:60). Every time he called his son, he was reminded of the grace of God.

Zechariah and Elizabeth seemed to be an insignificant elderly people with personal problems. They did not have much money or power. But God chose them to be the parents of John the Baptist. They were chosen to participate in the redemptive history of God. Why? Because Zechariah and Elizabeth studied the word of God and lived according to God's word. They lived by faith while others followed the trend of the world. By faith they participated in the redemptive history of God. Zechariah and Elizabeth had their problems in life, but they had God in their hearts. They loved God and the word of God. They had a clear mission and purpose in their lives. God blessed them to be the parents of John the Baptist.

**Second, John's life of mission.** As the one and only son of an old couple, John could have grown up as a spoiled brat. But from early on, John evidently accepted Isaiah 40:3 as his life key verse. He lived a spiritual life as his parents did. He did not follow the trend of the world. He lived in the wilderness, wearing camel's hair and eating locusts and wild honey (Mk 1:6). John's clothes were not the latest fashion of his day. He was different from the religious leaders, whose purple robes reflected their great pride in their positions (Mk 12:38). John had no time to look for gourmet food. In other words, John ate and wore what was available to him. He did not care much about what he ate, what he wore or where he slept; his life was totally focused on his mission. He lived a simple, mission-centered life.

What was John's mission? What message did John preach? John came as the forerunner of Christ. His mission was to prepare the way for the Lord. In order to prepare the hearts of his people, John preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Mk 1:4). Luke 3:4-6 describe his mission this way: *As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all mankind will see God's salvation.'"* Preparing a straight road means removing obstacles for the Lord. Some people's hearts are like crooked roads full of ditches and



debris. Some have roads with a mountain of pride. These mountains must be made low. Some are in deep despair and self-pity like a valley. They must be filled in. John's mission was to challenge them to remove those obstacles so that the Lord could come in their hearts. John was to help them prepare their hearts so that they could see God's salvation.

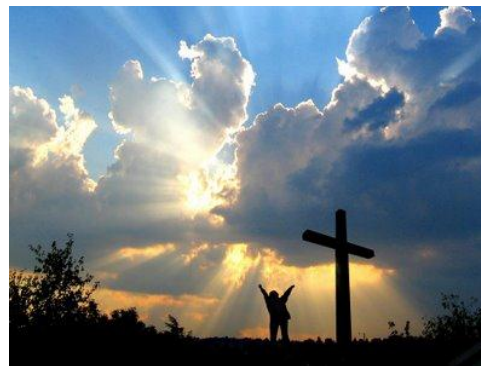
How did John carry out his mission? He boldly preached a message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. People don't want to hear the word "repent" from us. When they hear it, they often assume we are judging them. Many would say, "Leave me alone. It's none of your business if I repent or not." But John the Baptist preached the message of repentance. He baptized people with water for repentance (Mt 3:11). He even rebuked King Herod and told him to repent of his sin of adultery. Luke 1:16-17 say: "Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous--to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." John prepared the way for the Lord Jesus by helping people repent of their sins.

**Third, "He must become greater"** (22-26). Look at verse 22. *After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them and baptized.* Jesus spent time with his disciples. Then his disciples began to baptize people (4:2). Now John the Baptist was also baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized (23). However, more people were now going to Jesus to be baptized. How did John's disciples react to the growing popularity of Jesus' ministry? They had upset stomachs because of their jealousy. In addition, a certain Jew provoked them by starting an argument over ceremonial washing. We don't know exactly what the argument was about, other than that it was over ceremonial washing. Perhaps the Jewish man said to John's disciples: "Hey, more people are going over to Jesus to be baptized. His baptism must be more effective than your rabbi's." Then John's disciples came to John and said, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him (26). What's going to happen to us?"



How did John the Baptist help his disciples? He understood their competitive spirit toward Jesus' disciples. Look at verse 27. *To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven."* What does this mean? John told his disciples that as long as God gave him his work to do, he would continue his work, which was to point people to Christ. That's exactly what he was doing. Even with Jesus beginning his work, John could still turn people to Jesus. But now his work was almost finished. By God's sovereign will, his mission was coming to an end. John told them that it was God's will that Jesus' ministry was increasing while his own ministry was fading. Look at verse 28. *"You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.'"* Once again John clearly identified himself—he was not the Christ, but he was only the forerunner of Christ.

John the Baptist was not sorry now that his mission was almost finished and everyone was going to Jesus. On the contrary, John expressed his inner joy of serving the work of God as a servant of Christ. Look at verse 29, *“The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete.”* John compared Jesus to the bridegroom and himself to the best man for the groom. The bridegroom, not the best man, is the main focus of a wedding. The friend is there only to help the groom. This was the role of John the Baptist. John’s disciples were disappointed because people were following Jesus instead of their own leader. It is easy for anyone to become jealous of the success of another ministry. But John knew that his mission was to introduce Jesus to people, and he was happy to see that people were going to Jesus. John said, *“The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete.”* What an amazing statement! His disciples were filled with jealousy, but John had a deep inner joy. John was full of joy because he heard the voice of the bridegroom. He was happy to know Jesus personally. He also had the joy of introducing the Lord to people through his preaching. We can also experience this kind of deep joy in our hearts in two ways. First, we can experience joy when we hear the voice of Jesus as we study his word with a sincere heart. Our hearts flutter with joy when the word of truth touches us. Secondly, we can experience heavenly joy when we see our Bible students open their hearts to Jesus. This was the joy of John the Baptist. He said, *“That joy is mine, and it is now complete.”*



John also said, *“The bride belongs to the bridegroom.”* Who is the bride? The Bible says Jesus is our bridegroom and we are his bride. Revelation 19:7,8 read: *“Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride had made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.”* (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) We are waiting for our bridegroom’s second coming. This will be the culmination of human history. On this day, the joyful wedding of the Lamb of God and his bride will take place. We will be wearing fine linen, symbolizing the righteousness that comes from our faith in Jesus. It will be a judgment day for the wicked and a glorious day for the righteous. Isaiah 62:5 describes this joy. It says: *“As a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.”* John the Baptist knew this joy.

Let us read verse 30. *“He must become greater; I must become less.”* This verse sums up John’s life of mission. He never forgot that his mission was to prepare people’s hearts for the Lord. God calls us to be servants of our Lord Jesus. We should never forget that our focus must be on Jesus. There is a temptation for us to focus more on the success of our ministry than on Christ himself. But a ministry without Jesus at the center is like a lighthouse without a light or a hospital without doctors. John said, *“He must become*

*greater; I must become less.*” John humbled himself in order to magnify the name of Jesus.

*“He must become greater; I must become less.”* We can also apply this to our personal life of faith. How can we magnify the name of Jesus in our life? St. Paul encourages us in 1 Corinthians 10:31: “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” We are accustomed to ask the question, “What’s in it for me?” But Paul teaches us to ask the question, “Does this action glorify and honor the Lord?” Paul says that whatever we do, we must do it all for the glory of God. In other words, whatever we do, there must be a clear purpose in our hearts to please God. We must be a blessing to others and live a sacrificial life of faith for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no greater joy than the joy of living to glorify the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. John the Baptist had the joy of serving the Lord and his joy was complete.

## II. JOHN TESTIFIES MORE ABOUT JESUS (31-36)

After expressing his inner joy of serving God as the forerunner of Christ to his disciples, John the Baptist took the opportunity to testify about Jesus once again.

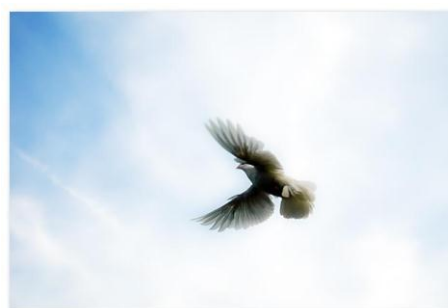
**First, Jesus is from above (31-33).** Look at verse 31. *“The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all.”* Jesus is God Incarnate (Jn 1:14). Jesus is the one who came from above. He is above all. Jesus is the Creator God and the source of human life. Therefore, no person’s life can be complete without Jesus. John the Baptist was a powerful, charismatic preacher. But he was not from above. John was saying to his disciples, “Don’t follow an earthly man like me now; follow the Son of God!”

Unfortunately, not everyone who heard John’s testimony believed in Jesus (32). Still, John did not give up. Look at verse 33. *“The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful.”* John the Baptist accepted the truth of God and preached the truth until the day he died.

**Second, Jesus and the Holy Spirit.** Let’s read verse 34. *“For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit.”* God sent Jesus to this world so that we may know who he is (Jn 1:18).

Jesus spoke the words of God to reveal who God is. As he spoke the words of God, the Holy Spirit was upon him without limit or measure. Thus Jesus was the highest revelation of God to humanity (Heb 1:2).

When we humbly accept his words, Jesus baptizes us with the Holy Spirit. People wonder why they are unhappy, even when they have many things in this world. Nicodemus was unhappy even though he was a very successful man. Jesus told him that he needed a spiritual life. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is love, joy and peace, to name just a few (Gal 5:22). A man of faith is happy even in the midst of hardship, because he has God in his life.



How wonderful it is to have peace and joy in Jesus, even when things don't go the way we want. Without Jesus we become selfish. We hurt others because of our sinful nature. When we have Jesus, we are like sheep under the good care of a shepherd who leads us into green pastures. We have the joy and peace that only our Lord Jesus can give us through the Holy Spirit.

**Third, Jesus gives us eternal life.** Look at verses 35-36. *“The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.”* This testimony of John the Baptist is very similar to what Jesus said earlier (3:16-18). People tend to value \$20 in their pocket more than eternal life. People also consider eternal life as something they can worry about when they get old. But we don't know what will happen to us tomorrow and we should pay attention to eternal life right now. Jesus once said, “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul?” (Mk 8:35-36). Our life is more important than anything in the world. That's why our God sent his one and only Son Jesus to give us life. Let's read again verses 35-36. *“The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.”*

The life of John the Baptist is an inspiration to all of us who want to live as servants of God. He humbly accepted the word of God and carried out his mission as the forerunner of Christ. He did his best to magnify the name of the Lord. He lived an uncomplicated life to focus on his mission. Most of all, his testimony was always clear. He pointed to Jesus and said, “Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” May God bless each of us to be a servant of God like John the Baptist!