

SESSION FIVE

The Superior One: *Finding Joy in Serving the Lord (John 3:22-36)*

“A sight of God’s glory humbles. The stars vanish when the sun appears.”
~ Thomas Watson

I. John the Baptist testifies concerning Jesus (3:22-36)

A. The disciples of John question Jesus’s activities (vv. 22-26)

3:25-26 A major question that arises from this passage is what was the nature of the dispute over purification between the Jews and the Baptist’s disciples? Hall Harris speculates that the Jews were reporting to John’s disciples that Jesus was setting aside the Jewish purification rituals. For John’s disciples this could be seen as falling away from Judaism and a break from John’s teachings. What the disciples of John missed is that Jesus looked to an inner cleansing—a new heart. John’s disciples also failed to grasp Jesus’s authority to overturn ritual purification.

B. John reiterates his role (vv. 27-30)

1. John is not the Messiah but the forerunner (vv. 27-28).

2. John is the bridegroom (vv. 29-30).

3:29 . . . *friend of the bridegroom, who stands by and listens for him, rejoices greatly* . . . The Baptizer identifies his role as the *shoshbin* (similar to the “best man”). This highly honored and joyous position functions as a witness to the wedding. The emphatic phrase, “rejoice with joy,” speaks to the wedding but may also reflect an eschatological overtone (see Mal 4:2; Lk 1:41). The *shoshbin* was also expected to help ensure the success of the wedding.

John’s life in many perspectives might appear worthless. He led a nomadic life, exhibited eccentric behavior, maintained an unusual diet, wore odd apparel, and delivered an offensive message. He forewent the joy of serving in the temple like his father, Zechariah. Ultimately, he winds up in prison and then beheaded. And yet, his life yielded dividends no money market or stock option could match!

Former German pastor and anti-Nazi dissident, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, wrote: “Self-denial is never just a series of isolated acts of mortification or asceticism. It is not suicide, for there is an element of self-will even in that. To deny oneself is to be aware only of Christ and no more of self, to see only him who goes before and no more the road which is too hard for us. Once more, all that self-denial can say is: ‘He leads the way, keep close to him.’” (*Cost of Discipleship*, 88).

C. John testifies to Christ's role (vv. 31-36)

3:31-34 One could argue that these verses not only serve as the capstone of chapter 3, but these words also summarize the entire book.

Note what John states concerning Jesus:

3:31 . . . *from above* . . . Stated twice in this verse, the phrase harkens the reader back to 3:13.

3:33 . . . *confirmed clearly* . . . The term is literally “marked with a seal” attesting to the validity of the documents to which the seal is attached. Those who receive Jesus confirm the validity of, not Jesus, but God (8:26; 1 Jn 5:10). As noted by one commentator, “To not ‘believe in the Son of God’ is to deny God Himself and make God a liar God entrusts His own credibility to the Son” (Michaels, *John*, 225).

II. Intersect

A. Service to the Lord allows us to be a great blessing to others.

Both in the promise of John's birth and in Zechariah's song of praise, John functioned as a prophet of the Most High. He served as the forerunner to the Messiah, the figurative Elijah, and the first to “announce” Jesus (i.e., leaping in Elizabeth's womb in Luke 1:41-44). No wonder Jesus declared John to be “the greatest born among women” (Matthew 11:11-15).

We must be careful not to base our value to the Lord's work on our giftedness, appearance, marital status, etc. F. B. Meyer writes, “Use what thou hast. The five barley loaves and two small fishes will so increase, so they are distributed, that they will supply the want of thousands. Do not dare to envy one more successful and used than thyself, lest thou be convicted of murmuring against the appointment of the Lord.” (*John the Baptist*, 93).

B. Service to the Lord allows us to receive great blessings.

1. Serving Jesus grants blessings in the present.

Colossians 1:9-14 -

“We humans are impressed with size and volume and numbers. It is easy to forget that God’s eye is always on motive, authenticity, the real truth beneath the surface, never the external splash . . . The dear older lady who prays will be rewarded as much as the evangelist who preaches to thousands. The quiet friend who assists another in need will be rewarded as much as the strong natural leader whose gifts are more visible.”

~ Charles Swindoll, *Improving Your Serve*, 195-196

2. Serving Jesus ensures blessings in the future.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 –

“An effective ministry has a very high price tag; but it is worth every penny!”

~ Howard Hendricks

3. Serving Jesus results in participating in the ultimate blessing—to be united with our Lord!

Philippians 3:20-21 -

“We are not meant to die merely in order to be dead. God could not want that for the creatures to whom He has given the breath of life. We die in order to live.”

~ Elisabeth Elliot, *Passion and Purity:*

Learning to Bring Your Love Life Under Christ’s Control