

John 3:22-36

Competition in Ministry

By this time, John the Baptist had achieved a great deal of popularity as the result of his preaching and baptizing. But he is no longer the only one baptizing. While in the Judean countryside, the disciples of our Lord baptized those who came to them. At the same time, John and his disciples were also baptizing.

Note: We would expect that John's baptism had not changed from what it had always been. His was a baptism of repentance in preparation for the coming of Messiah. Our Lord's baptism—or rather the baptism our Lord's disciples conducted in His name—was essentially the same as John's. His disciples could not baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit yet since our Lord had not yet been crucified, buried, and risen from the dead.

Verse 22 Who was doing the baptizing in the Judean countryside? This verse alone can be confusing. John 4:2 clearly says that Jesus was not baptizing—His disciples were.

Verse 23 “People were constantly coming to be baptized.” Describe John's ministry. Luke tells us that crowds went out to hear John. Matthew tells us that people came to him from “Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan” (Matthew 3:5). Apparently the multitudes included all segments of the population—Pharisees, Sadducees, tax collectors, soldiers, the rich, and the poor. John the Baptist has a large, devoted following!

What do we see going on between the disciples of Jesus and those of John the Baptist in verses 25-26? Competition for “baptizees” resulted in jealousy, rivalry, and bickering.

How would you describe the attitude of John the Baptist's disciples?

- Pride. *We were here first. This is our territory.*
- They were more focused on themselves and their ministry than on the spiritual condition of people coming to be baptized
- John the Baptist's disciples see the end in view—for themselves and for their ministry. *We're going to be out of a job if this keeps up!* Yet this is the way God meant it to be.

It is interesting to note that some of the greatest men in the Bible faced this problem of comparison and competition:

- John the Baptist John 3:26-30
- Moses Numbers 11:26-30
- Jesus and His disciples Luke 9:46-50
- Paul Philippians 1:15-18

Application: Are there any places we see examples of comparison and competition in the church today? Have you experienced it?

Verses 27-30 How would you describe the attitude of John the Baptist?

- John likens this situation to a wedding scene, where he is the best man at the wedding between Jesus and Jesus' followers.
- When the voice of the groom is heard, the best man knows his task is accomplished. He can rejoice that the bride and the groom are joined in marriage.
- “That joy is mine, and it is now complete.” He is losing his congregation to Jesus—and he is happy about it! John's joy comes from knowing Jesus Christ—and from knowing his relationship to Him.
- “He must become greater; I must become less.” His ministry was to announce that the Messiah had come, point the people to Jesus, and then to step back once Jesus appeared on the scene.

What does John the Baptist's response to the dissention in verses 27-30 tell us about him?

- He was in touch with God.
- He knew what his purpose was.
- He was a model of humility and Christian servanthood.
- Yet we have already seen that he was bold, unafraid, and unashamed! Clearly John understood that his ministry, his moment in the spotlight, and now his declining popularity, were all part of God's sovereign plan and purpose.

Application: Like John the Baptist, do you know your purpose in life? Perhaps you have a calling to minister to those in the military and/or their families! Your purpose/ministry/calling is not in competition with anyone else.

Why was John the Baptist able to remain humble in the midst of all this notoriety?

- A contributing factor in John the Baptist's humility was his own self-awareness. John the Baptist knew who he was and what it was to which God had called him.
- When John the Baptist said, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven" (v. 27), this was an awareness by John of God's sovereignty in all things. If the newcomer was attracting and winning more followers than John himself, this was not because he was stealing them away from John or acting dishonestly in presenting his claims. It was because God was giving them to Christ to be his followers.
- Another contributing factor in John the Baptist's humility was that he had his eyes fixed on Christ. He was the friend of the bridegroom, John said (John 3:29). It was not his wedding. His function was to serve the groom. This too applies to all Christians.

Is there any example from John the Baptist's life for us to follow? "He must increase, but I must decrease" should be the motto of every Christian, especially leaders among God's people. Jesus should become greater and more visible, and the servant should become less and less visible. It's all about Jesus. John the Baptist's disciples failed to understand that.

Application: How can we get to be humble like John the Baptist? Meditate, study, and read the Word of God so that you can increasingly comprehend the hugeness of God, the magnitude of the sacrifice (the Cross), and the depths of your own depravity.

Verses 31- 35 John documents the supremacy of Jesus Christ. How is Jesus superior?

- Jesus came from heaven.
- Jesus is above all.
- Jesus testifies to what He has seen and heard—speaks the Word of God.
- Jesus has the Spirit without limit.
- The Father loves Jesus.
- The Father has placed everything in His hands.

Verse 36 What are the two options given to us in this verse? Belief or unbelief. There is no middle ground. To try and ride the fence, to make no decision, is to reject Jesus. Because He is the Son of God, there is a heavy price to pay for rejecting Him. There are eternal consequences.

Application: Because of His supremacy, how will you react? What are you going to do with Jesus Christ?

Conclusion: The most important question anyone can ask and answer is, "Who is Jesus Christ?" The answer is the key to everything. It is the key to one's eternal destiny. It is the key to one's ministry and service. There is no room for competition in serving Him.

MEMORIZE: John 3:30