
Day 1

Memorize: Try memorizing John 3.35 or 3.36 this week.

Learn: Prayerfully read John 3.22-36 [first pray for enlightenment, then read thoughtfully, then ponder what you just read]. The apostle John points out that John the Baptist had not yet been to prison [3.24]. Thus we know that all we have read about Jesus so far in this gospel occurred before any of his ministry activities discussed in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Curiously, John 4.2 points out that it was not actually Jesus who was baptizing people, but his disciples, no doubt led by those who had been disciples of John the Baptist. Meanwhile, John the Baptist was still attracting people [3.23]. This makes it obvious that his complaining disciple was exaggerating when he said “everyone” was going to Jesus [3.26]. This complaint came despite the teachings of John the Baptist himself about Jesus being the Messiah. This disciple of John the Baptist was so loyal to his mentor that he could not understand clearly the teachings of his mentor!

Reflect: While it is good to learn from a pastor, mentor, or small group leader whom you respect and trust, and to be both faithful to do as they instruct and reliable in your relationships with them, be sure you understand that their role is to bring you closer to Jesus. They will do that in part by being relational with you, but their ultimate goal is to improve your relationship with Jesus. Prayerfully consider your relationships with those you respect and trust in the church. Are they guiding you to Jesus? If you do not have good relationships with a pastor, mentor, or small group leader, pray about cultivating them.

Want more? Scholar D.A. Carson tied together several passages thematically by asserting the following: in 2.1-11 we learn that Jesus rendered obsolete the stone jars of purification since he now offers real purification instead of ceremonial; in 2.12-25 we learn Jesus rendered obsolete the temple since he now offers real and permanent redemption and mediation with God in the New Covenant; in 3.1-21 we learn that Jesus fulfills the prophecies about a water and spirit regeneration and is the deliverer of grace foreshadowed by Moses holding up the snake staff in Numbers; and in 3.22-36 we see that Jesus surpasses John the Baptist and his rite of baptism for repentance [D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 208].

Day 2

Memorize: Practice your new verse and the other verses you memorized previously.

Learn: Prayerfully read John 3.22-36 in a different translation. In contrast to his jealous disciple, John the Baptist not only saw clearly that Jesus must surpass him in ministry importance, but also accepted this situation with grace and understanding [3.30]. John the Baptist showed that he knew and accepted his role in life, and that he trusted in God’s sovereignty about this issue [3.28-29]. Also, John the Baptist saw the praise and honor coming to Jesus as a fulfillment of his own ministry, and now his goal was to hand off that ministry and his disciples to Jesus, because only Jesus is the Messiah-Savior. John’s servant attitude, humility, and devotion to Christ is a proper response to the grace God gives us.

Reflect: Consider the role God has given you in ministry, which might include ministering in your family, at work, in the neighborhood, as a part of the church, and in other ways. Do you understand well the role God has given you at this time? Are you content with it, and do you believe you are responding to God’s grace properly? Are you seeking to point people to Christ the Savior? Can you rejoice and praise God when Christ is exalted instead of you?

Want more? In 3.27, the implication is that our gifting for ministry comes from God, our opportunities to minister come from God, and our success or failure in ministry comes from God. This can be frustrating if you are still intent on control in your life. But if you have submitted fully to God’s sovereignty in your life, this can be incredibly freeing! You can focus on the work God has given you to do, and let him worry about whether you are adequate to do it and whether any good will come from it. Also, when a ministry initiative seems to be ineffective, we can trust in God that he either is working in ways we cannot see or that it was part of his plan that this initiative end the way it has. This removes a great burden of anxiety, stress, and guilt from our shoulders!

Day 3

Memorize: Keep working on your memory verses. Try using flash cards at various times during the day.

Learn: Prayerfully read John 3.31-36. John the Baptist is a great prophet of God, but his teachings are limited to the revelation God has given him, and his ministry of calling people to repentance is limited similarly. In contrast, Jesus is from Heaven and of the same essence as God the Father, so he can reveal the nature of God to us and his ministry

involves much greater blessing to us, even regeneration to new life! Notice Jesus teaches what he knows, not some theory; he speaks the very words of God. The previous prophets, including John the Baptist, were anointed by the Holy Spirit to do their work for God, but their anointing was limited to what was needed for their task. In contrast, when the Son of God was here on Earth and working as a man [Jesus], he had unlimited divine empowerment, as symbolized by having the Holy Spirit's full anointing [3.34]. Because of all these things, Jesus' words are true. Thus, to believe in the teachings of Jesus is to trust in God and his previous revelation about the Messiah, and to doubt Jesus is to doubt God.

Reflect: As you are reading the words of Jesus, do you trust they are true? The identity and accomplishment of Jesus as revealed in the Bible are what sets true Christianity apart from all other religions, including many that call themselves Christianity but place doubt on what the Bible reveals about the identity and accomplishment of Jesus. Are you comfortable with your faith in Jesus, not just in God the Father? If you have questions, doubts, or concerns, talk to a pastor or your mentor/small group leader.

Want more? John's wedding illustration in 3.29 is interesting. Weddings and marriage serve as illustrations in several other verses: Isaiah 54.5-7; 62.4-5; Jeremiah 2.2; 3.20; Hosea 2.19-20; 2 Corinthians 11.2; Ephesians 5.25-33; Revelation 21.2, 9. Look a few of these up and think about them a little; what do they imply for you?

Day 4

Memorize: Practice your verses during a coffee break, while eating, while brushing your teeth, while in an elevator, whenever you have a few seconds... and be blessed as you hear from God!

Learn: Prayerfully read John 3.35. This verse could have an "eschatological" meaning, in other words it might have something to do with the end times. There are many prophecies about the end times in the Bible, and they point to the Messiah having all authority over creation, as granted by God the Father. On the other hand, it could pertain to Jesus' life on Earth, meaning that God the Father had empowered Jesus – God the Son – to do whatever was necessary during his human life on Earth. The apostle John might have meant both when he wrote this verse. We know that God has anointed Jesus as our Savior [Luke 2.11; Acts 5.31], as the head of the church [Ephesians 1.22; Colossians 1.18], and as the king who will rule the world when he returns [1 Timothy 6.15; references to Jesus fulfilling Psalms 2 & 110, such as Matthew 21.5; 1 Corinthians 15.25]; therefore, as believers in Jesus, we must submit to Jesus.

Reflect: An important step as believers cooperating in the transformation [*sanctification*] process is to decide we will trust and obey Jesus. We must have faith in Christ to lead us in our earthly life, not just save us to eternal life. If we walk with Christ, we submit to do whatever he commanded in Scripture. When this willingness is beyond us, we can submit by praying to be made willing. This commitment to follow Christ's example and commands is required of every believer [1 John 2.4-6; 1 Corinthians 11.1]. An ongoing theme throughout the Bible is that God desires 100% of our devotion and 100% of our dependence. Are you submitting to Christ? Are there areas of life you are still trying to control?

Day 5

Memorize: Practice your new verse! Share it with others!

Learn: Prayerfully read John 3.36. We see again that faith in Christ is the only way to eternal life. The apostle John repeats this theme over and over, as he reveals more and more about who Jesus is. John wants us to understand Jesus' identity as the Son of God and Messiah [Christ], and to believe in him so we can be saved [20.30-31]. So throughout this gospel, John shows us that Jesus is the deliverer promised by the prophets, the savior who can forgive sin, the Son of God, the unique one who appeared as both God and man, the one Moses predicted would come, and the suffering servant of Isaiah who would die on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. John will reveal some things about what Jesus taught and some things about what Jesus did, but his goal throughout is to convince us about who Jesus is. If we believe in what God has revealed through John about who Jesus is, then we easily can believe in what Jesus came to do for us, and when we believe in those two things, we have accepted the gospel.

Reflect: 3.36 also says that God's wrath remains on the one who rejects Jesus. All people deserve God's wrath, because all of us are born with a corrupted nature passed down by our ancestors [inherited sin], all are held accountable for the corruption of the human race [imputed sin], and all choose to do things contrary to God's will [acts of sin]. God freely offers to forgive all this and reconcile with us through Jesus paying the penalty for our sin on the cross. All he asks of us is to trust and believe in this deliverance, to appropriate it for ourselves and become one of his people by faith. What do you believe about Jesus and his death and resurrection? Is your trust in God's deliverance from sin strong? Are you assured that you are destined for God's loving embrace instead of his wrath? Don't be afraid to talk these things through with spiritual leaders in your church.