

John 3.22-36 Sermon / COB / 03.02.14

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: title/map]** Good morning! You should have a blank piece of paper in your bulletin today, please pull it out. Raise your hand if you don't have one, this is for everybody in the room.
- Put the blank paper on top of a Bible or hymnal, and place your left hand on it. Now trace your hand with a pen or pencil. There should be a pen in the chair back in front of you. Everyone got a hand print on the paper now?
 - On the pinky finger, write "listen." On the ring finger, write "read." On the middle finger, write "memorize." On the index finger, write "study." On the thumb, write "reflect/apply." These are ways you can interact with God's Word during the week: you can listen to a teaching, read the Bible, memorize a verse, study a passage, and reflect on a passage so you can apply it to life.
 - Now let's suppose you come to church faithfully, but that is all you do. Take out your Bible or grab one from the seat in front of you. If all you have is a hymnal, you can pretend it is a Bible. Now tell me how long you could hold on to God's Word by balancing it only on your pinky finger... how long? Not at all, right? That's what it is like trying to hold on to God's Word by only listening to the sermon. You will forget most of what I say by the end of lunch today.
 - What if you listen and read. Lot's better! But is it good enough? Try holding the Bible with just your pinky and your ring finger. Anyone think they can make it through the day without dropping it? I once had a guitarist who said he thought he could, so I showed him the big Bible!
 - The best way to hold onto what God has for you in his Word is to do all of these activities, but especially the index finger and thumb, especially study and reflect/apply. Then you can begin to learn and absorb the teaching, and begin to see change in your character and lifestyle. That's why I invest so much time in making these sermon-based devotions. I care about you, and want to ensure you are spiritually healthy and growing.
- † Ok, keep that hand print, take it home, and let it prompt you into spending some time in the Bible this week. If you are doing other devotions, this is not a push to get you to do mine instead, I just want to be sure you are getting fed solid food, so you grow.
- When I started making devotions for high school students, we saw a dramatic improvement in Bible study habits. When I started making them for the adult church, we saw hundreds of people who were not doing devotions at all start to interact with God's Word, and their feedback was very encouraging.
 - I have gotten some very positive feedback from several of you too. This is not surprising: if you do something with the sermon teaching during the week, your capacity for retaining what you learned improves by 900%.
- † Let us now pray and then we will take a look at our passage...
- We are starting today at John 3.22, so turn there in your Bible, if you will.
 - [discuss pretty map from Zondervan; mention Schlegel's *Satellite Bible Atlas*]

[Slide 2: 3.22-24/map] John 3.22-24 [NET]: After this [after Jesus' talk with Nicodemus], Jesus and his disciples came into Judean territory, and there he spent time with them and was baptizing. John [the Baptist] was also baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming to him and being baptized. (For John had not yet been thrown into prison.)

- † We know from 4.1-2 that Jesus actually was not baptizing people, his disciples were. So why does it say here that he was baptizing? In Greek, this is called a “causative active voice,” and it means Jesus caused the baptizing, or, in other words, Jesus was having his disciples baptize people. I am not trying to teach you Greek, I just don't want you to be confused next week when we see the text say Jesus himself was not baptizing.
 - We recently talked about baptism in depth, so we will not discuss it today. If you are interested in understanding John's baptism, Christian water baptism, or Spirit baptism, let me know or go to our website, cotobible.com, and download the devotion and sermon for January 26.
- † Last week, we heard a discussion between Jesus and a religious leader named Nicodemus, which took place in Jerusalem, marked by the lowest star on our map. Jesus and his disciples left Jerusalem, which is in the mountains, and travelled downhill to Jericho and then up the Jordan River valley, not too far since they are still in Judea. Meanwhile, John the Baptist was several miles north along the river, at Aenon near Salim. On the map, this is the upper star, toward Galilee.
- † It is interesting that John the Baptist continued to baptize even after Jesus started his ministry. Remember, John was confronting people of their sin, and telling them to repent – to change their ways – because the Messiah was coming from God. Now Jesus has been revealed as the Messiah by John the Baptist himself, yet John continued his ministry, calling people to repent and turn back to God, to trust and believe in the Messiah who has come.

[Slide 3: 3.25-26/painting] John 3.25-26: Now a dispute came about between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew concerning ceremonial washing. So they came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, the one who was with you on the other side of the Jordan River, about whom you testified— see, he is baptizing, and everyone is flocking to him!”

- † As we learned when discussing the wedding miracle, the Jews had rituals for ceremonial cleansing, to symbolically remove the defilement or taint of sin. It was part of their submission to God and acknowledgment of their need for repentance and divine cleansing.
 - John the Baptist was demanding a more emphatic step than the Law or custom usually required: his teaching was that it was not enough to go through the motions, people had to have a change of heart, they had to really be sorry for sin and desire to walk with God. And he asked that they symbolize this heart change and desire for divine cleansing with baptism in the Jordan River. No doubt, this was the topic of the argument between this unnamed fellow and John's disciples.
 - As we learned a few weeks ago when studying the miracle at the wedding in Cana, the time for ceremonial washing was coming to a close. The New Covenant was now coming through Christ to replace the Mosaic Covenant, beginning a new era in mankind's relationship with God. We have talked about the New Covenant some already, but I will remind you here that we now turn to a new source for a new kind of cleansing: we turn to Jesus for cleansing in God's sight – which we call justification – and for cleansing of our character that comes by the work of the Holy Spirit – which we call progressive sanctification.

- † Probably, the issues brought up in the argument made John's disciples consider why they were doing this ministry, why Jesus now had his disciples doing the same, and what they should do about the fact that Jesus was now more popular than their own Rabbi, John the Baptist.
 - So John the Baptist's disciples came to him and complained that Jesus was baptizing also, and "everyone" was going to him now. Obviously, this was exaggeration, because we see that some people were still going to John the Baptist for their baptism, but apparently enough people were going to Jesus that John was seeing a decrease in traffic.
 - Now recall that John the Baptist has identified Jesus as the Messiah, has stated that he is lower than a slave compared to the Messiah and lives to point people to the Messiah, and has already handed off some of his disciples to the Messiah. So these disciples who remained with John the Baptist and don't understand that it is a good thing that Jesus is popular must have been the more obtuse ones, who did not get or did not believe their own Rabbi's teachings about who Jesus was! Let's see what John the Baptist says to them...

[Slide 4: 3.27-28/painting] John 3.27-28: John replied, "No one can receive anything unless it has been given to him from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but rather, 'I have been sent before him.'

- † As I just mentioned, John the Baptist knows his purpose is to point to Christ and his value is much less than Christ, and he is ok with that. He trusts God's sovereignty in his life, he is willing to be and do what God has given him to be and do.
 - John the Baptist shows a servant attitude, humility, and devotion to Christ. We should seek to have these qualities in our selves.
- † John the Baptist said, "No one can receive anything unless it has been given to him from heaven." The implication is that it is God who equips us for life and ministry, God who gives us opportunities to serve him, and God who determines our success or failure, our prominence or obscurity. John the Baptist was ok with that and accepted the role God had given him.
 - We sometimes find this difficult to accept, don't we? First of all, we don't want to be humble, we want to be proud; we want the praise to come to us, not just to Christ. We want to be known as a great preacher, an effective evangelist, a super-mom, the best boss, good at whatever it is that we do.
 - Second, we like to have control. It's the same for us as it was for Adam and Eve, right? God gives us things to do and tells us to trust him; we don't want to do the things God has given us to do and we don't like feeling we don't control the outcome.
 - So if we succeed, we want the credit. And to succeed, we are determined to guide our own destiny. But this is not what it means to be a godly person, to walk by the Spirit. If this church succeeds or dies, it will not be my doing. I just come here every day and try to do what God has told me to do; the outcome is up to him. It is God who will bring new people to faith here, it is God who will soften your hearts so you will seek to grow more like Christ, it is God who will inspire you to develop your ministry in partnership with this church.
- † The good thing is, that if we can accept God's sovereignty, then we can experience a lot of peace. If you lose your job, it does not mean you are a bad husband, father, or employee, it just means God

has something else for you. If you get laughed at for sharing the gospel, it does not mean you are not good at sharing the gospel, it means God is using this experience to grow you. If you can give your all to the ministry while letting go of the control of the outcome, it is liberating!

- Just come do what God has given us to do, and let God worry about the results. This is related to what we said before about walking the top line by God's revelation: do the right thing, and let God take care of the consequences. You might not always like the results, but at least you need not feel the blame, for you did what God asked. If you never got the handout on walking the top line by God's revelation instead of the bottom line by human wisdom, let me know.

[Slide 5: 3.29-30/painting] John 3.29-30: [John the Baptist continued:] "The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands by and listens for him, rejoices greatly when he hears the bridegroom's voice. This then is my joy, and it is complete. He must become more important while I become less important."

- † John the Baptist sees the popularity of Jesus as a reason for his own joy. He delights in the presence of Jesus, the coming of Christ, and he is eager to see Jesus gain in importance even though he knows that means his own importance will diminish.
- † The apostle John continues to show us not only who Jesus is but how important he is. Scholar D.A. Carson points out in his commentary on this gospel, that there are implications in the series of events John has been sharing with us.
 - In the scene about the wedding miracle, we learned that Jesus renders obsolete the process of ceremonial cleansing, since he now offers real purification.
 - In the temple clearing scene, we learned that Jesus renders obsolete the temple, since he now offers real and permanent mediation with God through the New Covenant.
 - In the scene with Nicodemus, we learned that Jesus fulfills the prophecies about a water and spirit regeneration and is the deliverer of grace as foreshadowed by Moses holding up the snake staff during the exodus.
 - And now we learn that Jesus surpasses John the Baptist and his rite of baptism for repentance. To repent means to acknowledge we were wrong, and commit to changing our ways; it is to go from walking by human wisdom and now begin walking by God's revelation.
 - We first repent of our lack of faith by accepting who Jesus is and what he has done for us in his crucifixion and resurrection, and then as believers we repent of our sinfulness by seeking transformation by the Holy Spirit so we can be like Christ.
- † It is interesting that John the Baptist refers to Jesus as the bridegroom here. As we mentioned before, this metaphor of Jesus being the groom with the church as his bride is repeated a few times in the Bible.
 - John the Baptist might have had that idea in mind, but the thrust of his point is simply that Jesus is the most important person, so nobody should be jealous of the attention and success Jesus is having. John knew his ministry was to promote Jesus.

[Slide 6: 3.31-34/movie] John 3.31-34: The one who comes from above is superior to all. The one who is from the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is superior to all. He testifies about what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his

testimony. The one who has accepted his testimony has confirmed clearly that God is truthful. For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he [God the Father] does not give the Spirit [to the Son] sparingly.

- † Just like last week, we cannot tell exactly when the dialogue between our characters ends and the narration by our author begins, because they did not use quotation marks in those days. But as I said last week, it is not that important, since it all is the revelation of God in any case.
- † John the Baptist was a great prophet from God, but like all the previous prophets, he was limited in what he could understand and teach. Jesus was not only a prophet from God, he was the Son of God himself, part of the triune God of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So Jesus can reveal anything and everything, even the nature of God himself.
- † As Jesus said to Nicodemus in our passage last week, Jesus was teaching what he knew from being in Heaven with God the Father.
 - While walking the earth as a man, Jesus was the divine Son of God in the flesh and he also was fully anointed with the Holy Spirit. Because Jesus was fully in unity with God the Father at all times, he spoke the words of God.
 - So Jesus' teachings are true, and the one who accepts those teachings confirms that God is truthful. In other words, to believe in the teachings of Jesus is to trust in God and his previous revelation about the Messiah who would come; to doubt Jesus is to doubt God.
- † The apostle John says that "no one" was accepting Jesus' testimony. This obviously is hyperbole, an exaggeration to make a point, since in the next verse he talks about those who do accept Jesus' testimony. His point here was that Jesus' own people, especially the religious leaders, overwhelmingly rejected Christ's teachings about his own identity and offer of salvation.

[Slide 7: 3.35-36/king] John 3.35-36: The Father loves the Son and has placed all things under his authority. The one who believes in the Son has eternal life. The one who rejects the Son will not see life, but God's wrath remains on him.

- † There can be no doubt that the Father loves the Son. This would be obvious just by their identification as being in the same Godhead of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!
 - But we have ample proof. In the past eight months, we have seen several Old Testament prophecies and New Testament clarifications that show God the Father's plan is to put all things under the authority of Christ the Son.
 - Jesus is not just the greatest prophet and eternal high priest, he is the head of the church, the one who will judge the living and the dead, and the chosen King and ultimate representative of God the Father for eternity.
 - As v.35 says, God "has given all things into his hand," an idiom for saying God has placed all things under his authority.
- † One implication of this is that those of us who believe should be seeking to trust and obey Jesus every day in our lives. We should be following Christ, not just relying on Christ. We should be adopting his priorities and attitudes, and doing the things he told us to do. We must have faith in Christ to lead us in this life, not just faith in Christ to lead us to eternal life.

- Suppose one of the Wrigley boys comes to his parents today, and he says, “Mom, Dad, I love you both so much! And I trust that you will take care of me, feed me, keep me safe and well. But I don’t think I should have to obey you or listen to your guidance, that’s just not for me...”
 - It doesn’t work that way, right? Such an attitude would be irreverent toward God, rebellious, sinful. We need to submit to Christ every day, even moment by moment accepting his will for our lives.
- † When talking about those who believe in v.36, we have a special Greek construction, a present active participle of the Greek verb πιστεύω. As I explained last week, that is one way the apostle John signals true faith, because it indicates that true faith is ever continuous, ongoing, present and permanent. The one who is *believing* in the Son of God as revealed in scripture has eternal life.
- Why? As we said last week, to believe in the Son is to believe not only in who Jesus is as the Son of God, but also in what he offers us in salvation. If you believe in this promise of deliverance, then you believe Jesus paid the penalty for your sin on the cross, and in his resurrection proves that he can give you new life, spiritual life now through the Holy Spirit and resurrected physical life after death.
 - This is great news, because we all were condemned from the start for three reasons: first, because of our tainted human nature, from sin tainting the image of God we were created to be; second, because of the guilt associated with the whole human race rebelling against God; and third, because of the guilt from our own acts of sinful waywardness.
 - We were all condemned, but God offers us a way to forgiveness and cleansing, to reconciliation and peace with God: all we have to do is believe in his promise of deliverance through Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection; just believe in his promise, trust his word.
 - To reject that promise, to refuse to believe as the HCSB says, to disobey the teachings of the Son as it literally says in the Greek, is to remain condemned and facing God’s wrath for sin.

Conclusion

- † **[Slide 8: blank]** Theologically, most of this is review today, but that is ok, because it gives us an opportunity to explore our response more. Today, John emphasized that Jesus is the divine Son of God, who came from Heaven to be born in the flesh as the baby Jesus, to be the promised Christ/Savior.
- And because Jesus came from Heaven, he can teach heavenly truths beyond what any merely human prophet ever could; Jesus not only speaks for God the Father, he speaks God’s very words; and God the Father has placed all things under Jesus’ authority.
- † God asks us to respond in two ways. First, we are to believe the promise of God, that we can be saved from the condemnation we deserve, that we can receive forgiveness, cleansing, a new relationship with God, and eternal life, all through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, by which he took our penalty for sin and appeased God the Father’s wrath. If you believe Jesus is the Son of God who died for you in this way, then you receive the very promise which you believe: you are delivered, saved by God’s grace through faith in Christ.
- † Second, we are to extend that belief into daily life. Eternal life does not begin when you physically die, you know; it begins the moment you put your trust in Jesus. If you believe in who Jesus is, then

you understand that God has placed all things under the authority of Jesus, and that includes you and your life. Jesus is the head of the church, God's eternal king over the earth, the single ultimate representative of God the Father. We as God's people submit to his king, and follow the king's leadership so that we can represent God on the earth, so we can learn to live up to the image of God which we were created and saved to be.

- † This means trusting in the way of Christ as revealed in scripture, trusting that living his way is the best way, even though it means sacrifice, struggle, and discipline; even though it means giving up our desires for his, giving up our priorities for his, giving back our time, energy, and money for him.
 - Like John the Baptist, we seek to learn how to be servant hearted, humble, devoted to Christ and his mission, trusting God's sovereignty in our lives, doing whatever God commands and trusting God with the results, and always giving the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit all the praise for our successes.
- † Living not just with Christ but for Christ is a challenge. And it does not always appeal to our flesh. But the more we submit, the more free we will be. That's the miracle of God's economy. The more we become slaves to Christ, the more we will be free of the tyranny of sin, flesh, our cultural expectations, and Satan.
 - Let's pray...

[Slide 9 for communion: crucifixion]