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## John 3:22-36 *Christ must become more in us!*

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Into Thy Word Ministries Bible Study [www.intothyword.org](http://www.intothyword.org)

**General Idea:** The disciples of Jesus started to baptize people in Judea at the same time John and his disciples were still baptizing people nearby at Salim, because people kept coming to Him there. Various conflicts occurred with John. His right to baptize was being challenged by the Jewish leadership, both for what it meant and what ceremony was being used, and John's disciples did not understand why there were two groups doing this—theirs and Jesus'. John replied that each of them had work to do for God; *I am preparing people for the Messiah and He is the Messiah to whom I am sending people now. We should rejoice in this; I must become less and He will become greater. He, Jesus, has come from above; the Spirit is in Him; He is greater and has no limit and His work will continue, while mine is limited and nearly done. Jesus knows and speaks God's Word, His knowledge is from Heaven while mine is limited and bound to this world. The point is, those who believe in Him will discover that God is real and true for their lives now and forevermore. God sent Him and loves Him; Jesus is God's eternal Son and those who believe in Him will not experience God's anger over sin but will receive eternal life. Those who reject Him will also receive the just wrath of God: eternal damnation.*

### Contexts and Background:

This passage is about the supreme example and witness of John the Baptist as his work overlapped that of Jesus for a short time before it concludes, while Jesus' superior work was now at hand. The imagery is that of a wedding, and Jesus is the Bridegroom, the highest place of honor and the purpose of the wedding, while John is the Best Man, whose role it was to prepare. While the wedding is over—Christ's work on the cross—the marriage, our salvation, continues because of Christ's eternal role and work. John was used mightily. Even though he did no miracles, he prepared people for Jesus and his work continues to resonate throughout history. This is also about the how the Gospel Message must impact us, and that Christ, His Will and His work, become greater than our will and the occupations of our lives. His work enables us for our task in the church—to proclaim Christ as Lord, His character, righteousness, peace, and joy, all by the Holy Spirit. It also showcased the coming of the Kingdom and that a new stage in God's redemptive plan was coming: CHRIST. The meaning for us is our personal identification and relationship to our Lord and Savior! We need to bow to His Lordship for our betterment and growth!

### Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings:

- *Jesus and his disciples... baptized.* Jesus Himself did not baptize; rather His disciples were doing it in His name and He oversaw it, just as He does today. Christian *Baptism*, that both Jesus' followers then and we still participate in today, is a sign that we have committed to Him and have changed. It is our label on the package of who we are. Baptism signifies faith and every element of our salvation from death to life. This is also about our union and commitment in Christ, which signifies our real immersion, that we are identified in Him, not the actual means and ways of the ceremony. The point is, we no longer belong to the world; rather, we have been transformed and renewed and this is the testimony to this happening. Because of Christ, we die to sin, and now we have new life in Him. Sin is no longer our occupation and drive; rather, we are focused upon Christ as our Lord (Matt. 15:1-2; John 2:6; 3:5; 4:2,13; 7:38-39; 11:55; Rom. 6:3-4).
- *John also was baptizing.* John's "proselyte" baptism was a ritual to signify the transition from the Law of the Old Testament to the new covenant and of the superiority of grace. The point of John's baptism was a preparation for people to know about and see the coming of our Lord and the new age of grace. The world was not ready for Christ; we have the barriers of sin, blindness to our need for Him, and our pride saying *I can do it*, and the point here is that only Christ can penetrate our barriers (John 1:5, 10-11, 15; Matt. 11:11).
- *Aenon... Salim.* In the Jordan Valley, west of the Jordan River between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea, a specific location is lost in time.

- *Plenty of water.* Most of the Jordan River was not deep enough to perform baptisms; most people then used the plentiful ceremonial pools for cleansing ceremonies. John's disciples may have felt lost and left out of the loop or jealous and did not know what to do. Later, we will see them turn and follow Christ (Mark 1:4-5).
- *Before John was put in prison.* John would eventually offend the Jewish and civil leadership to the point that he would be arrested and then put to death (Matt. 14:1-12; Mark 6:14-29).
- *Argument ...ceremonial washing.* The Jews in Jesus' time were engrossed in purification ceremonies and the right way to achieve, missing the point of what they were about.
- *Given him from heaven.* Meaning the authority of the mission comes from the One who sent us to do it. God is the Author of life, salvation, and our Christian service. This also measures the mission parameters: what are we doing and why? Is it for Him or for us? Christ sends us, and our real authority and purpose is that we have to do what comes from God. When we lose sight of Him, we lose sight of our mission and become problems and not partakers of His Kingdom. Real ministry can never come from a person's will, his/her seeking of power and control, or to make a name for him or her self. Real ministry only comes from our Lord and always gives Him the glory. If we are a leader, we must not just keep Christ in the loop—He *is* the loop. We must adhere to Him in all that we are and do (John 6:65; 19:11; 1 Cor. 4:7)!
- *Bride... bridegroom... friend who attends.* This refers to the "shosbin," like a best man who is responsible for the coordination of the wedding. He would have been a close friend of the groom who gave practical, personal, and moral support. He also acted like a godparent to the couple. But the purpose of the marriage is not about the *friend who attends*; rather it is the union of the groom to the bride. It is like that in ministry; we are the coordinators, and the reason is Christ, His work being performed and extended. He uses us as a means to accomplish His continual work. This is also an illustration that as followers of Christ, we have a profound friendship with Him; we are His servants, protectors, and heralds.
- *Joy is mine.* Our happiness is not because of a focus of a ministry or an opportunity; rather that God is using us and because Christ is with us! The context is that a wedding is a celebration of friendship and commitment that produces joy. This is not passive on our part; we are active "in with" faith that gives us the joy now when we follow Him (Rom. 2:5-16; 3:22; 5:10; 9:30).
- *He must become greater; I must become less.* Meaning our intimacy with Christ gives us the confidence and completeness to know and do His purpose. This is the hallmark of Christian maturity. John the Baptist's sole mission was to testify about Jesus so people might believe in Him (Isa. 43:10; 44:8; John 3:27-30; 10:41; 20:21). For us, this means we can have the "fullness" to live out our new lives by being loyal and faithful to our living Lord. If we are truly devoted to Christ, we will be devoted to the things of Christ—His interests, principles, and plan. The key is to realize Christ is our Lord—not our own ideas, situations, fears or experiences or what others have to say. We can have the fullness and abundance of life with Christ, to live and perform from what we think and trust. The key is to keep our minds and hearts in Christ. This attitude is what spurs on our commitment and our service to Him. Without persevering with Christ, we cannot keep trying to persuade others well, or even at all. Our relationship in Christ will reflect His work in us and be the beacon of hope to others. This is how we are to live out our lives and be examples of hope for others to follow (Isa. 7:9; Matt. 28:18; John 5:22; Acts 1:14; 2:42; 6:4; Rom. 12:12; 1 Cor. 11:1; Eph. 6:18; Col. 1:3-12; 3:2)!
- *Comes from above.* Meaning Christ is set apart from all others. He is superior and LORD. Jesus Christ has the highest standing as Creator, Sustainer, and Head. He reconciles us, gives us our hope, and is the source of all we are and have; in addition, He is our wisdom, our redemption, our empowerment, and our life. His glory radiates throughout the universe and must also radiate in and through us, both personally and collectively as a Church, all pointing to Him. This refers to Divine Wisdom that can only come from God in heaven; it can't come from our own being. (Acts 13:33-34; Rom. 1:4; 1 Cor. 15:47; Eph. 1:20-23; Phil. 2:1-11; Col. 1:18; Heb. 1:4-5)!

- *From the earth.* Meaning the wisdom that comes from man's sinful thinking. We are limited in what we can know or comprehend; even the best due diligence of research will not produce what God has or can give.
- *Testifies.* This is a legal term to attest to the validity of the claim, like important documents in ancient times that were folded or rolled, tied with a string, and then wax or clay placed on the seam, and impressed with a signet ring (Rev. 7:1-8; 9:4; 14:1; 22:4). Here this is denoting that there is nothing fake in Christ. This can also refer to giving credence to what is being said—that this is not the author's idea; it is God's (Jer. 31:31-34; Acts. 4:25; Heb. 4:25; 8:8-12).
- *God is truthful.* John is the herald to the Christ and then Jesus is the principal and prime Witness. He is our hope and light to whom we can look for strength of faith and perseverance, and so our testimony will be strengthened (Isa. 43:8-12; 44:8-9; John 1:6-18; 1 John 5:10; Rev. 3:14; 19:10-11; 22:6, 16-20).
- *God gives the Spirit.* People then thought (and many Jewish teachers taught) that the Spirit had been quenched in Israel and only people like Moses and David had access to the Spirit. Thus, the average person could never hope to have the Spirit within them. But now as believers, we have a permanent relationship with and access to the Spirit's power and help. This also indicates the power and position of Christ to give us the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:22; 4:1; John 15:26; Gal. 4:4; 1 John 4:9-14).
- *Rejects the Son.* We have two choices: to accept Christ or to reject Him; but we can only receive Him by His empowerment. This is not about ignorance, but rather willful disobedience. God gives the Son the ability to redeem and acquit the judgment on the person of faith who trusts in Christ. He also authorizes the continuance of the sentence of judgment and conviction to those who reject Christ.
- *Will not see life.* Meaning the wicked that suppress God's truth and His character will not see the goodness of God, nor receive His gift of heaven. We have no excuse, for God reveals Himself through His creation. The good news for us is that God imputes His righteousness unto us by what Christ has done; He declares us righteous so we will see life now and forever more (Rom. 3:21-26; 5:10-19; 10:3). This declaration means we, as the elect, are free from our debt of sin, but we as debtors are to be witnesses to the lost (Rom. 1:18-32; Rev. 14:14-20; 15:1-8)!
- *God's wrath.* This means God's just and righteous anger toward sin and our pending and just judgment that is coming, and that it will become a reality. No one can escape this—either His love or His wrath (Joel 2:11; Mal. 3:2). This is something Christians need not fear as Christ covers our sin for us (Zeph. 1:14-18; Nah. 1:6; Mal. 3:2; Rom. 1:18; 3:9-23; 6:23; Rev.19:15). There is hope and assurance when our trust is in Christ and His righteousness. He is our hope, even when the very foundations of the universe are collapsing around and under us. When our hope is in Christ, nothing can shake us (Matt. 25:46; Luke 12:32-34; John 1:6-18; 1 Cor. 7:29-31; 2 Thess.1:7-9; Heb. 12:25-29; Rev. 6:16-17; 11:18; 14:10; 16:19; 19:15).

### **Devotional Thoughts and Applications:**

We must realize the sacredness of our Lord and Savior; we must acknowledge His Holiness so He touches us ever so deeply and consistently in every aspect of our lives. His life and work must overshadow ours, so He is more and we are less. In order to reach Christian maturity, we have to allow His Presence to enter us. He does so at our conversion, but we usually only allow Him into the entryway of our lives, not into the deep recess of our heart's home. He must have access to every bit and part, every nook and cranny; every corner must be filled with Christ so that He is more and we are less. We have to see our lives compared to a hamster on a spinning wheel, going nowhere in the cage of the world. Let Jesus take you outside of yourself and will so you are not imprisoned by your fears and felt desires and needs. What we have is ever so limited and imperfect; what He has for us is limitless and impacting. Be transformed and renewed; be His and His alone so your life shines His Way; allow His uniqueness and impact to take you beyond your own set limits and your doubts into the far reaches and depths of your spiritual formation so you are more faithful, assured, and fruitful, because your life belongs to Christ. He is your LORD, so be and do and act in accordance with who He is and what He has done for you!

**The Essential Inductive Questions** (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

**Additional Questions:**

1. How would you explain Christian Baptism? Why do some Christians argue about this today? Are they missing the point of what it is supposed to be about?
2. Why do you think that Jesus' and John's disciples were baptizing people at the same time in different locations?
3. What do you think of John's statement, "I must become less and He will become greater?" What does this mean? What does this mean to you? How is this a reflection of your spiritual life? How can it be more so?
4. How did you discover that God is real and true for your life now and forevermore? How can you testify about this more and better to others? What holds you back?
5. Do you believe that those who reject Christ deserve God's just wrath and eternal damnation? Why do many people balk at this?
6. How would you describe your personal identification and relationship to our Lord and Savior?
7. Do you know your need to bow to Christ's Lordship for your betterment and growth? What needs to take place so a Christian who is self-focused will become Christ-focused?
8. How do you know that what you are doing and why you are doing it are what you are supposed to be doing? Is it for Christ or for your self?
9. Do you know that how we live out our lives is the example of hope for others to follow? What happens when we rather rely on our ideas, situation, fears, experiences or what others have to say?
10. How does Jesus' work enable you to proclaim Christ as Lord, His character, righteousness, peace, and joy? How can you do this without opening your mouth? How will your words be used to articulate this more? How does it help you to know that you are not alone, but that the Holy Spirit will lead you?
11. How has the Gospel Message impacted you? What do you need to do so that Christ, His Will, and His work become greater in you than your will and the occupations of your life? What do you need to do to make this happen? When will you do it?
12. What work do you think you still need to do for God? What do you need? How will you do it? When will you do it?