

John Ch 3:22-36

“Believe Me; It’s A Matter Of Life And Death”

That’s sort of the theme that’s woven throughout the entire 3rd Ch of the gospel of John. “Belief”, making the difference between life and death and it’s how the chapter is going to round off and close out with as well. You know, when my taking heed to something makes the difference between life and death, don’t you know that I’m all ears! I don’t mess around when it comes to my life, when I’m on a missions trip and the contact person, or the local guide (or whatever) begins to give me instructions as to what to do, and what not to do, what’s acceptable in such and such a culture, and what’s not, *I listen*. Because I don’t want to get out there and something go suddenly, devastatingly wrong because I wasn’t doing what I needed to do even though it was clearly laid out for me what it took stay safe (and for that matter *alive*). Because sometimes it’s just that serious, my taking what they say at face value and following their instructions can be the difference between life and death.

I’ve done a fair amount of flying over the years, and now I’m one of those guys who just sort of pays attention out of respect, but I’ve been known to read a book or sort of drift off into my own world when the flight attendant is beginning to go over the proper protocol of “Airplane etiquette.” But I’ll guarantee you that the 1st couple of times I sat in a plane, you couldn’t get my attention off what she had to say because it was a matter of life and death, and I took her words to heart and was prepared to act on them because it was just that serious.

Well, in like manner the things Jesus has to say, and what you do with the testimony regarding Him is a matter of life and death, but on a much higher level than the here and now because we’re dealing with the eternal. and So the plea of Jesus is, “*Believe Me*, it’s a matter of life and death.” You guys it’s just that serious, it’s like when Paul said, “*Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*” 2 Cor 5:20-21 So the plea is, “Be reconciled to God”, the means is through Christ, reconciliation to God comes by faith in Jesus Christ The only thing that makes the difference between reconciliation *to* God, and the wrath *of* God being poured out upon your life is you, whether you choose to believe in Jesus Christ or remain in the dark, keeping hold of your sin rather than taking hold of your Savior.

That’s how we ended our time together last week, by exposing the reality of condemnation, that people refuse to come to the light, they refuse to come to Jesus Christ because they love their sin more than the One who stands there ready to be their Savior (Jesus was spelling out the matters of eternal life and death to Nicodemus).

Vs22-24

Vs 22 begins, “After these things.” and Of course the things that it’s in reference to is Jesus’ time of ministry in Jerusalem, the time of the Passover, and after His interview with Nicodemus. and We read here that He and His disciples went to Judea, and He stayed there and baptized. Now if you’ll peek down at Ch 4 vs 2 you realize that it wasn’t Jesus Himself who did the baptizing, but rather His disciples baptized on His behalf.

As much as I’ve sought to sort of dismantle the position of baptismal regeneration the last couple of weeks (meaning you’re not saved until you’re baptized which is thoroughly unscriptural) I in no way want to belittle the *significance* of it. Is it *salvational*? No, is it *significant*? Yes, as is any act of obedience to the Word of God. Now the bible speaks of at least 4 different baptisms.

The baptism of repentance (which J.B. was busy about), there is the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the baptism that Jesus speaks of regarding Himself (in reference to the cross), and then what we might refer to as the Christian baptism which is what we’re familiar with today. (The identifying of ourselves with the baptism of Christ, being baptized into His death.) The bible says, “*Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*” Rom 6:3-4 In writing to the Colossians Paul said in regards to our relationship with Christ that we were, “*Buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.*” Col 2:12

So when we’re reading here of these baptisms, we’re not speaking of the same baptism with which you and I are baptized today, because Jesus hadn’t yet been crucified, so they weren’t being baptized into His death, this was like that which John was performing, the baptism of repentance. That’s why we see John’s disciple’s get a bit riled up here in just a moment, because rather than seeing what Jesus was doing as a *completion of* John’s ministry, they see it as *competition to* John’s ministry. But this is where the gospel message finds it’s platform, in the message of repentance, because people don’t even realize their need for a Savior until they come to grips with the fact that they’re sinners and need to repent from their sin.

We remember from the other gospel accounts that when Jesus came onto the public scene His message was identical to J.B.’s which was, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*” Matt 4:17 and So here we see Him beginning to overlap John’s ministry just a bit (before John was thrown into prison) by baptizing people unto repentance.

Vs 23

I love how practical the Spirit of God is, we always expect that when we're busy about the work of God, or moving in the Spirit and will of God, that there will be this "Mystic" sort of sensation and sway about us. But if there was anyone who was busy about what God had called him to do it was J.B. and Yet what was his justification for baptizing in the area in which he was baptizing? Was it because a vision from Heaven moved him there? No, was he fulfilling some sort of OT prophecy in being there? No, the text reveals to us quite plainly and practically why it was he was where he was. It was because, "there was much water there", that was it.

We have such a tendency to make discovering God's will for us this incredibly difficult thing. But I think we would do well to de-mystify the process of finding and fulfilling the will of God's for our lives. God had called John to the ministry of baptism, the baptism of repentance, and so John went where the water was, to an area that suited his call. It's like Augustine said when he said, "Love God with all your heart, and do whatever you please."

Because if you truly love God with all your heart, then your heart is going to be in tune with His desires for your life. The question is do you, do I truly love God with my heart, and if the answer is yes, then what's your desire, what is it that interests you? Because so often just like with J.B. the Spirit will move supernaturally in your life in practical ways, and the reason you have a certain inclination or interest in that part of the ministry, or in that aspect of the Christian walk is because God is placing it there. So just take the necessary steps that place you in that environment so that you might be able to minister in the area that's suited to your call. John was about baptizing people unto repentance, so he went where the water was.

Vs24

As you know John would preach the need for repentance from sin in order to turn to the true and living God and to place your faith in the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Herod was all about listening to John as long as he addressed people in a general way. But one day John backed Herod up personally by saying that his taking of his brother's (Herod's brother's) wife was un-cool and unscriptural, and that he personally needed to repent. and Of course that was crossing the line and so Herod had John thrown in prison and ultimately he was beheaded. But isn't that the way we so often are? As long as things are addressed in a general sort of way, then we'll tolerate them, but as soon as you start getting personal and address an issue that labels me in a personal way, now you've gone too far. "As long as things stay general we can talk about repentance and forgiveness and that sort of thing, but as soon as I feel like I'm being addressed personally, I'll never be back. I'll never hear from you again."

Wouldn't it be better if upon hearing something addressed that dealt with a specific issue in our lives that we would just heed the rebuke of the Holy Spirit and fall to our faces before God in our hearts in repentance? But too often instead of allowing ourselves to be humbled *by* the Holy Spirit, we harden ourselves *to* or *against* the Holy Spirit and His conviction upon our lives. Instead of receiving the love of God and His desire to change our lives, we get personally offended and feel as though we've been violated somehow, God help us to grow up and get beyond that mentality that we might willingly and wantingly receive His chastisement upon our lives. The Proverbs tell us, "*Poverty and shame will come to him who disdains correction, But he who regards a rebuke will be honored.*" Prov 13:18 and Again, "*Open rebuke is better Than love carefully concealed.*" Prov 27:5

Vs 25-26

So John's there preaching and baptizing away and some of John's disciples begin to engage the Pharisees regarding what it is that makes a man pure. As you know the Pharisees were all about ritual purification and the washing of hands and all in just a certain way according to the codified law, and here John is baptizing people and so the question comes up, "What is it that truly makes a man pure." and So this is the 1st debate that begins to rage about baptism and we could only wish that it would've been the last. But thank God that Jesus came along and clarified the whole issue of purification, because everyone seemed to be focused on these outward rituals regarding the cleansing of the flesh. But Jesus said that's like cleansing the outside of a cup but leaving the inside of it all nasty and gross, it's not fit for use no matter how it looks outwardly. It's still unclean, but once the inside is clean, then you can begin to work on its outward appearance. He said, "*First cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.*" Matt 23:26

You see it's not about an outward ritual, it's about an inward relationship, the cleansing of the heart by the blood of Jesus Christ and After He has your heart He'll worry about peripheral matters. When I was at the county jail in Carthage last Wednesday waiting on the guy I was there to visit to come out to the little window I was listening to this lady try to minister to another inmate. and She was taking him to various portions of the OT (not even keeping the context of the vs) and trying to tell him that he was out of line because of his tattoos and various marking on his body. But never once did she ask him if he even knew Jesus Christ or had ever asked Jesus into his heart, maybe that was a prior meeting but based upon what I could hear I wouldn't have concluded that the guy even knew Jesus.

It was like she was trying to cleanse him from the outside in. Jesus said, "That's all a backwards. A man isn't cleansed from the outside in, but rather the inside out." But maybe in seeking to vindicate their position these disciples of John said, "Well, Jesus is baptizing just like John is!" and The Pharisees responded, "Yeah, and He's also gathering more people than John is, as a matter of fact I notice the congregation here is thinning out a bit." and That didn't sit too well with John's disciples and so they went to John wanting to get his input on the matter and said (Vs 26).

Wouldn't it be great to see this testimony come true today, just to see everybody coming to Jesus? This is why I was going to title the message today, "The Joy of loosing your congregation." Because would to God that every congregation could be lost to Jesus, would follow not the preacher behind the pulpit but the One whom he proclaims, Jesus Christ and Him crucified for the sin of the world. You see it wasn't like they were leaving John and going to another church; they weren't church hopping or looking to skip out on accountability, they left him so that they could follow Jesus, because they wanted to know Jesus. But as I said earlier John's disciples begin to see Jesus as competition, and so John immediately addresses that issue and brings clarity to that particular point of view. and Again of those born of women there hasn't risen one greater than J.B., not an ounce of pride or contention in this man's body, notice how he handles this.

Vs 27-29

Vs 27 should be underlined in your bible. "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven." Paul put it like this, "*For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?*" 1 Cor 4:7 and In another place, "*But by the grace of God I am what I am.*" 1 Cor 15:10 James said it like this, "*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights.*" James 1:17 What's the point, the point is there's no such thing as competition, nor is there any room for pride when it comes to Kingdom business, or for that matter any good thing that pertains to your life. Because the only reason I am where I am is the grace of God, the only reason you've been blessed like you've been blessed is by the grace of God, God doesn't establish us or bless us because of us but rather in spite of us.

How can I boast and say that I have what I have, or am in a certain position in the ministry based upon some credential I possess. What makes me different than anybody else? Nothing, what do I have but that God hasn't entrusted me with it? Whether it be a position or an office in the ministry, or perhaps God has entrusted you with material wealth, but what do you have but that it's not the result of God's abundance of grace poured out upon your life? Nothing, so then how can I be prideful about what I have, or what's happening in my life, or bummed when something isn't happening in my life? John says, "Look, I'm just a vessel on the shelf, if God chooses to take me down and use me, praise the Lord, if He wants to cease using me, that's His business." God gives, God takes away blessed be the name of the Lord, the bible says, "*Woe to him who strives with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth! Shall the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?'*" Isa 45:9

In other words striving with one another may be one thing (as un-cool as that is) but striving with God is quite another. and John is saying, "If God wants to bring people around me that I might minister to them, that's great, if He wants them to be watered in another place, that's fine to. I'm just going to be faithful to tend to those whom God places before me."

In vs 28 he reminds them that he has no desire to be the center of attention, or in the lime light, he's not Mr. Fix it, or the world's problem solver. He's not the Christ, he's just sent to bust of the fallow grounds of men's hearts, to reveal them in their sin that they might be prepared to receive their Savior. He's saying, "I'm just a big Neon arrow that flashes the way, or points the way to Christ."

Then in vs 29 he amplifies his secondary position at best in his relationship to Christ anyway by using this illustration of a wedding. and He says, "Look, how absurd would it be if the best man at a wedding got jealous because he didn't have the affections of the bride?" As if when she comes down the isle she's to turn to him and live happily ever after with the best man. John is saying, "That would be wrong, and it would be just as wrong for me to be jealous over the ministry of Jesus." The best man's joy is fulfilled in the coming together of the bride and the groom, and even so (John says), "My joy is fulfilled in seeing people coming to Jesus, He's not the competition to my ministry, He's the completion of it." (Notice) Vs30

Again, underline it, memorize it, let it impact and change your life, "He must increase, but I must decrease." This is the 3rd "Must" of this ch; remember what this word "Must" speaks of, "Non-negotiable necessity". and So we have the "must" of the sinner, vs 7 "*You must be born again*", the "must" of the Savior, vs 14 "*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.*" and Finally the "Must" of the servant, in his life, Jesus "must" increase and he himself "must" decrease.

Jesus put it like this, "*Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.*" Matt 16:25 So we might even go as far as to understand it as not only must I decrease but in fact I need to "Decease", I need to die to self altogether. Paul said it like this, "*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*" Gal 2:20 This vs is pointing us to the fact that there must be steady, consistent and continual spiritual growth in our lives. Both of these key words "increase" in regards to Christ, and "decrease" in regards to us are in the present tense speaking of an open ended "right now" happening in our lives. This is to be a perpetual happening in our lives, Him being ever amplified in our lives, as we take a lower and lower seat.

This word "Increase" is active as to where the word "decrease" is passive. What's that mean? It means Jesus is the initiator, we're the receiver, He instigates, we respond, so how do we decrease? By allowing Him to increase, it's like how do I decrease the darkness? By increasing the light, the darkness is passive, but the light is active, the light is doing the work, the dark just gives way to the light.

We're to be giving way to Jesus Christ continually, you won't get there overnight, but you'll grow and mature little by little continually and consistently as you just let Him be Himself in your life. (Ex 23: 29-30?) (God's going to grow you little by little as you're able to be tried and stretched, He has no desire to overwhelm you, but as you learn to die to self, He'll continue to increase in your life, but what we need to receive is the non-negotiable necessity of getting out of the way that we might give way to Jesus Christ and Him increasing, taking over our lives.) and John is saying here, "It's not about me trying to hang on, it's about me letting go, and letting God have His way."

Vs31-32

Now contrast this with vs 26 where it says that, "all are coming to Him." You almost get the sense of the perspective of John's jealous disciples vs the proper perspective in the big picture. If you can't see the forest for the tree in front of your face it seems like everyone's coming to Him, but if you stand back and look at the big picture (by comparison) no one is coming. Because He testifies the truth of what He's seen and people don't receive His testimony. Now what's His testimony? #1 That unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. and People don't receive that, they think they can lead a pretty good life and that God will understand, or that as long as they're sincere in their religion it doesn't matter what path they take, they'll all take you to the same place. But those things aren't true, because Jesus Christ is the standard and none of us lead "pretty good" lives compared to Him. and The only path that leads to everlasting life is the narrow path of Jesus Christ Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."* John 14:6

You must be born again, how? By faith in Jesus Christ and the atoning power of His shed blood, this is His testimony. #2 He's testified to His eternal nature, that He's God come in the flesh, that no one has ascended into Heaven (at the time He made the statement) but He who came down from Heaven, that is, the Son of Man. But people won't receive that testimony; "A good teacher, yes, a man of high moral character, absolutely, but God?" and They can't receive it. Then finally He testified to the necessity of the cross and faith in Him, (vs 14-15). But people won't receive it, they can't rationalize how a man dying on a cross 2,000yrs ago can somehow benefit them now. However Vs 33

Vs33

The one who's received Jesus Christ and trusts in his Word, bears witness to the reality of these things.

Vs34

Jesus operated fully in the power of the Holy Spirit; there was no lack of the Spirit's fullness in Him. God's callings are God's equippings, if God calls you to a task, there'll be no lack of the Spirit's fullness measured out to you in the completing of that task. He won't hold out on you that which you need to fulfill what He's called you to do.

Vs35

Eph 1:22 says, “*And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church.*” and Again, “*And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.*” Col 1:18 I don’t know how to amplify that any further, Jesus is over all, His authority is over all things. Jesus said, “*All things have been delivered to Me by My Father.*” Matt 11:27 He said, “*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.*” Matt 28:18

Vs36

So as is common the word of God brings us to a place where we have to make a choice. and We’ve spoken on the need to believe upon Jesus Christ if we’re to receive everlasting life, but what I want you to see here is the eternality and the finality of our decision. and Even as to believe upon Jesus Christ equals eternal life, a quality of life that carries on through the eternal. So to, to reject Jesus Christ is to invite the wrath of God to *abide* (present ongoing active tense) upon your life. In both giving you over to a debased mind to do those things that aren’t fitting in this age, and then separation from God eternally in the age to come in outer darkness where there will be wailing and weeping and gnashing of teeth. Jesus said in regards to the habitation of hell, “*Their worm does not die And the fire is not quenched.*” Mark 9:44 Rev 14:11 says, “*The smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night.*” That’s the reality and the finality of it all, but it doesn’t have to be that way, he who believes on the son has everlasting life. God loves you so much that He gave His only begotten Son, and He absorbed the penalty of your sin and my sin upon Himself, He was separated from the Father so that we’d never have to be. “*Believe Me*” Jesus would say, receive My testimony, believe My words, “It’s a matter of life and death.”

If you’re here today and you don’t know Jesus Christ then today is your chance, as though God were pleading through me, I implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God. We’ve all sinned and messed up. Thought something or done something we shouldn’t have, that we know wasn’t right, and Jesus stands ready to forgive, to receive you and wash you white like snow, to give you new life, that you might be born again to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. But you have to receive His testimony and believe upon Him and the atoning power of His blood, are you willing to do that? If so just open your heart to Jesus and let Him fill you with His presence, with His love and His forgiveness.