

## **John: Trust or Reject Him**

**John 3:22-26**

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Please open your Bibles to John 3:22, as we continue our study of John's gospel.

After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them baptizing. John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and people were coming and were being baptized-- John had not yet been thrown into prison. Therefore there arose a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purification. And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him." John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven. You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent ahead of Him.' He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made full. He must increase, but I must decrease. He who comes from above is above all, he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. What He has seen and heard, of that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. He who has received His testimony has set his seal to this, that God is true. For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand. He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.

*Father in heaven, we ask now for Your rich blessing upon our time and on the study of this passage of Scripture, written by the finger of God. And we ask it in Jesus' name, amen.*

You all remember the story, I am sure, perhaps the most famous and most illustrious of all the sentences that C.S. Lewis ever wrote. It was the third radio broadcast that he gave during the course of the Second World War. It was called

the 'Shocking Alternative,' and became a chapter in his book, *Mere Christianity*. Lewis is talking about people who merely regard Jesus as a great moral teacher. You remember what Lewis goes on to say,

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic--on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg--or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

Do you see what he's saying? Jesus cannot possibly simply be a great moral teacher, because of the things that He said. He is more than that. Much more than that. He's the Son of God who demands of us our worship.

And, it's over that issue now that a debate, a discussion, an argument develops between some of John the Baptist's disciples and followers, and a certain Jewish man. We don't know his identity. But it's over ceremonial washings and the meaning and the import and consequences of these washings and perhaps their relationship to John's baptism of repentance and, also, to the baptisms that Jesus was performing. And you can imagine the discussion and how it might be going, especially as they now report this discussion to John the Baptist, because it appeared to some of John the Baptist's disciples as though Jesus was more popular than their leader.

John the Baptist was a great preacher. A man of extraordinary ability and liveliness and freshness and vitality and energy for the word of God and the truth of God and the kingdom of God. Many had given their lives to become disciples of John the Baptist. But now some, including Andrew and Simon Peter, his brother according to John 1, had left following John the Baptist and were instead following Jesus. And you can imagine some of the sense of rivalry that John the Baptist's disciples were feeling. It's an immensely important point in the story of the life of Christ, because if John hadn't dealt with that issue the way he dealt with it, there would have been enormous damage and enormous consequence as a result. It's to John's eternal credit that he deals with this sense of rivalry and tension between his disciples and Jesus' disciples in the way that he does. And I want us to look at it together.

**I. The only focus of the believer's life is the glory of Jesus.**

First of all, what John does is a very simple thing. He turns his entire focus upon Jesus Christ. He must fill our vision. And I want us to see in the verses from 27 to 30, and I don't want to psychoanalyze the passage, but in a sense it's impossible not to do that, because there is this tension, this sense of rivalry that some people are sensing between John the Baptist and Jesus. Now the rivalry isn't there but some of the disciples are sensing that it might be and John is repeatedly saying, "I'm not the Christ. I'm not the Messiah. I am the forerunner. I am the one who goes before the Messiah." And the wonderful thing and the extraordinary thing about this passage is that John the Baptist comes out with a statement in which he says to his own disciples, "I find my fulfillment and I find my contentment and I find my joy in being what God has made me."

I want to apply that a little now, to those of you who are involved in some degree or another in Christian work. And that's just about all of you. Because I have to tell you that early on in my Christian life I struggled with this, wanting to be someone I actually wasn't. I'm now surrounded by people with so many talents that God is determined to keep me humble. And this is important. John didn't use this occasion as he could have so easily done to bolster his own ego and self importance. He was at ease. I hope I'm not psychoanalyzing the passage, but it's an important point, and a practical point, because there are many many Christians that are not at ease in the gifts and talents and positions that God has made them, whether that be a housewife or a mother or a deacon or an elder, and you want to be something else, and you want to be somewhere else. And John is saying, "I am not the Messiah, I am not the Christ." Look at the words he uses in verse 27, "A man can have nothing except what is given him from heaven."

Do you understand what he is saying. I am perfectly at ease with the providence of God, for what I am, is what God has made me, and what God has given to me, and I find my joy in that, he says, in verse 29. The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. And then John adds a little comment here, and it's so typical of John, therefore, this joy of mine is *complete*, or better, *full*. And John loves those words *joy* and *full*, and do you see what he is saying? My fullness and my joy, my satisfaction, my contentment, comes in resting in the providence of God.

Actually, John's position in the divine economy of things in the history of redemption, John's place is a very important one. "No one born of woman is greater than John," Jesus said. But John is speaking to his disciples, who are about to cause a storm in the kingdom of God, and you can imagine how a storm could have brewed here very quickly, and John says, "There's nothing worse than always wanting to be someone else or wanting to be something else, or wanting to be in someone else's marriage, or in someone else's home, or to have someone else's income, or to have someone else's job, or to have someone else's plaudits and praise, and prestige." And you live your life like that and it's

miserable. You live your life like that and it's one unending misery. And John cuts through it all and he says, a man can have nothing but what have been given him from heaven.

Now John may be speaking there about himself or he may actually be speaking about Jesus, and saying that the prestige and honor and dignity and following and the number of disciples that are now going after Jesus and following Him, it's all because God has given it to Him. Who am I to complain? How am I to get all worked up? Who am I to get all prickly about it? Because a man can have nothing except what God has given to him. "He must increase. I must decrease." And that's a lesson for us.

That's a very, very practical lesson for us, because some of us need our prideful peacock feathers to be brought down. Because we're so full of ourselves. Some of you are used to getting your own way. You were raised like that. Your parents spoiled you. You had things that this world can give you. You have jobs in which you're in charge. That's your way of life. And you see, within the economy of the Church of Jesus Christ, it doesn't work like that. Because he who will become great — do you remember what Jesus said to the disciples who wanted to sit right next to Him at the head of the table - go to the bottom of the table, He said, that's the way to do it. He must increase and I must decrease.

You know the way to grow up in the Christian life is to grow down in your estimation of yourself, in your self aggrandizement. My mother has seven children, and when they would visit at various stages, she would insist they stand behind the kitchen door and she would put a little tape and a date and name, and they're still there. And her kitchen door is covered with little bits of tape with names at various stages in their growth and development, because you know, children are meant to grow. You see a child that you haven't seen for awhile and you say, "Oh, how tall you've grown. How big you are!" But it isn't like that in the Christian life, because in the Christian life to grow up in grace means to grown down in our estimation of ourselves and of our self importance.

The first of the 95 Theses that Luther nailed to the church door at Wittenberg was that repentance is a life long duty. Repentance is a life long duty. John is perfectly content being the man that God intended him to be, the best man; not the groom, not the bridegroom, but the best man. You know, you don't go to a wedding and say, "Did you see the best man?" You say, "Who was the best man?" If the best man makes a big show at a wedding, he's not doing his job. His job is to draw attention to the bridegroom. At a large Presbyterian Church at Melbourne in Australia, the chairman introduced Hudson Taylor, the founder of China Inland Mission and what is now Overseas Missionary Fellowship. And he introduced him as "Our illustrious friend." Actually, I've had more flowery introductions than that, but that's all it was, "Our illustrious friend." I was introduced once as a man who had had a very successful ministry. I have no idea what that means. 'Our illustrious friend.' And Hudson stood quietly for a

second or two, and it was said, "The light of God seemed to shine upon his face," as it seemed to those who were present. And he said, "Dear friends," he began, "I am the little servant of an illustrious Master." Isn't that beautiful!

But notice in the passage in verse 31, and all the way down to the penultimate verse, in verse 35, there's a connection now in the dialogue with Nicodemus in this third chapter, because Jesus is now referred to as "the One who came from above," and later in verse 31, as "the One who comes down from heaven." Do you see what John is doing? Not only is he drawing attention away from himself, but he's drawing attention towards Christ and he's exalting Christ. The Father loves the Son. What a beautiful text that is, verse 35, "the Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hands." Isn't that a beautiful text. The Father has given all things into His hand. Your life, your home, your family, your children, your circumstance, the hairs on your heads, however many you've got left, are in the hands of Jesus. Not in the hands of some willful, capricious unpredictable deity, but in the hands of Jesus, who had died instead, in the hands of Jesus who went to the cross, in the hands of Jesus who bore our sin and our shame, in the hands of Jesus who went to the ultimate in order to redeem us. God loves His Son, and has given all things into His hand.

"He gives," verse 34, "the Spirit without limit." I think that's a reference to Christ, but some commentators are divided, but it makes perfect sense in the context that John the Baptist is still speaking and saying that the Father loves the Son, and has given to Him the fullness of the Holy Spirit. In the divine economy of the Covenant of Grace, everything is put into the hands of the Son in whom the Spirit dwells in all of His fullness.

You know, my friends, that's high Christology, isn't it. It's as high as anything that you have in the great prologue of John's gospel, in the opening chapter. Christianity is about Christ, that's what John the Baptist is saying. It's not about me. It's not about ritual washings. It's not even about baptism. It's about Christ, and the lordship of Christ, and our relationship to Christ. That's why Jesus is more than just a great moral teacher, someone to look up to, someone to teach me a few things about how to survive in this world. He's more than that. He demands our worship, He demands our all. Earlier we sang a hymn, "I Surrender All," and a lady at the desk said, "I'm not going to sing that hymn." I said, "Why?" She said, "Well, I might have to do it." We sang that so well, but you don't surrender things to just anybody, only to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Yes, this passage is beautifully Trinitarian, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, there's a doctrine of the trinity in this passage. I wish we had time to explore this. But John is saying, at the heart of the biblical message, at the heart of the history of redemption, is Jesus. Look to Him. Don't look to me. Look to Him, follow Him, give Him everything. Jesus Christ is central.

You know that hymn by Fanny Bolton? "Not I but Christ, be honored, loved, exalted. Not I but Christ, be seen, be known, be heard. Not I but Christ, in every

look and action. Not I but Christ, in every thought and word.” And then there comes the nail, the clincher, in the last verse. John has been saving up to this. Because it's not about me, I'm content, John says, in the providence of God, being the forerunner, I find my joy and fullness in what God has made me to be. Look to Jesus, because He is the Lord. Look to Him because He is the Son of God. Look to Him because the Father loves Him. Look to Him because the spirit indwells Him. Look to Him because He is the center of it all.

## **II. Those who trust, believe and rely upon Jesus already have eternal life.**

But look at the last verse, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.” Now, I don't know whether this is John the Baptist saying this, it's not in red letters, whatever significance that may or may not have. But this is probably John, the writer of the gospel, who's now making a comment, he's drawing a conclusion from all of this, and he's saying, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”

There are consequences, my friends, there are consequences to saying “No” to Jesus Christ. And you say, “I got here tonight from a busy, difficult day at work, I made my way through the traffic and I couldn't find anywhere to park, and that's all you've got to say to me!” Yes, that's all I've got to say to you, that there are consequences of saying “No” to Jesus Christ. It's so easy to disdain the simplicity of the gospel, how personal it all is. It's so easy to make the gospel difficult and sophisticated. You know, there was an Ulster preacher by the name of H.H. Owr, and they used to call him “Heaven and Hell Owr.” And once someone, exasperated by his plain speaking said to him, “You're like something that came out of the Ark.” And he said, in reply, “I'd rather be something that came out of the Ark than something that never got into it.”

You know, our discipleship, my friends, lacks decisiveness, it lacks extravagance, it lacks wonder, we've lost the thrill of the man who digs a hole and finds a treasure trove. The excitement of it all. There's too much defensiveness, too many excuses for sub-Christian living, too much ordinariness about our Christian profession, too much looking to men, rather than looking to Jesus, rather than looking to the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. Every time we meet, the King is here. Whether we meet in the sanctuary or in Miller Hall, Jesus is with His people. That's what's important. There's good news. There is such wonderfully, astonishing, mind-boggling, fantastic good news here, that if you believe on the Son, you have eternal life. I sort of wish I could make it more complicated, more sophisticated. It's faith alone in Christ alone. Cast your deadly doing down, down at Jesus' feet, stand in Him and Him alone, gloriously complete. “Nothing in my hands I bring.” I don't bring my membership at First Pres, I don't bring my baptismal certificate, I don't bring my communicant membership form, I don't bring my name and my peerage and my ancestry and

my cousins and parents and siblings, all of whom have done such great things. I don't bring anything. I bring empty hands. "Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling." That's what John is saying. It's as simple as that.

### **III. Those who reject Jesus are already under God's judgment.**

But you see, there's another side, isn't there. "Whoever does not obey the Son." If you don't believe, if you don't trust Him, if you don't follow Him, if you don't have a living vital relationship with Jesus Christ, the wrath of God remains. He's not saying it's coming. The wrath of God is already upon you, my friends. You are already under the wrath of God if you're not a believer. And it remains forever. When you die, the wrath of God will be upon you. When your soul survives death, the wrath of God will be upon you. When your body will be resurrected at the last day to be reunited with your soul, the wrath of God will be upon you, and it will be upon you forever and ever and ever.

Sometimes we say to ourselves, why would anyone not believe? If that's really true, why would you not believe? Until you examine your own heart, because apart from the grace of God and the mercy of God, none of us would believe.

I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew  
He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me;  
it was not I that found, O Savior true;  
no, I was found of Thee.

O what a Savior that He died for me!  
From condemnation He hath made me free;  
He that believeth on the Son saith He,  
Hath everlasting life.

Chorus:

Verily, verily, I say unto you  
Verily, verily, message ever new;  
He that believeth on the Son, 'tis true,  
Hath everlasting life."

All my iniquities on Him were laid,  
All my indebtedness by Him was paid;  
All who believe on Him, the Lord hath said,  
Hath everlasting life.

Isn't that extraordinary. We're going to live forever in the presence of Jesus, what marvelous grace. John is saying, "Don't look to me, look to Him, look to Jesus." Let's pray together.

*Our Father in heaven, we thank You for Your word and we thank You for Your gospel which is ever new and ever fresh. Forgive us when we take any of it for granted. Fill us with joy and contentment in believing. Put a song in our mouth, even praise to our God, and be gracious to any soul in this building this evening who may yet be unconverted. Draw them by Your powerful hand to Yourself and to Jesus Christ, for Jesus' sake, Amen.*

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