

Sermon Outline

“LIFE IN HIS NAME”:
THE PURSUIT OF WHOLENESS AND THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

HE MUST INCREASE (OR “IT ISN’T ABOUT YOU”)

JOHN 3:22-30

I. Introduction

II. Jesus and His Disciples in the Judean Countryside (John 3:23, 24)

- A. Sometime after the Lord had spoken with Nicodemus, he goes with his disciples “into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing” (v 22).
- B. John the Baptist was also baptizing in the same region, “because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized (for John had not yet been put in prison)” (vv 23, 24).
- C. Even though Jesus’ ministry had begun, people were still coming to be baptized by John the Baptist.

III. It Was a Problem Then Too (John 3:25-26)

- A. During this time, a debate arose between some of John’s disciples and another Jew concerning “purification” (v 25).
—The debate may have to do with how John’s baptism related to the other ritual washings that had been going on.
- B. This debate led to a further discussion within John’s circle as to how Jesus stood in relation to John the Baptist: “And they came to John and said to him, ‘Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him’” (v 26).
- C. This seems to be a case of envy on the part of John’s disciples.

IV. Envy

- A. Envy in ministry is a real and potentially destructive problem in the Church today.
 - 1. This problem was around in John’s day.

2. In our day, this problem is amplified by social media and ready access to gifted preachers and authors from other parts of the world.
- B. By allowing our culture of works, performance, and celebrity to shape our expectations of life in church, we unwittingly contribute to a spirit of envy and jealousy amongst pastors and other Gospel servants.
 - C. Yet the one who is finally at fault is the one who *does* the envying. We are responsible for allowing envy in our lives.
 - D. In 3:26, we are given an honest portrayal of life in ministry.
 1. There is such a thing as ungodly jealousy and envy amongst ministers of the Lord.
 2. While sin remains, we will have this problem (in varying degrees) everywhere.
 - E. What is the root of envy?
 1. In order for envy to exist, one must perceive that one is being short-changed in life.
 2. Envy is the result of failing to find one's happiness in God alone.

V. **God Is the Source of All Good Things (John 3:27)**

- A. How are we to deal with envy and discontentment, whether it's in ministry or wherever the Lord would have us serve?
- B. From verses 27-30, John teaches us how to overcome ungodly, destructive envy in our lives.
- C. *First: Recognize that our heavenly Father, who loves us, who delights in us, and who cares for us deeply is the Lord and Architect of the situation in which we now live.*
 1. "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven" (v 27).
 2. John is telling the envious disciples that people are going to Jesus because Heaven is moving them toward him.
 - a. This anticipates the theme of election and irresistible grace we see later on.
 - 6:44: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day."
 - 6:65: "And he said, 'This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.'"
 - 10:26: "but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep."

3. When good things happen to another, there is no reason to be negative.
4. By recognizing that God—the same God who cares for and loves us—has chosen to give a particular blessing to another helps us to perform the commandment of Romans 12:15: “Rejoice with those who rejoice...”
5. It is hard to rejoice with those who rejoice, because we are jealous and refuse to see our heavenly Father’s hand in good things that happen to others.
6. To overcome sinful envy and competitiveness, transfer our happiness from our own narrow visions of success to the will of God himself.

VI. I Am not the Christ (John 3:28)

- A. Second: *Recognize that you are not the main event—Christ is.*
- B. John reminds his disciples: “You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’”
- C. There is no reason the disciples should be jealous of Jesus, because it’s only proper that people go to him.

VII. The Bridegroom Has Arrived (John 3:29-30)

- A. To further convey his lesson, John uses an illustration: “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....”
- B. John likens Christ to a bridegroom, a metaphor for the Lord God himself (cf. Isa 54:5).
- C. By calling Jesus the bridegroom, John is saying that Jesus is the main event of all history.
- D. Embedded in the Lord’s mission is the vision of a cosmic wedding.
 1. Now we see salvation in an even greater light.
 2. We sense the intensity and fierceness of Christ’s love for his own.
- E. Since people are going to Jesus, John says, “Therefore this joy of mine is now complete.” He adds, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (v 30).
—It is only proper and necessary for John to decrease, while Jesus increases.

- F. Don't get jealous when people give glory to Jesus and not to you.
1. Pastors and those who teach God's Word must not deviate from the simplicity of the Gospel.
 2. Calvin: "Those who win the Church over to themselves rather than to Christ faithlessly violate the marriage which they ought to honor" (*The Gospel According to St. John 1-10*, 81).

VIII. He Must Increase

We have heard it from John himself. Why should we pastors strive to preach Christ-centered sermons that call people to Christ? Why should every sermon be, in one sense, a Gospel message? Why should you always make running to Christ the main work that you do every day, whether you've been a Christian for one day or a hundred years? Because, as John says, "He must increase, but I must decrease." Because the mandate of heaven has been given to Jesus. The great work that God is doing today is bringing people to Jesus again and again and again. There is no greater miracle than this. Getting your favorite position in life is great. But Jesus is greater. Getting the grades you want is great. But Jesus is still much greater. Getting healed from cancer is wonderful. But Jesus is the greatest. Jesus alone is the true Lover of your soul. If you have Jesus, you are complete.

Questions for Reflection

1. Was there anything in particular about today's sermon that blessed and encouraged you?
2. Was there anything that you disagree with or found difficult to accept?
3. "Envy is the result of failing to find one's happiness in God alone." Discuss.
4. We are responsible for allowing envy to remain in our lives. How does John teach us to overcome envy?
5. "Recognize that our heavenly Father, who loves us, who delights in us, and who cares for us deeply is the Lord and Architect of the situation in which we now live." How does this principle help us to overcome our sinful envy?
6. What is the significance of likening Christ to a bridegroom?
7. Why is it so important for shepherds to keep directing their churches to Christ alone for all good things? How can you encourage your pastors/elders to keep on doing this?
8. "If you have Jesus, you are complete." How does this truth shape your perspective on life today?