

## Humility toward Jesus

John 3:22-30

Thomas Jefferson, the primary author of the Declaration of Independence, was a deist; he didn't believe that God was involved in the everyday affairs of humanity. But he loved the teachings of Jesus. He didn't believe that Jesus was God in the flesh or that the miracles described in the Bible actually happened. And so he decided to create a book about the life and teachings of Jesus without all the parts that didn't make sense to him. So he took a razor blade and literally cut the teachings of Jesus out of his King James Bible and pasted them into a book. He called the resulting book *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*; most people call his book *The Jefferson Bible*.

I think you'd agree with me that you would relate to the "Jesus" of the Jefferson Bible differently than you'd relate to the Jesus of our Bibles. You might relate to someone who taught profound and thought-provoking ideas as a peer, a mentor, or a "resource," but you wouldn't necessarily devote your life to him. Mark Batterson's comment is that when we do what Jefferson did (only paying attention to those aspects of Jesus' life that make sense to us), we end up with "a god who is about our size and who looks an awful lot like us" (*Wild Goose Chase*, p. 71).

But how should you relate to the Jesus of the New Testament - Someone who not only taught with authority but who was also born of a virgin, who lived a sinless life, who healed people (like lepers and people who'd never walked), who performed other miracles (like feeding 5,000 people with a small amount of food), who died on the cross to pay for our sins, AND who rose bodily from the dead after three days? How do you relate to someone like *that*? How do you relate to the Son of God?

Today we are going to learn the answer to this question from John the Baptist. John understood more clearly than anybody else in his day who Jesus was and therefore how to relate to Him. This Advent season we're studying the life of John the Baptist because his birth was so closely intertwined with the birth of Jesus. Last week we saw that God gave John the assignment of being the forerunner of the Messiah. His entire life was devoted to preparing people for the coming of Jesus Christ.

Today we consider a passage of Scripture that exposes John's deepest attitude toward Jesus. In John 3:22-30 we see in John a type of humility toward Jesus that should characterize everyone who understands who He is.

### ***John's Attitude of Humility toward Jesus (John 3:22-30)***

Verses 22 through 24 explain that there was an overlap in the ministries of Jesus and John; there was a time when both of them were baptizing people.

22 After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing. 23 John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and

*people* were coming and were being baptized— 24 for John had not yet been thrown into prison.

The first couple of verses in chapter 4 will mention that Jesus was “making and baptizing more disciples than John” but that Jesus Himself wasn’t doing the baptizing (His disciples were). But the fact that both Jesus and John were baptizing people sets the stage for what we learn in verse 25: John’s disciples had a discussion with a Jewish man that led them to ask a question about John’s attitude toward Jesus.

25 Therefore there arose a discussion on the part of John’s disciples with a Jew about purification.

We don’t really know the details of this discussion about “purification.” But perhaps the discussion involved the difference between the purification rites practiced by Jews in the first century and John’s practice of baptizing people. Something about this discussion prompted John’s disciples to ask him a question:

26 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 1 records how John “testified” about how Jesus was the Christ, how Jesus had a “higher rank” than he did, and how Jesus was “the Lamb of God.” John’s disciples seem to be fishing around about whether or not John was okay with the fact that this One about whom he had testified was growing in popularity. This is a fair question from a human point of view. It would only be natural for someone like John to resent that Jesus was now teaching and baptizing and gaining a following that exceeded his own.

Beginning in verse 27 John displays a crystal-clear understanding of his own relationship with Jesus. He begins by stating an aphorism (or proverb) that attributes to God every good thing that a person has:

27 John answered and said, “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven.

This saying reminds us of Paul’s question in 1 Corinthians 4:7, “What do you have that you did not receive?” Here John seems to be applying this proverb to the issue raised by his disciples, acknowledging that both he and Jesus had been given their assignments “from heaven” (i.e., by God). If Jesus’ God-given assignment involved growing attention/popularity, who was John to complain or to be jealous?!?!

In verse 28 John reminds his disciples that all along he had viewed himself as the forerunner of the Christ.

28 “You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent ahead of Him.’

In John 1:20 we read that when John was asked directly, "Who are you?" that he answered, "I am not the Christ." In 1:23 John applies Isaiah 40:3 to himself:

23 He said, "I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as Isaiah the prophet said."

Remember that John lived in the wilderness outside Jerusalem (Luke 3:2). When the crowds came to him in the wilderness, he told them, in effect, "Make straight the way of the Lord" - prepare yourselves for the coming of God Himself. In this way John was "sent ahead of" Jesus.

In verse 29 John uses a parable to explain his relationship with Jesus. Jesus is like the groom, and he (John) is like the "friend of the groom" (roughly equivalent to the "best man").

29 "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.

Here's some free advice: Don't ask someone to be your best man if he craves the affection of your fiancée or if he resents you getting all the attention. That would be a bad choice. John was a good "best man": his greatest joy was hearing the groom's voice and seeing the groom with His bride. John is surely bringing to mind the Old Testament imagery of Israel being the "bride of the Lord" (Isaiah 62:4-5, Hosea 2:16ff, Jeremiah 2:2, etc.). As the forerunner of the Messiah, John had the privilege of introducing the people of Israel to their Lord and King! After the resurrection of Jesus the church would be known as "the bride of Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2). As the friend of the groom, John's joy was filled up, full to overflowing because the groom had come.

In verse 30 John summarizes what he's been saying.

30 "He must increase, but I must decrease.

The term translated "must" is often used in the NT for a "divine imperative" - something that God has ordained and therefore *must* happen. Given their assignments from God - John as the forerunner and Jesus as the Messiah, John as the best man and Jesus as the groom - it had to be that Jesus' fame and reputation would increase and that John's would decrease.

This statement is historically unique on the lips of John. Given his place in the history of salvation, it was necessary that Jesus would increase in prominence and popularity and that John would decrease. The gospels even tell us that John would soon be executed. It's obvious to us that Jesus would increase while John would decrease. What may not be so obvious, however, is how this same principle applies to each of our lives.

And so I want to talk about ***Our attitude of humility toward Jesus: “He must increase, but I must decrease.”*** There is a sense in which each of us needs to come to the place where we say about Jesus, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” You and I need the same attitude of humility toward Jesus that we see in the life of John the Baptist.

In other words, we each need to come to the place where we can say with integrity, “The goal of my life is to glorify Jesus.” When you glorify someone, you make that person look good; you magnify the attributes of that person for others to see; the glory of that person is on full display. When you and I glorify Jesus, we don’t merely talk about how great He is; His attributes are actually on full display in our lives. Others see less and less of us and more and more of Jesus. He increases and we decrease.

The good news is that this is the very thing that the Holy Spirit within us is committed to doing. In John 16:14 Jesus said of the Holy Spirit, “He will glorify Me. . .” The Holy Spirit who is given to every believer is committed to showing the world just how glorious Jesus is; He is committed to putting the attributes of Jesus on full display ***through the lives of Jesus’ followers.***

J.I. Packer calls this the spotlight ministry of the Holy Spirit. His role isn’t to draw attention to Himself, but to shine the spotlight on Jesus. Think, for example, about the K-State Alumni Center. It’s one of my favorite buildings in town. At nighttime the Alumni Center is illuminated by spotlights. When you drive by you probably aren’t tempted to think, “Wow, those are some amazing spotlights! I am so impressed by those spotlights!” No, because the spotlights are doing what they’re supposed to do, you think, “That’s an impressive ***building.***”

In the same way the Holy Spirit within us shines the spotlight on Jesus Christ. He came to “glorify Jesus.” Increasingly, our desire should be for the Holy Spirit to shine the light on Jesus through the way we live our lives. Instead of people saying, “Wow, Joan is one impressive person. . .” people will say, “Jesus, now He’s impressive in who He is and what He does in people’s lives.”

Let me give you one specific example of how this might happen in the body of Christ. Since we’re already talking about humility toward Jesus, let’s think about humility toward one another. One of the core attributes of Jesus is humility - the attitude that “others are more important than me. . . instead of looking out for my own interests, I’m going to look out for the interests of others.” In Philippians 2 Paul tells us that even before He became a man Jesus had this type of humility. In light of our sinful condition, Jesus humbled Himself by entering this world as a baby. Even the conditions of His birth were humble: he was born in obscurity in a stable. As a man Jesus invited weary, burdened people to “come to” Him and find rest:

28 "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29 "Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and

humble in heart; and you will find rest for your souls. 30 "For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."

Jesus didn't merely *act* humble; He was actually "gentle and humble *in heart*" - at the core of His being. That's why people were and are drawn to Him. As a man Jesus even humbled Himself to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:8). Instead of merely looking out for His own interests, He went to the cross for our good - to pay for our sins.

Paul's challenge was, "Have this attitude [of humility] in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5). The idea is that your attitude toward the people around you should be the same as Jesus' attitude toward us. Instead of merely acting humble when you can screw up enough willpower, we should actually be "gentle and humble in heart."

Imagine what your relationships would be like if you had "this attitude [of humility] in yourself which was in Christ Jesus." What if the people around you experienced you the way people experienced Jesus? If that were to happen, you would be "glorifying Jesus" - showing people this amazing attribute of humility, putting on full display just how glorious Jesus really is. If this were to happen over an extended period of time, you would be able to say, "Jesus is increasing, and I am decreasing." Instead of being concerned about how YOU look, you'd be concerned that people see how Jesus "looks."

This lifestyle of humility (toward Jesus and toward others) is one of the grand challenges from the life of John the Baptist. As we mentioned earlier, the Holy Spirit produces this humility within us; that's one of the core things He does - shine the light on such attributes of Jesus. But we participate in the process, don't we. One of the most practical things we can do to cultivate humility is to dwell on the cross of Christ. John Stott wrote this:

Every time we look at the cross Christ seems to be saying to us, "I am here because of you. It is your sin I am bearing, your curse I am suffering, your debt I am paying, your death I am dying." Nothing in history or in the universe cuts us down to size like the cross. All of us have inflated views of ourselves, especially in self-righteousness, until we have visited a place called Calvary. It is there, at the foot of the cross, that we shrink to our true size. (*The Message of Galatians*, p. 179)

Carl Henry asked, "How can anyone be arrogant when he stands beside the cross?" When we stand beside the cross, we become convinced, "He *must* increase, but I *must* decrease."