

JOHN

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to John chapter 3 as we continue our study through the Word of God. This is a wonderful chapter that shows us the love of God for sinful man. And please understand that these are not just empty words. His love for us is manifested in action as Jesus reaches down and saves us.

And as wonderful as that is, there is a darker side to this as well. You see, in this section we will also see the heart of man and his refusal to come to God, to receive that free gift of life that is only found in Jesus!

So, this is a powerful chapter that deals with life and death. Life that is found in Christ and death that is found apart from Him. And man has a free-will to choose what he desires, life or death!

Spurgeon sums it up like this for us, "If we were asked to read to a dying man who did not know the gospel, we should probably select this chapter as the most suitable one for such an occasion; and what is good for dying men is good for us all, for that is what we are; and how soon we may be actually at the gates of death, none of us can tell."

How true that is. It is not a matter of *IF* we will die, but really *WHEN* we die are we prepared to meet our Maker? Will we stand in our own righteousness, which is like filthy rags, before Him or the righteousness of Christ that has been imputed into our lives by faith? We, again, have a choice to make. To choose life in Christ or death apart from Him. I know I have said that already but it is the most important decision you will ever make! And by the time we finish tonight, if you have not chosen life in Christ, I pray that you will re-evaluate your decision and come to Him and enter into that abundant life that He has for you.

Now just a quick summary of this chapter and then we will dig in and see what the Lord has for us this evening. We are told,

Having seen the signs the Lord was doing, Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews and a Pharisee, comes to Jesus by night to inquire further about spiritual things. Jesus reveals to him that one must be born again by the Holy Spirit to see the kingdom of God. Several times in these verses it is said that whosoever believes in Christ shall not perish but will receive eternal life. John the Baptist comes back in this chapter and tells a gathered crowd that one must believe in the Son of God to have eternal life, otherwise the “wrath of God abides on him.”

- Elmer Towns, John, p. 27

So, the focus of most of this chapter is this Pharisee named Nicodemus and as we will see, he will come to Jesus at night. Thus, we can call this section, “Nick at Night!” Sorry about that, but it is true. With that as our background, let’s begin reading in John chapter 3 beginning in verse 1 and let’s see what the Lord has for us as we study through His Word.

JOHN 3

VERSES 1-2

Here we are introduced to a man named Nicodemus. And keep in mind that this is a Greek name that means “victor over the people” and it was a common Jewish name.

And as you look at this man I think we see a representation of all men. In fact, he represented what we might say is “the best of the best.”

Notice what we are told of this man. Nicodemus was a religious man, a Pharisee. This group of men, the Pharisee's, numbed about 6,000 during Jesus' day, and they were very dedicated in keeping the Law and making or influencing others to do the same.

He was also a "**ruler of the Jews**" which probably meant he was a member of the elite seventy-member Jewish Supreme Court, the Sanhedrin. That means he was over the people and it would have guaranteed him the highest regard and respect. And in John chapter 19 we are told that Nicodemus was a wealthy man.

And if you think about it, we are no different today than Nicodemus was back then. What do I mean by that? You see, there are many people who are religious. That is, they believe they are okay with God because of what they are doing instead of who they know, Jesus! Good works saves them, at least that is what they believe!

Also, some are very influential, the who's who of society, and they are their own god, in control of their own destiny instead of Jesus being their God. Power is the focus of their lives.

And then there are those who are rich, they have all the toy's you could imagine and yet they are lacking the best gift, Jesus. They think the more you have the better you are and that is not true.

But here we see Nicodemus do something that I pray more people would do and we see that in verse 2, "**This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, 'Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.'**"

You see, he came to Jesus, which is always an important thing to do for the Lord said in Jeremiah 29:13, "**And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.**"

The thing is, why did he come to Jesus at night? Some say he was afraid to come to Jesus during the day because he would be seen and that would not go well with the other Pharisees.

That is possible.

Another reason may be because of the crowds of people around Jesus during the day and he wanted to spend some time alone with Jesus.

I don't think you can be dogmatic about it, and it may be that both apply here in his decision to come to Jesus at night.

Now I want you to see that Nicodemus also recognizes that Jesus must be from God because of the miracles He was doing. We see this played out for us in John 2:23-25, **“Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.”**

Jesus was the talk of the town because of the miracles that He did, the signs that were pointing to Him being the One, the Messiah!

Now this is important for us to understand because many are falling prey to these deceptions. Just because there is a miracle it does not mean it is from God. I realize that may be hard to swallow but listen to what we are told in II Thessalonians 2:9, **“The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders.”**

You see, the Antichrist will do signs and wonders but they will not draw people to Jesus, but to himself!

I think that the Lord dealt with this issue very clearly in Deuteronomy 13:1-5, where we read, **“If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods’ - which you have not known – ‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall put away the evil from your midst.”**

I wonder how much deception would be going on in the church today if these guys were put to death for their actions by God! I think it would weed them out and stop them very quickly. You see, it is a serious issue that we need to be aware of today as people run here and there after this miracle, this apparition and-so-on.

If Satan and his demons can transform themselves into angles of light to deceive us, it is not time to be lackadaisical in our walk. You see, we have God’s Word which is our plum line to keep us straight, to keep us on track, to help us not to be deceived by Satan’s schemes. And we can see who this person is drawing us to, Jesus or themselves. Be careful!

So, Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night and recognizes that there is something special about Jesus. How will Jesus respond to what Nicodemus has said? We don’t have to guess. Look at the next verse.

VERSE 3

Now put yourself in Nicodemus' shoes. You are a brilliant man, a keeper of the Law. You are very rich and influential. And you come to Jesus to maybe be encouraged on how good you are doing and Jesus says that he is not going to see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again! That had to hurt Nicodemus and it should hurt anyone who thinks they will enter into the Kingdom of God by good works, keeping the Law!

Now what is this "**born again**" all about? What does Jesus mean by this? First of all, the Greek word "**again**," ANOTHEN, can be translated "from above." And that is the idea here.

Let me explain it like this. When Adam was created, he was created as an inferior trinity as compared to the Superior Trinity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Man was created with a spirit, a soul or mind or consciousness, and a body with his soul or mind controlled by the spirit.

But, when Adam sinned it caused him and all his descendants after him, you and me, to be controlled by his body appetites, his spirit in a sense, is dead.

Thus, Jesus is saying that you need to be born again, your spirit needs to be resurrected in your life, to have control of your actions, and that can only come from above.

Thus, for Nicodemus and all men, they will not see, they will not understand, they will not know the Kingdom of God unless they come to Jesus and are born again!

Do we see this idea of being born again in the New Testament? You bet we do. "All over the New Testament this idea of *rebirth, re-creation* occurs." (Barclay)

1 Peter speaks of being born anew by God's great mercy (1 Peter 1:3)

1 Peter speaks of being born anew from an imperishable seed (1 Peter 1:22-23)

James speaks of God bringing us forth by the word of truth (James 1:18)

Titus speaks to us of the washing of regeneration (Titus 3:5)

Romans speaks of dying with Jesus and rising anew (Romans 6:1-11)

1 Corinthians speaks of new believers as new-born babes (1 Corinthians 3:1-2)

2 Corinthians speaks of us being a new creation in Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Galatians says that in Jesus we are a new creation (Galatians 6:15)

Ephesians says the new man is created after God in righteousness (Ephesians 4:22-24)

Hebrews says that at the beginning of our Christian life we are like children (Hebrews 5:12-14)

- William Barclay, The Gospel of John Volume 1, pp. 125-126

Now let's see how Nicodemus will respond to what Jesus just told him about being born again and if he isn't, he will not see the Kingdom of God!

VERSE 4

This is an interesting response by Nicodemus because he doesn't say, "Why in the world do I need to be born again? I keep the law, I am a righteous man. I am a Pharisee!" That would be the typical response from these religious leaders.

But Nicodemus did not say that, which tells me Nicodemus saw his weakness, his failure to reach up and touch God and he is seeking a way by which that relationship with God can be restored, that gulf between God and man can be bridged!

Now, in saying that, it seems to me that Nicodemus' reply may not have been out of ignorance, but from thinking that Jesus meant a moral reformation. His question may be "How can you teach an old dog new tricks?" One way or another, Nicodemus clearly did not understand Jesus or the truth about the new birth.

You see, the problem for Nicodemus is he is thinking physical while Jesus is speaking spiritual! Listen to how Jesus answers his question.

VERSES 5-8

What does "**being born of water**" mean? Some say it speaks of water baptism, but that is not a requirement for salvation.

Others say it speaks of the Word of God and we are washed and cleansed by the Word.

I tend to lean towards this speaking of our physical birth for it does seem to parallel what Jesus says in verse 6 of the flesh.

It is then that you can have the spiritual birth as you ask Jesus to be Lord and Savior of your life, you are born again! It is as one person said, "***Born once, die twice; born twice, die once!***"

Now what he meant by that is simple. If you are born once, physical birth, you will die physically and you will also die in the second death as you are cast into eternity in the Lake of Fire at the Great White Throne Judgment in Revelation chapter 20.

But, if you are born twice, physical birth and spiritual birth, then you will only die once, speaking of our physical death as Revelation 20:6 says, "**Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.**"

Spurgeon put it like this as he sums this up for us, “A man may cast away many vices, forsake many lusts in which he indulged, and conquer evil habits, but no man in the world can make himself to be born of God; though he should struggle never so much, he could never accomplish what is beyond his power. And, mark you, if he could make himself to be born again, still he would not enter heaven, because there is another point in the condition which he would have violated - ‘unless a man be born of the *Spirit*, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’”

I like this story because it sums it up for us very nicely regarding trying to do our best. We are told,

An Arabian Chicken Little story tells of a young Arab who was traveling along a road on his donkey when he came upon a small, fuzzy object lying in the road. He dismounted to look more closely and found a sparrow lying on its back with its scrawny legs thrust skyward. At first he thought it was dead, but closer investigation proved the bird to be very much alive.

The young man asked the sparrow if he was all right. The sparrow replied, “Yes.” Then the Arab said, “What are you doing lying on your back with your legs pointed toward the sky?” The sparrow responded that he had heard a rumor that the sky was falling, so he was holding his legs up to support it. The Arab replied, “You surely don’t think you’re going to hold it up with those two scrawny legs, do you?” The sparrow, after a very solemn look, retorted, “One does the best he can.”

But of course our best will never suffice! That is what Jesus is saying in verse 6. “Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.” That which is vegetable is vegetable, that which is animal is animal, and that which is flesh remains flesh. There is no evolution from flesh to spirit! Jesus says, “You must be born again” (v. 7). You must realize you are a sinner and repent. You must receive the work of the Spirit in your life.

And in verse 7 Jesus said, “**Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’**” How do you think Nicodemus looked at this point? I think he was shocked by what Jesus was saying and Jesus is telling him not to be shocked by this but receive it by faith even though you don’t fully understand it.

And please understand, if you want to spend eternity with the Lord, you must be born again, it is not an option, for Jesus says, “**You must be born again.**” Notice He didn’t say “You should” or “It is a good idea” or “Pretty please!” If you don’t have Jesus, or if He doesn’t have you I should say, you are not born again and you will not see the Kingdom of God!

And like I have said, this was a difficult thing for Nicodemus to fully understand and grasp, just as it is for us. Thus, Jesus gives us this illustration to help us and in it He is basically saying, “You don’t see the wind, you don’t understand everything about the wind and yet you see its effects. The same is true with the birth of the spirit or being born again.”

And we have seen that as God touches people’s lives and changes them, transforms them. Look at Pastor Mike Macintosh for one example. Before he was saved Mike was a liar, a drug abuser, strung out on LSD. One night one of his buddies blew a gun off right beside his head while he was on a LSD high. Mike thought that half of his head was blown off and he would keep getting these flash backs. Mike was so bad that the doctors gave up on him, they couldn’t help him anymore.

Mike ended up at Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa and after hearing of the love and forgiveness of God from Pastor Chuck Smith, he gave his life to the Lord Jesus. In regard to his mind, God healed him, no more flash backs and when he looks in the mirror he sees his whole head! Not only that, but God has placed him as pastor over Horizon Christian Fellowship in San Diego, California overseeing thousands of people, traveling all over the world and speaking to heads of state!

You see, we can't see the Spirit doing this but we truly can see the effects of what the Spirit has done! And all who come to Jesus can experience this transformation in their lives, maybe not as dramatic as Mike, but still the same, the Spirit will work in you and through you once you are born again!

Listen to how Nicodemus responds to what Jesus just said and then the response of Jesus to this question of Nicodemus.

VERSES 9-13

As you look at the puzzlement of Nicodemus, he is wondering about what Jesus said, what is this process by which a person can be born again? I think the problem for Nicodemus is that he is still thinking of working his way into heaven, as they thought the Law was teaching them, instead of receiving the gift by faith. "I have been keeping the Law and I am not good enough to get in? How can this be?" That is his line of thinking here.

And Jesus rebukes him saying that he is this respected teacher in Israel, leading the people and yet he still does not know how to get into the Kingdom of God! How could he have known these things? Is Jesus being hard on him? Not at all, you see the Old Testament spoke of these things and thus, being a religious leader, a teacher in Israel, he should have known them.

In Jeremiah 31:31-34 we read **“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah - not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”**

The New Covenant that is based in the blood of Jesus and given to us by His Spirit, the new birth! In fact, the Old Testament Scriptures point us to Jesus, as Psalm 40:7 tells us, **“Then I said, ‘Behold, I come; In the scroll of the book it is written of me.”** So, he should have known these things.

And verse 11 is interesting because Jesus is speaking of His deity, that He is God. Morris tells us that Jesus “makes it clear that He can speak authoritatively about things in heaven, though no one else can.”

Why? Because He was with the Father, He is God! “In short, we have here the basis in Christ’s own words of the statement in the prologue that the Word was in the beginning with God, and became flesh to be a light to men.” (Dods)

And then in verse 12 we see that Jesus is telling Nicodemus that if he can’t get that $2 + 2 = 4$, the basics, then how in the world will he understand trigonometry?

You see, Jesus is giving to him the basics of entering heaven, this spiritual leader, and he is still having a hard time understanding it because he is in a box of man-made religious ideas that he is having a hard time of getting out of and letting them go!

Many do the same today, they ignore the truths of God found in His Word and they want to believe what man has to say instead, and that is tragic because they will miss heaven!

And we see why Jesus could speak with such authority in verse 13 once again. Because He was with the Father, became flesh in the Incarnation, descended from above, and thus, He speaks the truth for He is the truth, ***HE IS GOD!***

VERSES 14-15

Since Nicodemus did not get it yet, Jesus takes him back to a story that took place in Numbers chapter 21. In doing so He is showing Nicodemus how to be born again and He is saying that this story that took place in Numbers chapter 21 points to Him, to Jesus and what He is to do.

You may remember the story; the children of Israel were wandering in the wilderness after being set free from their bondage in Egypt and they once again were complaining. God therefore sent a judgment upon them, serpents.

And as the people were bitten by these serpents they began to die and Moses steps in and intercedes for the people. God responds by telling Moses to make a bronze serpent and place it upon a pole in the camp. Then, when anyone is bitten by these serpents, if they would look to this bronze serpent on a pole, they would be healed. If they didn't, they would die.

Now this bronze serpent on a pole we see portrayed with the serpent wrapped around the pole but I don't think that is how it was made. The pole itself was vertical and the serpent I think was horizontal on that pole and it made a picture of the cross!

Now for many, they heard what Moses said and they thought it was the stupidest, most ridiculous thing in the world to do. They needed a medic or some anti-snake venom, not to look upon this serpent on a pole. Thus, when they were bitten, they died! Others, when they were bitten, they looked upon this bronze serpent on a pole by faith and they were healed, they lived!

Now what in the world does that have to do with Jesus? Everything! You see, bronze in the Scriptures speaks of judgment and the serpent speaks of sin. Thus, this bronze serpent on a pole spoke of the judgment of sin and Jesus is saying that when He is lifted up, placed on the cross, all our sins will be judged as He became sin for us and paid in full the penalty for our sins.

In Isaiah 45:22 we are told, "**Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.**"

And Paul said in II Corinthians 5:21, "**For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.**"

Thus, all who look upon Jesus, receive Him will live and all those who reject Him, think it is foolish to look upon someone dying on the cross for our sins, will die! You see, as you look by faith at the cross of Jesus, receive Him, you are born again!

VERSE 16

As we have seen going through the Gospel's is that Jesus is a master communicator. In these 25 words, He gives to us the Father's heart – He loves the world, you and me! Morris adds to this thought, “The Jew was ready enough to think of God as loving Israel, but no passage appears to be cited in which any Jewish writer maintains that God loved the world. It is a distinctively Christian idea that God's love is wide enough to embrace all mankind.”

Then we see Jesus give to us the Father's plan – He gave His only begotten Son to be sin for us, to pay the penalty for our sins. Alford puts it like this, “These words seem to carry a reference to the offering of Isaac; and Nicodemus in that case would at once be reminded by them of the love *there required*, the *substitution there made*, and the *prophecy there uttered to Abraham*.”

And lastly, He gives to us His will – that whoever believes will be saved, not just a quantity of life but a quality of life!

And please understand this is not speaking of a limited atonement or that Jesus died only for some as Reformed Theology or Calvinism teaches. This verse alone refutes that idea. God's gift of eternal life is for “**whoever believes in Him**” and I am so thankful for that.

These words of Jesus here in John 3:16 are so rich, they are so beautiful and out of the 31,373 verses in the Bible, it may be the most popular, the most often used. But many people, even though they have read it, they know it, they have not applied it to their lives where they can have that abundant joy that is only found in Jesus! They are not born again because they are still trying to work their way into heaven and that will never happen. You can never be good enough to get in, you must be perfect and apart from the righteousness of Christ applied to your life by faith, you will not make it.

I like how Bruce summed this up for us. He wrote, “If there is one sentence more than another which sums up the message of the Fourth Gospel, it is this. The love of God is limitless; it embraces all mankind. No sacrifice was too great to bring its unmeasured intensity home to men and women: the best that God had to give, he gave – his only Son, his well-beloved.”

Now I need to make another point here because some feel that if you die apart from Christ you are annihilated, you cease to exist. That is not true. You see, that word “**perish**” in verse 16 is APOLETAI in the Greek and it is not speaking of annihilation for those that refuse to believe but a final destiny of ruin in Hell apart from God, who is life, who is truth, who is joy! God wants to save but He will not force anyone, He will invite them to come and then it is up to each individual to respond.

Let’s read on and see what else Jesus has to say to Nicodemus and to us.

VERSES 17-21

Now this is interesting. Why didn’t God condemn us? And the answer is simple. Because we are already condemned. You see, we are dead in our trespasses and sins. Our sin before a holy and righteous God has already condemned us. We didn’t need more condemnation we need salvation and thus, God sent forth His Son to give to us salvation through His shed blood on the cross of Calvary! Jesus has come to give us life, to save us. That is why He came!

Let me share this with you and you will see the compassion that Jesus has for us. We are told,

At a railway station in New Jersey a little girl stepped up to a shackled criminal, and looking tenderly into his face, said: "Oh, man, I am so sorry for you." It made him very angry, and he tried to strike her. Her mother forbade her to go near him again. But as they all waited for the train the mother's eyes were turned away, and once more the little tot stole up to the wretched man and tenderly whispered to him: "Poor man, Jesus Christ is so sorry for you." He started and gave a low groan and offered no violence. Suddenly the train came, the officers led him away, and the two parted forever. But years afterwards the man came forth from prison a Christian and an evangelist, and he loved to tell how the compassion of the Lord Jesus from the lips of a little child broke his heart, subdued his spirit, saved his soul. It is not our sympathy men want, but His!

- Heartwarming Bible Illustrations

It is as Paul said in Romans 8:1, "**There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.**"

And Jesus said in John 5:24, "**Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.**"

Now you may be thinking, "That is great for those who have heard of Christ, but what about those who have never had the opportunity to believe, they have never heard the good news of Jesus Christ?"

Paul does speak about that in Romans chapters 1 and 2, but that is not what Jesus is dealing with here. Jesus is speaking of those who deliberately reject the message of Christ. They heard the truth they just refuse to accept it.

I like the way that Bruce looks at this. He wrote, “No explicit mention is made here of those who have never had the opportunity of believing in Christ, those on whom the light in its fullness has never shone. But John’s words probably unfold the principle of their judgment too. As the eternal Word came to men and women before becoming incarnate in Christ, so it is with the light of God. If men and women are judged by their response to the light, they are judged by their response to such light as is available to them.”

And because I know that God loves sinful man, no matter what, the heavens declare the glory of God and any person who is searching for the God who created the heavens and the earth, God will reveal Himself to that person! God is a just judge and thus, whatever He does is right, it is perfect! Never forget that!

And here is the painful truth for those who refuse to come to Jesus. They are and will remain condemned until they do. God has done everything possible to save us except force us, now it is up to us to receive that gift. But why won’t they come to Jesus?

We don’t have to guess because Jesus tells us in John 3:19-21, “**And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.**”

And this just makes sense. You see, they enjoy sin and thus, when the light of God exposes their evil, their sin, they fight against it, try to extinguish it, to put it out.

Make no mistake about it, light always exposes the darkness and when God shines on a person's heart, if they refuse to receive it, they will flee from it. They don't want to change and they don't want their sin exposed, although now it seems like we are living in a time where people have no problem flaunting their sin!

Look at what is going on just in this nation. But, and here is the wonderful news, if you come to the truth, to Jesus, your life will reflect that new nature you have, the nature of God as Paul tells us in II Corinthians 5:17, "**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.**"

Clarke sums it up like this as he wrote, "They chose to walk in the darkness, that they might do the works of darkness - they broke the Divine law, refused the mercy offered to them, are arrested by Divine justice, convicted, condemned, and punished. Whence, then, does their damnation proceed? From THEMSELVES." How true that is!

VERSES 22-24

Here we see John focus on the work Jesus did in the area of Judea while the other Gospels focused on the work that Jesus did in the region of Galilee.

And here in Judea we see Jesus baptizing people, really His men baptizing people. Of this Morris wrote, "More probably it represents a continuation of the 'baptism of repentance' that was characteristic of John the Baptist."

And we also see that John the Baptist was baptizing. Now what takes place next is interesting because there could have been some confrontation between the two, between the men who were following John the Baptist and those who were following Jesus. Let's read on and see what transpired.

VERSES 25-26

Here comes trouble it seems. You see, Jesus was gaining a following and theirs is shrinking. They saw Jesus in competition with them and they didn't like it so they go and tell their leader, John the Baptist about this so he could rectify the problem.

Jealousy can grow and it can be destructive. We need to be careful that we rest in the Lord and we rejoice in the work that God is doing through other Christians and Christian ministries. It is not all about us and we will deal with that in a few minutes.

Now, let me show you how this works. We are told,

In a home where a lady had two canary cages, one on either side of a window, a visitor made some comment about the birds. Whereupon the hostess remarked that one of the canaries was exceedingly jealous. She then proved her statement. Going to the cage of the bird that was not jealous, she began petting it, calling it pretty names and chatting with it. The reaction of the other canary was remarkable. Its feathers ruffled up, it fluttered all about the cage and made angry squawks of protest. There was no question about its jealous nature. Man, too, displays a jealous nature by his actions.

- Illustrations of Bible Truths

So, as John's men come to him with their concerns, their complaints, listen to how John responds because his response is great!

VERSES 27-30

Keep in mind that the disciples of John the Baptist were concerned that they were going to lose what they had, this following. So that is what John the Baptist is answering first, this concern of losing.

And I like that John the Baptist is reminding them that everything that they have is a gift from God and it should be received with joy, with thankfulness.

In this we see the humility of John the Baptist because he recognizes that all he has is a gift from God; he is nothing apart from God.

May we not forget that. I think too often it is all about us and what we have done instead of praising and thanking God for all He has done, what He has given to us.

There is a story told about a young preacher who strutted to the pulpit, expecting to wow the congregation. He was very proud, very confident and he had an extremely difficult time. He fumbled with the words he wanted to say, lost his place, he had a hard time making his point, and he came down distressed, almost brokenhearted, and after words a wise pastor said, "If you had gone up as you came down, you would have come down as you went up." What a powerful lesson for us all!

From saying that all is a gift of God and being thankful, John then speaks of a Jewish wedding. And he is saying, in a sense, that he is the best man at the wedding of Jesus and His followers, the Church, which is the bride of Christ.

Thus, it is more important for the bride to come to the bridegroom than the best man, isn't it? Of course it is! Of this illustration, William Barclay makes these comments. He wrote,

The "friend of the bridegroom," the *shoshben*, had a unique place at a Jewish wedding. He acted as the liaison between the bride and the bridegroom; he arranged the wedding; he took out the invitation; he presided at the wedding feast. He brought the bride and the bridegroom together. And he had one special duty. It was his duty to guard the bridal chamber and to let no false lover in. He would only open the door when in the dark he heard the bridegroom's voice and recognized it. When he heard the bridegroom's voice he was glad and he let him in, and he went away rejoicing, for his task was completed and the lovers were together. He did not grudge the bridegroom the bride. He knew that his only task had been to bring bride and bridegroom together. And when the task was done he willingly and gladly faded out of the center of the picture.

- William Barclay, John, pp. 143-144

Thus, John recognized his work was coming to an end and he said these powerful words, "**He must increase, but I must decrease.**" John 3:30. Those seven words are at the heart or should be at the heart of any true ministry, that Jesus is lifted up, that people are drawn to Him and not to us. We need to have Jesus become more visible, greater in our lives and to have less of us visible, less of that flesh life coming through!

And let me say this. Those are not easy words for us to say but they are needful for us to say, "**He must increase, but I must decrease.**" John 3:30.

And what could have turned out in a fight or argument for a person's rights, that is not what we see here as John recognized that God was in control and he was joyful to serve the Lord at any capacity. Jesus is the focus. Bruce put it like this, "John betrays no sense of envy or rivalry. It is not easy to see another's influence growing at the expense of one's own; it is even less easy to rejoice at the sight. But John found his joy completed by the news which his disciples brought."

Now as we read on and finish this chapter, in verses 31-36 some feel that John the Baptist is continuing on. But I tend to think this is the apostle John making these statements for he will be going over some of the things Jesus already said in this chapter.

Is it a big deal? I don't believe it is and when you understand that all Scripture is given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it makes it even less important I think. But again, I lean towards the apostle John speaking these words here. Listen to what John tells us.

VERSES 31-36

Notice what John is telling us here. That God has sent His son, Jesus, to become flesh and dwell among us. Thus, what Jesus speaks He does so with authority because He has not only been with the Father, but they are One, their natures are the same.

And God the Father gave God the Son in His Incarnation the fullness of the Spirit, "**For God does not give the Spirit by measure,**" or He doesn't or didn't just measure it out to Him.

The conclusion of this is that whoever believes in Jesus; receives Him by faith into their lives, has everlasting life and whoever doesn't will see the wrath of God come upon them, the judgment for sin. See, our sins have been paid in full by Jesus, He bore God's wrath as He hung on the cross and thus, we have life in Him.

And I realize that some try to soften the wrath of God today so not to offend people, I guess they want to make people feel more comfortable. But you can't do that. Let me explain.

One writer put it like this, "The word does not mean a sudden gust of passion or a burst of temper. Rather, it is the settled displeasure of God against sin. It is the divine allergy [dislike] to moral evil, the reaction of righteousness to unrighteousness." (Tenney)

And think about this for a minute. You can't say to God, "I reject your Son, Jesus Christ, but I still want the free gift of eternal life!" It does not work that way. The gift is found in the Son and thus, to reject the Son you reject His gift!

Also, Morris points out, "The wrath of God' is a concept which is uncongenial to many modern students, and various devices are adopted to soften the expression or explain it away. This cannot be done, however, without doing great violence to many passages of Scripture and without distracting from God's moral character."

And lastly, Barclay makes this interesting point. He wrote, "It is not that God sends wrath upon him; it is that he brings that wrath upon himself."

Also, keep in mind that we are dealing with a people, the Jews, who were committed to the Law, keeping it for their salvation. And yet, did you notice that you do not see anything dealing with the keeping of the Law, obeying the Golden Rule, with going to church, with tithing, with just doing the best that you can, working your way into heaven.

The reason you don't see it is because that is not how you enter in! John makes it very simple, "**He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.**" John 3:36. **BELIEVE** not **WORK** your way in! It doesn't get any simpler than that!

Let me leave you with these words from Paul in Hebrews 9:11-15, where he says **“But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.”**

You see, it is all about Jesus and His finished work on the cross of Calvary and our responsibility is to **BELIEVE** or to put it another way, ask Him to be Lord and Savior of our lives! Look upon the cross where sin was judged and you will be healed!