

Teaching Points

John the baptist appears again in this section. He's still baptizing people and teaching his own disciples - much like we saw in chapter 1. Verse 22 says that Jesus and His disciples also conducted a baptizing ministry at the same time as John. This led to some conflict between some of the Jews and the disciples of John.

Verse 26 records a complaint that arose out of this conflict, ***“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's disciples seem to be concerned that their ministry with John is losing steam while Christ's ministry with His disciples is growing.

John's response to their complain provides us with an opportunity to rehearse some of the truths that were laid down in chapter 1. Here we see John reiterating the supremacy of Christ and His ministry over his own. Let's consider a few statements from John's response.

1. Verse 28, ***“You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, I have been sent before Him.”***

This is John's way of saying, “Guys, I told you from the start that this wasn't about me!” Back in chapter 1 there were people asking John questions about his identity and he made it very plain there, as he does now, that he was only sent as a forerunner to prepare the way for Christ.

2. Verse 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.”***

John uses the imagery of a wedding to describe and compare his own ministry with Christ's. In the metaphor Jesus is the groom and John is a friend of the groom.

Discussion Question: What does this metaphor say about John's ministry and his relationship to Jesus?

Thoughts: *The groom receives attention and honor much more than any of the groomsmen. John is describing himself as one of the friends of the groom who stands by and watches the groom receive attention and acclamation. John is essentially describing himself as a side note to the true person of interest. Jesus deserves to be in the spotlight and John's disciples should be glad to see Christ's ministry growing.*

3. The second half of verse 29 says, ***“Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.”***

This is an important statement about John's attitude. He knows that he's not the main focus - and he's happy to be in the background. To go back to the wedding analogy,

John isn't a discontent or jealous groomsman who stands by and sneers while the groom receives honor. Rather the opposite. John is a groomsman who stands to the side with a genuine smile on his face while he watches his friend, the groom, receive attention and applause. Seeing Christ's ministry grow - even while his own ministry is shrinking - is the fulfillment of John's joy.

Discussion Question: Does it seem natural to you for a man like John to be joyful while his life's work shrinks before his eyes? How was he able to see people leave his ministry to go follow Jesus without becoming jealous or bitter?

Thoughts: *John had his joyful attitude because he had a high view of Jesus. He knew that Jesus is the one "above all" (v. 31), the one whom God has sent to speak the words of God (v. 34), the one whom God the Father loves (v. 35), and the one to whom God the Father has given all things into His hand (v.35). He believed that Jesus is the eternal Son of God and, as such, he was happy to see people follow Jesus instead of himself.*

4. Verse 27, **"A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven."**

To know Christ and to desire to follow Him are gifts from God. Notice how John uses the language of giving and receiving. God must give this knowledge to us or else we will never obtain it. This is much the same as what Christ said to Peter in Matthew 16:17, **"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."** Peter's statement of faith is not something he possessed according to his natural faculties. His faith and knowledge of Christ were gifts from God. This is the same point John makes in verse 27.

Discussion Question: Why can't humans obtain saving faith in their own natural strength? Can you think of any Bible verses that explain why we need supernatural help from God in order to believe?

Thoughts: *Ephesians 2:1 says that we were dead in trespasses and sins. This means that we needed a supernatural work of God in order to make us alive and full of faith. Romans 8:8 says those in the flesh cannot please God. This means that we were incapable of honoring God before God changed our hearts. John 6:44 says that no one can come to Christ unless the Father draws them. This means that we are utterly dependent on God to bring us into a relationship with His Son Jesus. The bottom line is that saving faith is a miracle that God Himself must create.*

John closes chapter 3 by declaring that believers in Christ possess everlasting life while unbelievers abide under the wrath of God. That's the dividing line. We are not saved or damned based on our own good works. We are saved by faith in Christ the Son of God. And this saving faith is given to sinful humans as a gracious gift from God.

Prayer Focus

Let's pray along the lines of verse 30, ***"He must increase, but I must decrease."*** Pray that people will see the matchless worth of Christ when they look at your life. Pray for each other that we would all draw nearer to God and become less important in our own eyes.

Pray for a joyful attitude like John's. His joy was fulfilled to see Christ exalted. Let's pray for joyful and content spirits like that. Even if no one is celebrating you, be glad that people are celebrating Jesus.

Also, praise God for new faces at church and pray specifically for some new people you've met. Let's thank God He's still calling people to Himself through His Son. Instead of being concerned that others are following Christ (like John's disciples) let's rejoice that the family is growing. (Pray for specific new families and individuals if you know any names.)