

John 3:22 – 36

^{3:22} 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. ²⁵ Therefore there arose a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purification. 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.' ²⁷ John answered and said, 'A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent ahead of him.' 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. ³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease. ³¹ 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. ³² What he has seen and heard, of that he testifies; and no one receives his testimony. ³³ He who has received his testimony has set his seal to this, that God is true. ³⁴ For he whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for he gives the Spirit without measure. ³⁵ The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. ³⁶ 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.'

Historical Background

- Baptism: a practice of being dunked in water; it was based on the symbolism of the Genesis creation, where God brought forth new life out of water; so it symbolized a dying and rising to a new life that Jews did to welcome Gentile converts into Judaism; the surprising thing was that John did this to Jews – a challenging gesture!

Observations:

- Repeated from 3:1 – 21
 - Baptism
 - heaven, from above
 - earth
 - testimony
 - Spirit, words
 - eternal life
 - wrath of God
- Repeated from 2:1 – 12
 - Bridegroom
 - Joy
 - Purification
- Repeated from 1:14 – 18
 - John the Baptist
 - Testify
 - God sent Jesus
 - Father loves the Son

Questions

1. Let's start off with a personal question. How is serving Jesus sometimes a lonely experience?
 - a. Jesus may cause you to feel a passion for telling people about him that leads you to feel a certain level of rejection from others.
 - b. Jesus changes your relationship with your peers and family, so that you share his concerns for them, making you different. It's hard for them to understand you.
 - c. Jesus may send you to a group of people who you wouldn't necessarily like by yourself.
 - d. Jesus may call other people – who were once with you – to do something else.
2. How do we see John the Baptist experiencing loneliness or not?
3. How does he experience joy?
 - a. He knows that God gave him his opportunity to serve, and gives the results (v.27)
 - b. He focuses on Jesus as the one who gets all the devotion (v.28 – 29)
 - c. He empathizes with Jesus – Jesus' joy is his joy (v.29)
 - d. He is okay with decreasing as long as Jesus increases (v.30)
 - e. He remembers that Jesus is the unique one who is from heaven and above all (v.31), who speaks the words of God and gives the Spirit beyond measure (v.34) and has received all things from the Father (v.35)
 - f. He knows that people's response to Jesus is ultimately the big question (v.36)
 - g. 'Eternal life' (v.36) is the life of the Triune God. Jesus and the Spirit draw us into true life, into the place where we are transformed. This is the nature of God's inner life as a Trinity – joyfully celebrating the other and enjoying the other. No hiding, nothing to be ashamed of, no secret rivalries or jealousies.
4. Let's explore that last point in v.36. What is God's wrath?
 - a. The 'wrath of God' is the love of God as it is experienced by a self-centered person. God continually demands joyful celebration of the fact that all praise and glory belongs to *Jesus*, because it is through Jesus that all humanity is being redeemed, and in Jesus that all humanity is loved. If we refuse Jesus, we remain in utter darkness. We claim that God is not true to His promises to transform humanity in love. We keep trying to celebrate ourselves when all of our petty celebrations are denied us by God. We keep trying to deny Jesus the greatest of all celebrations when in fact God centers all reality on Jesus. In other words, the love of God and the life of God have a focal point: Jesus. Jesus is the precondition for experiencing the love and life of God as love and life. Otherwise, we will be eternally jealous, enraged, and bitter.
 - b. God's wrath is His personal and permanent opposition to human sin, and in this specific case, not just sinful actions but the corrupted human nature. It is not what He designed human nature to be. Human nature was originally good.
 - c. God does judge the corruption in human nature, absolutely and without apology. He does so first in Jesus – by condemning sin in the flesh of Christ since Christ never sinned

throughout his entire life (Romans 8:3 – 4) and then by putting to death the ‘old self...the body of sin,’ which was the physical body of Jesus containing the tragic corruption we all share (Romans 6:6). It is perhaps why Jesus refers to himself by analogy to the ‘snake’ that Moses lifted up in the wilderness in Numbers 21:4 – 9 (see John 3:14 – 15). By doing this on the cross and raising Christ from the dead as a truly new human being, God embraced in love the original human nature of Jesus by resurrecting him – and that nature – into eternal life. This makes Jesus the source of true Spirit-filled humanness. So for us to die and rise with Christ (Romans 6:1 – 11) by the Spirit means that we embrace both the judgment of God and the love of God in the death and resurrection of Jesus. God judges the fallen human nature in us as we identify with Jesus’ death, and simultaneously affirms and loves our fundamental humanity as ‘made in His image’ as we identify with Jesus’ resurrection. By embracing Jesus, we embrace our true selves: who we were truly meant to be. When the Spirit of Christ comes to dwell in us, God restores His image in us because He has already restored His image in Jesus. But if we reject Jesus, we reject ourselves as well, fundamentally. In that sense, the wrath of God does indeed abide on those who reject Jesus, because the person who rejects Jesus is identifying himself or herself with a false construct of self. Recall in John 18 – 19 how sin is expressed in self-negation. Simon Peter said, ‘I am not.’ Pilate, who should have cared about truth in legal proceedings, said in abdication, ‘What is truth?’ The Jews, who cried out at every Passover that they had no king but God, said, ‘We have no king but Caesar.’

- d. In that sense, God’s judgment is something that happens first in the physical body of Christ in his life, death and resurrection. Then God’s judgment occurs in us and upon us at our conversion, where we die and rise with Christ by the Spirit. Then God’s judgment falls on others in eternity for all eternity, but only because hell is the constant attempt by some to wrench free of the love of God which keeps judging their old selves and false identities, and bringing their new selves into existence in resurrection. The problem with those committed to resisting God is that, in so doing, they deny their very selves for all eternity. Hence they experience God’s love as torment, and yes, judgment.
5. What does it mean that God is true in v.33?
 - a. That in and through Jesus, God is fulfilling His commitment to making a new humanity. He is giving people a new heart promised in Psalm 51:10, Jeremiah 31:33, and Ezekiel 36:26. He is healing the corruption in human nature, and giving us a new, transformed humanity in return. Otherwise, God would be a liar, since He promised this in the Old Testament and didn’t deliver.
 6. (optional) How is John the Baptist different from Nicodemus, in 3:1 – 21?
 - a. John is not competitive, no rivalry or envy of position, whereas N. was afraid of losing his position.
 - b. John is happy to become less, whereas N. and the other Jewish leaders seem worried that too many people will start following Jesus
 - c. John finds joy in Jesus, whereas N. seems to find joy in himself
 - d. John testifies publicly, whereas N. did not testify to having met Jesus, and comes at night so as to not be seen with Jesus.
 - e. John’s response is how all Israel should have responded towards Jesus
 7. (for leaders) Why isn’t John jealous of Jesus when Jesus leads people away from him?
 - a. He knows his place
 - b. He sees God behind people being drawn to Jesus (we must not generalize v.27 beyond this)
 - c. He knows God is true, i.e. fulfilling His covenant, through Jesus
 - d. Jesus should rightly have ‘all things’ from the Father (v.35)
 - e. What does the analogy of the wedding reveal about how John looks at his life?
 - i. Have you ever been to a wedding of someone you knew? What was that like? It’s awesome!
 - ii. What are some things that are inappropriate to do at weddings if you’re a guest? Draw attention to yourself. Dress flamboyantly. Act in a way that is really conspicuous.
 - iii. STATE: When you’re a guest at a wedding, the event is not about you. You receive joy from it if you’re joyful about the couple. That’s what John the

Baptist sees here. All of life is a wedding ceremony where more people are coming to Jesus. He gets to be a part of it. He's not the center of attention. Even his own followers are leaving him to know Jesus. But he's okay with that!

8. APPLICATIONS

- a. If you're a freshman, think about next year. There will be a new freshman class, and people will focus on welcoming them. You can either welcome them also, for Jesus' sake, or you can get jealous about them and slide into the sophomore slump.
- b. If you're interested in leadership, think about how that is. I used to have a lot of peer friends that I liked hanging out with. But over time, the more excited I got about ministry, the more I felt like my peer friends, as well as my parents, didn't really share in that. There were always a few people who were also excited about ministry, but I felt increasingly lonely in a sense because the people I cared about didn't care about Jesus and other people in the same way I did.
- c. If you like this fellowship or church, there may come a point where you don't like it because new people come in. Your friends might start spending time with new people. You might feel like, 'Hey, what about me???'
- d. Life is either a huge wedding party with Jesus as the bridegroom, with you celebrating his wedding as a guest, or it's a party you're trying to throw for yourself that people keep leaving.
- e. Do you get happier about yourself, or about seeing people come to Jesus and become transformed by him? How can you cultivate joy for Jesus?
 - i. We become what we proclaim. If we proclaim Jesus as God's way of saving and redeeming humanity ('Jesus was sent from God'), then we must be being saved from our own evil, we must be being redeemed, and we must be being made new.
 - ii. You will decrease and Jesus will increase – that is a fact. The only question is whether you will receive it joyfully.