

"HE MUST BECOME GREATER, I MUST BECOME LESS"

- Our **mission** is to *Reach* people in the Name of Jesus; *Disciple* people in the Way of Jesus; *Empower* people in the Service of Jesus.
 - Our **method** is to ensure that everything we do is *Christ Centered; Word Focused; & Ministry Minded*
 - Our **message** is *the Gospel*.
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JOHN 3:22-31

INTRODUCTION:

You have likely heard the slogan, “*Friends don’t let friends drive drunk.*” The idea is simple: we may feel like doing something, but, in fact, it would be better if we did not. We recognize that we are easily manipulated, the excitement or confusion of a moment can sweep us off our senses and we do that which is foolish. A friend holds us back, he/she applies the brakes, he/she makes us do that very thing we would want to do if we were in our right mind. As you can imagine, such a clever slogan is often edited in order to make a statement.

We can summarize the main point of our text as, “*Friends don’t let friends grab glory.*” As people move from John and toward Jesus, John’s disciples feel envy and jealousy. They want their man in power; they plan to ride his coattails to positions of influence; they enjoy the excitement of John’s fame and they want it not to end.

John is the true friend. He insists that only One get glory – and it will not be himself! Nor does he resort to exaggeration and emotional appeals. As we gather around John the Baptist, and also listen to John the Apostle’s commentary, we learn much about how to relate to God and to other people, both the vertical and the horizontal aspects of our lives together.

Before we do, however, let us take a quick side road. Did you notice the unexpected reasoning in verse 23? Look at it again: “John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized.”

I wonder if we are all satisfied with his answer? “John, how did you pick Aenon for your work? Did God give you a vision? Did you get a word from the Lord? Tell us, how did you know this was the place?” And John answers, “Well, I was baptizing a lot of people and there was a bunch of water there.”

One quick side note for us to consider...

Please beware of over-spiritualizing church life. Because Christians want to be biblical in all they do, we can easily imagine that our choices are more spiritual than they really are. When that happens, secondary matters are often elevated to first importance. Let me give an example. I wear a robe on Sunday morning. Suppose an auxiliary came to me and said, “Pastor King, we really think that the robe has connotations in our time and place that make an obstacle for people coming to Christ. Some who see the robe may think of Supreme Court Justices especially when you were the black ones, and it could distract them. Would you consider not wearing it on Sunday mornings?” I would consider it... We may need to discuss the pros and cons, but it is not a matter of biblical faithfulness to wear a robe, nor does it affect my or their salvation. But if we demand “spiritual answers” for every decision, we run the risk of trivializing Scripture. Tell us, how did you know this was the place?” And John answers, “Well, I was baptizing a lot of people and there was a bunch of water there.”

DISCUSSION:

The ministry of John the Baptist was unique in all of history, for several reasons:

1. His ministry came ‘between the testaments’, so to speak. There had not been a prophet in Israel for 400 years. The voice of God had been silent to His people, and they longed for a Word from Him, as they also longed for the promised Deliverer (They got both in Christ; the Prophet of whom Moses spoke). So in a sense, John was an Old Testament Dispensation prophet, born at the proper time to usher in the New Testament Dispensation. In his left hand he held (and upheld) the Law and the Prophets, echoing their voice, and in the right hand he held the good news of impending fulfillment; not only of all the prophets spoke, but of God’s great plan for the ages.
2. The nature and purpose of his baptism were unlike any before or to come. The Jews (of all sects) had their ceremonial washings which for the most part were done on a daily basis, and for symbolic preparation for other forms of worship. John’s was a one-time baptism of repentance, to symbolize and testify of the heart’s preparation for the coming of the Holy One of Israel. Luke records for us in Chapter 7 of his gospel that the people “acknowledged God’s justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God’s purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John”.
3. And of course, it was unique in that he would be afforded the honor and privilege of baptizing Jesus Himself, so that all righteousness might be fulfilled as our Lord identified Himself with His chosen nation and with fallen man (Hebrews 2:14-18).

While John was at the peak of his career, Jesus appeared on the scene and the crowds, who had once streamed out of the villages to follow John, began to follow Jesus instead. As John watched them go, his only response was, “**He must become greater, I must become less.**”

John’s response to Christ is the same response which all of us must offer Him. John was able to do this because:

I. He Mastered Himself—“I must become less.”

- A. The desire for recognition is a universal human drive.

1. We all want to be important, to surpass others, to achieve distinction.
2. This desire often drives much that we do in life.

B. Unchecked or improperly channeled this instinct can get us into a lot of trouble.

1. Even good deeds can be undone by an overeager desire for credit and self-acclaim.
2. At its worst it can even become ruthless. History is strewn with the wreckage of the havoc visited upon us by people who have reached for greatness with no respect for God or fellow humans.

C. Even the church suffers from unchecked or improperly channeled egos.

1. Ego-centric preachers, ruling deacons, rogue committees, resident critics—all trying to impose their will upon the kingdom of God.
2. The unbridled ego may be the single greatest threat to the health of the church.

D. Properly channeled, however, this powerful human instinct can be the source of great achievement.

1. In response to the egotistical request of James and John to sit at His right hand (Mark 10:35-45), Jesus urged them to seek true greatness through service
2. Christian greatness is a greatness that undergirds rather than overpowers, that seeks to serve rather than to be served.
3. This is the greatness John the Baptizer rose to in this, his most difficult moment.

II. He Was Mastered By Jesus Christ—“He must become greater.”

A. When John looked at Jesus, he saw something in Him which he himself did not possess, something with which he could not compare.

1. He noticed it in his preaching.
2. He witnessed it in his miracles.
3. But it went even deeper. He saw it in his person.

B. True greatness belongs only to Jesus.

1. History validates his greatness. He alone is without peer.
2. Jesus was more than the greatest man. He is the Son of God. According to the scriptures it is He who: made the world, sustains the world, saves the world, presides over the world. He is in every way the incomparable Christ.

C. And John may have been the first person to truly sense it.

1. When he sees Him coming to the Jordan, there is no question in his voice: “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”
2. With these words John acknowledges Jesus as more than the master teacher, more than the great physician, more than a great humanitarian. He is uniquely the Savior of the world.

CONCLUSION:

For John, to meet Jesus was to be mastered by Him. So must it be for all who will answer His call to salvation and service. Jesus has to be more than just master, teacher, savior, He has to become Lord of our lives.