

John 3:22-36

Then Jesus and his disciples left Jerusalem and went into the Judean countryside. Jesus spent some time with them there, baptizing people.

²³ At this time John the Baptist was baptizing at Aenon, near Salim, because there was plenty of water there; and people kept coming to him for baptism. ²⁴ (This was before John was thrown into prison.) ²⁵ A debate broke out between John's disciples and a certain Jew over ceremonial cleansing. ²⁶ So John's disciples came to him and said, "Rabbi, the man you met on the other side of the Jordan River, the one you identified as the Messiah, is also baptizing people. And everybody is going to him instead of coming to us."

²⁷ John replied, "No one can receive anything unless God gives it from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves know how plainly I told you, 'I am not the Messiah. I am only here to prepare the way for him.' ²⁹ It is the bridegroom who marries the bride, and the bridegroom's friend is simply glad to stand with him and hear his vows. Therefore, I am filled with joy at his success. ³⁰ He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less.

³¹ "He has come from above and is greater than anyone else. We are of the earth, and we speak of earthly things, but he has come from heaven and is greater than anyone else. ³² He testifies about what he has seen and heard, but how few believe what he tells them! ³³ Anyone who accepts his testimony can affirm that God is true. ³⁴ For he is sent by God. He speaks God's words, for God gives him the Spirit without limit. ³⁵ The Father loves his Son and has put everything into his hands. ³⁶ And anyone who believes in God's Son has eternal life. Anyone who doesn't obey the Son will never experience eternal life but remains under God's angry judgment."

Background

Verse 23 says John the Baptist was in Aenon, but this exact location is uncertain. His baptism was not "Christian baptism" but a "baptism of repentance," preparing people for God's coming kingdom. Meanwhile, Jesus' disciples were also baptizing, but Jesus Himself did not perform baptisms (John 4:1-2). Like John's, their baptism was a testimony of repentance, preceding the Christian baptism established after Jesus' resurrection.

A dispute arose between John's disciples and some Jews (likely Essenes who practiced frequent ceremonial immersions and their methods differed from John's). John's disciples were upset that people were now going to Jesus for baptism instead of them. In response, John humbly affirmed Jesus' supremacy, saying, "*He must become greater, and I must become less,*" acknowledging his supportive role.

Teaching Points

1. People who don't believe the words of Jesus don't believe in the God of the Bible.

Many claim to believe in God but reject key teachings of Jesus, such as eternal judgment, human sinfulness, and that He is the only way to salvation. When they do this, they're rejecting the God of the Bible. John the Baptist emphasized that while he spoke from an earthly perspective, Jesus came from heaven and speaks the very words of God. Those who believe Jesus' words agree with the one true God of the Bible. Those who reject Jesus' words believe only in a god of their own making.

2. The wrath of God abides on the unbeliever.

Verse 36 teaches a powerful truth: those who believe in the Son have eternal life now, but those who reject Him are already under God's wrath. This isn't future judgment, it's a present reality for unbelievers. This verse parallels John 3:18. Rejecting Jesus doesn't start condemnation later, it confirms a state of already being condemned. An illustration: Imagine a dam holding back a massive flood. Those living beneath it are in constant danger, even if unaware. To be saved, they must heed the warning and flee to safety.

Application

1. What do you have that you did not receive? (1 Corinthians 4:7)

1 Corinthians 4:7 and John 3:27 remind us that everything we have is a gift from God. John the Baptist understood this. He accepted his God-given role and didn't boast or envy others. He was content, knowing his assignment came from heaven. We shouldn't boast about our talents or success. Whether it's ability, opportunity, or influence, it's all from God. Instead of pride, we're called to humility and gratitude.

2. Do you know the secret of joy?

John the Baptist understood the secret of true joy: submitting to God's will. In John 3:29, he compares himself to the best man at a wedding. His joy is in the bridegroom—Jesus—being honored. Even as John's ministry faded and Jesus' grew, John was content. His joy was complete because he had fulfilled his God-given role. His attitude: *"He must become greater, and I must become less."* Joy comes from accepting, submitting to, and aligning with God's will. Do you know that secret?