

John on Jesus - He Must Increase, I Must Decrease

Sign Title: He Must Increase, I Must Decrease

July 15, 2012

Good morning Faith family. My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. I want to say a special “Hello” to those connecting through the Internet. It is great having you studying the Gospel of John with us. For the last three weeks we studied one of the most famous chapters in this Gospel, that is John chapter three. This morning we finish the chapter.

Before we get started, I wonder if anyone has received one of these. It is a pink slip. It is a notice that your job was terminated. Has anyone here lost a job? I have lost a job. It is absolutely no fun. I never received an actual pink slip but that didn't make it any more pleasant.



I wondered where the term pink slip came from so I did a little research. Today, getting a pink slip is just a metaphor. According to an article in the New York Times, the term dates back to 1910. At that time, when you lost your job, a literal pink slip of paper was included in your paycheck. Why was it pink? It is probably because layoff notices were done in triplicate. Who here is old enough to remember using triplicate forms? What color was the bottom copy? Pink!¹ There you have it! Now we know where this metaphor came from.

This morning, John the Baptist gets a “pink slip.” He loses his job because somebody with better skills and more popularity moves into town. Losing a job

¹ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pink_slip_\(employment\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pink_slip_(employment))

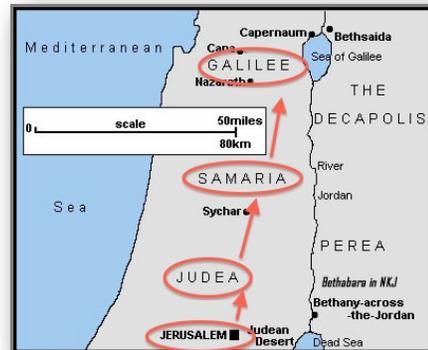
can be very painful. It can cause us to struggle with our sense of self worth. It can lead to depression. For men, it can cause them to question their masculinity when they can't provide for their family.

This morning, we discover how to face those painful times when we are faced with the sunset of our influence. If you haven't faced one of those times, just wait. It is something every one of us will eventually experience.

What was the problem?

After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized (for John had not yet been put in prison). John 3:22–24 (ESV)

Last week, Jesus and his disciples were in Jerusalem talking with Nicodemus. They left Jerusalem and headed north into the Judean countryside. Next week, Jesus will continue heading north through Samaria on his way to Galilee. Looking at the map we get an idea of where Jesus was. The geography of the map helps us understand what happens in these chapters and why chapter 4 of John begins in Samaria.



One thing that isn't apparent is what it looks like for Jesus to be in the



Judean countryside. Most of us picture it like Spirit Lake with green fields. It isn't. It is a dry desolate climate. The Middle East's version of the countryside is our version of the desert. That also explains why John

was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there. That city is next to the Jordan River. If you have a large baptismal ministry, you need a good water supply. If the area around you looks like a desert, you need to be near a river. As we learned at the beginning of this series, John the Baptist was calling people to repentance of their sins and the result was nationwide revival. Hordes of people were coming from miles around into the wilderness to hear John's preaching. They responded by confessing and repenting of their sins. When they did, John dunked them.

Now Jesus and his band of disciples were working their way north. They were moving into John's territory. They didn't have much water, but their baptismal ministry was getting off the ground. It was big enough that the mega baptism ministry John the Baptist had was taking note of it. There was competition in town.

If you remember from the beginning of this series, some of Jesus' disciples were former employees of the John the Baptist ministry team. So Jesus' ministry was growing, and the guys doing the baptizing for Jesus were

former employees of John the Baptist. Can you see where the tension comes from in this passage?

Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him." John 3:25–26 (ESV)

We don't know the details of this discussion on purification. As we learned in John 2 with the wedding at Cana, the Jews were very interested in purification rituals. They even washed their hands between courses of a meal, not just before dinner. Jesus was throwing everybody for a loop because he blew off their religious rituals.

"For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds." Matthew 11:18–19 (ESV)

From this Jewish man's discussion with John's disciples, they learned that people were flocking to Jesus down south. In fact, the bottom line on John the Baptist's spread sheet was in the red. Business was in a slide. You can sense the frustration when they said "everyone is going to him." "John! We are losing market share!" How would you respond? I would be tempted to get angry. Maybe John could have increased his advertising budget. Maybe he could have offered two-for-one baptismal coupons in the local paper. Let's see what happened.

How did John respond to losing market share?

Sovereignty --- Nothing can happen to me that is outside of God's control.

John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. John 3:27 (ESV)

John reminded people that his success as a preacher and teacher was simply a gift from heaven. John's success in preaching and baptizing was not because of his polished communication skills. It was not because he came from the right family. It had nothing to do with chance. It was a gift of God. Rather than looking at himself as the source of his success, he looked at God as the source of his success. Just as God graciously gives us a period of success, God also has the right to withdraw that. We see this same theme again and again.

Paul said the same thing.

For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it? 1 Corinthians 4:7 (ESV)

This is especially true when we see that John's birth was preceded by words from an angel concerning his greatness as a preacher and teacher. It is obvious that his skills were all from God.

For he will be great before the Lord... And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared." Luke 1:15–17 (ESV)

So when John heard people were leaving him and moving to Jesus, rather than getting upset because his market share was diminishing, he understood that

God was the one who gave him success and God was the one who could take it away.

When life is spinning out of control sometimes the only thing we can hold onto is God's sovereignty. It is remembering that God loves us. He is fully in control. When he gives us success, we give him the credit. When he takes it away, we thank him for the good times he allowed us to enjoy. No matter what happens, we can still trust him.

If you have lost a job or lost a spouse or lost your health, when you are laying on your bed asking God what to do, remember how much God loves you and that life isn't out of his control. That doesn't mean life will be easy. It doesn't mean we don't need to work hard in the face of problems. It means God loves you and no matter what happens, you can still trust him even though you may not understand what he is doing.

Humility --- My job is pointing people to Jesus, not being their Jesus.

"You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.'" John 3:28 (ESV)

Earlier in the Gospel of John, when we studied John the Baptist, we learned people kept thinking John the Baptist was the Christ. They thought he was the long awaited Messiah of Israel. They wanted John the Baptist to be their savior. Even John the Baptist's disciples wanted him to be their savior. John told them many times the purpose of his life was simply to prepare the way for the Christ. He wasn't the Christ. They heard him say those words many times, but they thought it was false humility on his part. They loved John's popularity,

because they rode on the coattails of his success. They wanted John to be the center of attention.

What I love about John is his humility. As the crowds moved from John to Jesus, that didn't destroy John's sense of identity. He understood he was not Jesus. He wanted to point people to Jesus, rather than himself. At the end of this chapter, there is a list of reasons John gave us for why he remained humble and tried not to compete with Jesus. This list is also applicable to us.

1. In verse 31, John said he is from Earth, Jesus is from heaven. Jesus is much more qualified.
2. In verse 34, John said he had the spirit of God, but Jesus has the spirit of God without measure. Jesus is much more qualified.
3. In verse 35, God gave all things into the hands of Jesus. Jesus is in charge of it all. John was just a messenger.
4. In verse 36, whoever believed in John the Baptist got wet. Whoever believes in Jesus has eternal life.

There is no comparison. John the Baptist knew he was not anyone's savior. The best thing he could do was point to Jesus.

Another reason John the Baptist could stay humble was he knew how to define success. Success for John the Baptist was not defined by the size of the crowd. It was defined by how faithful he was to the mission God gave him to accomplish. At the end of our lives, the same thing will be true for us. Success will not be defined by the size of our funerals. It will be defined by God when he examines us to see if we accomplished the mission he gave us for our lives.

Defining success by completing our God-given mission is not just a theme we see in this verse. We also see it with Jesus.

I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.
John 17:4 (ESV)

We also see it in the Apostle Paul.

But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. Acts 20:24 (ESV)

The next question we are all asking is, “What is the mission God has for my life?” I cannot answer that question for you. There are some general items God gives all of us to accomplish but God may also call you to a specific mission.

What is the general mission God calls us to?

1. **Learn to delight in the love of Christ.** It is like getting married. In marriage, we take on the mission of learning to enjoy our spouses. It is an exciting lifelong mission. When we become Christians, we are given the privilege of learning to enjoy the love of Jesus. Don't deny yourself that pleasure. It would be like getting married and neglecting the marital bonuses. That is no fun.
2. **Walk faithfully with Christ.** God wants us to walk faithfully with Jesus. That is a theme we learned in the book of Hebrews.
3. **Tell others about God's love for us through Christ.** The great commission in the book of Matthew tells us we are to be about the task of making disciples. God gave us the task of not just writing checks for missionaries but being about the mission. We are to build relationships for the sake of the

Gospel. It is God's will for you to be involved with your community to tell others about Jesus.

How does God call us to specific missions?

Sometimes God gives us specific missions in life. Sometimes God calls people into preaching and teaching. Sometimes God calls people to the mission field of a foreign country. How does God call us to specific life missions?

1. **God may call us to specific missions in extraordinary ways.** When God calls people to a specific mission, he may call them in an amazing way, such as through a dream. Sometimes in the Bible he does things in a miraculous way.
2. **God may call us to specific missions in ordinary ways.** Many times God calls us to missions by changing our hearts. We discover there is no peace in our hearts other than when we are doing the missions God gives us for our lives. That is how I ended up as a pastor. I was a computer programmer. I found I felt more peace in my heart teaching junior high Sunday school than I did working for IBM. Teaching the Bible was the only place I had peace in my heart. That is how God called me. Maybe that is how God will call you.
3. **God may call us to specific missions through tragedy.** Another way God calls us to missions is through unexpected physical or financial tragedy. Sometimes a spouse dies unexpectedly. Sometimes we lose a job unannounced. When that happens, God is thrusting a new mission upon us. That mission is to display to the world what it means to have the peace of Christ and the power of Christ in the face of difficulty.

How does tragedy reveal Christ? How many of you like donuts? I brought a box of jelly and creme-filled donuts.



I don't know what is on the inside of them. There is one way to tell for sure. Squeeze them. When you put the squeeze on the outside, you always find out what is on the inside. That is the same way with us. Many times the mission God calls us to is to live under the squeeze. When life puts us under the squeeze on the outside, people see Jesus oozing from the inside of our lives and they take notice. When difficult times hit our lives, understand that one of the reasons God allows us to be crushed is so others can see us turning to him in those times. Sometimes, the squeeze is the best way for people to see Jesus on the inside when he is forced to the outside.

Joy --- Joy is found when my life makes Jesus' fame increase and my fame decrease.

The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease." John 3:29-30 (ESV)

In this ancient culture, the friend of the bridegroom is what we would call the best man. The best man's job was to ensure the success of the groom's wedding day. He tried to make sure everything was focused on the bride and groom. He even guarded the wedding chamber to make sure another guy didn't slip in under the cover of darkness on the wedding night. The best man's job was not to be the center of attention. His job was to make sure the bride and groom were the center of attention. The more focus that went to the bride and groom, the happier the best man was. It meant he did his job well.

John the Baptist told people that he was not upset that people were going to Jesus rather than himself. Instead, he was filled with joy because it meant he did his job well. In fact, the less people were talking about John the Baptist and the more people were talking about Jesus, the more joy John the Baptist had in his heart.

Joy is found when we make the name of Jesus more famous than our own. That is true joy. The path to the greatest joy in our lives is when our lives serve to make the name of Jesus famous. I tell you that because I want you to be filled with joy.

It is easy to think joy is found when we make our names more famous. If you are a starting quarterback or a star athlete in the local high school, you think real joy is found in making your name famous. Of course, there is a measure of joy in any success but there is not lasting joy. Lasting joy is found when we use our lives to increase the fame of Jesus rather than ourselves.

Application --- What can I do to let Jesus' fame increase and my fame decrease?

1. **Talk about Jesus instead of ourselves.** A basic axiom of life is we think about what people talk about. In a social situations, it is easy to talk about our summer vacation and our family. There is nothing wrong with that. A good challenge is to segue our social conversations into Jesus. We can talk about what we learned in our personal Bible readings. We can talk about what we learned at church. Segue into Jesus.
2. **Rely on Christ in the crisis.** Remember the jelly donuts? When we hit difficulties, that is God's way of giving us a new mission. The mission is to

show what it looks like to be sustained by Christ in a crisis. Those apart from Christ fall apart when life gets tough. Those who know God loves them and fall into the arms of Jesus where he holds them when life gets tough.

Micale Conway - My Christ Story

During this series, we are sharing Christ stories. These are stories of people in Faith Church and the difference Christ makes in their lives. To see Micale Conway's story visit <http://www.johnonjesus.com/stories/index.html>



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