

“He Must Increase, but I Must Decrease”
(John 3:30-31)

Introduction: In our text this evening, we see John discussing the ministry of Christ with some of his disciples. They had come to him to tell him that the One that he had earlier pointed to was now baptizing and all were beginning to come to Him (v. 26). Perhaps they were jealous for John’s sake, since he had been their teacher and they were disciples of his. But John reminds them that Jesus could not be doing the things which He was unless He had received that authority from heaven. He uses the same kind of reasoning that Gamaliel did, when the disciples had been brought before the Sanhedrin. Gamaliel cautioned the Council by saying, “And so in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action should be of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God” (Acts 5:38-39). This ministry which the Father had given to Christ was from above. John had told them that he himself was not the Christ. He was merely sent before Him to prepare the way. Now that Christ was here, John was rejoicing. Like the friend of the bridegroom rejoices when he hears the bridegroom’s voice, so his joy was now made full. Nothing was left for him now except to begin to fade away from the scene so that Christ’s shining light may appear all the brighter. He is the very reason for all things and the culmination of the whole redemptive purpose of God. John said, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” What follows in our text gives us some of the reasons why this must take place in the life of John, and I believe there are some analogous reasons why the same must take place in our own lives as we seek to serve and to honor the Lord.

I. First, Christ Is the One Who Is from Above and Is Above Everyone.

- A. John says, “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” (v. 31).
 - 1. Christ is the One whose origin is not of the earth, merely, but also from heaven.
 - a. If Christ were merely a man, He too would be merely from the earth. But Christ is more than a mere man, He is the God-man.
 - b. John writes, “And no one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven, *even* the Son of Man” (3:13). He is the bread of life who comes down out of heaven (6:33). Jesus said to the Jews, “You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world” (8:23).
 - c. Christ’s human nature has its origin from earthly materials, for He, like Adam, is made from the dust of the ground.
 - d. But the person of Christ is the eternal Son of God, He who is divine. He comes from, or originates, from above, not from below.
 - 2. But not only does He have His origin from above, He is also the most exalted Being in heaven.
 - a. Being a person who originates in heaven would certainly make you an exalted being, but not the most exalted being.
 - b. An angelic creature is certainly much more glorious than a man, by reason of his

greater power and intelligence. Although, I must add that Edwards believed and taught, that although angels are greater in natural power, they shall not excel the saints in holiness, in their moral likeness to God. The saints, he believed, would have a greater love for God than even the angels, which in the end would make them superior to them.

- c. But even though angels are majestic creatures, they are not above all. There is only One who is, and that, of course, is God.
- d. And Christ is that God, united with a human nature. He is the One who is the eternal Son of the Living God. And since He is God and shares all of God's attributes and works, He also shares this supreme worthiness and authority.
- e. Christ is the One who is above all things. Paul writes, "And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything" (Col. 1:15-18).

3. Man, on the other hand, has his origin from the earth.

- a. As I said in connection with Christ's human nature, it is of the earth.
- b. In Genesis 2:7, we read, "Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being."
- c. Man came from the earth. This does not mean that he is the result of the evolution of life from the slimy mud, but it does mean that man's body is a part of the environment in which he lives.
- d. He comes from the earth, and he requires the earth to sustain his bodily life. And of course, both the earth and man require God to sustain them in existence.
- e. God formed his body from the dust of the ground, and then breathed into his nostrils the breathe of life, that power of animation, his soul, and man became a living being. This rules out evolution absolutely, for it was not until this being was already constituted a man that he even began to live.

B. But the point here is, John is from the earth, but Christ is from heaven.

1. Why must John decrease while Christ increases?

- a. It is the nature of a creature that he is infinitely below the Creator.
- b. Christ is the originator of all things. John is one of those things.
- c. Christ is the exalted Son of God. Even though at that time He was in a state of humiliation, that humiliation only involved His taking upon Himself the nature of a man. It did not change the worthiness of His person as the Son of God. John, though he was the greatest of the sons of men in the Old Covenant, yet he was just a man.
- d. It was fitting for John to recede into the background as the Messiah came to the forefront. The reverse would be unthinkable.

2. But as I said earlier, there are implications here for us as well.

- a. We sustain the same relationship as John to Christ. We are creatures and He is the Creator.
- b. Before coming to Christ we may have had very high opinions of ourselves. Perhaps, like Shirley McClain, or like some of the very left-wing Charismatic leaders of today's TV church, you thought you were little gods.
- c. But once you came to Christ, and realized His personal worthiness, and your own unworthiness, you knew that self had to recede into the background, while Christ came to the foreground. Again the reverse would be unthinkable.
- d. All of our plans and goals and dreams had to be erased from our lives, and His had to overrule everything. That is the nature of Christianity. That is what it means to lose your own life in order to follow Christ.
- e. He must increase in importance to you, while you decrease.

II. The Second Thing Which John Points Out Is that the Words Which Christ Speak Are the Words of God.

- A. He says, "What He has seen and heard, of that He bears witness; and no man receives His witness. He who has received His witness has set his seal to *this*, that God is true. For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure."
 1. In contrast to man who speaks of the earth, Christ speaks of the things of heaven.
 - a. Man, who is of the earth, can only speak of his experiences on earth and the things which he has learned from the earth, unless something more is revealed to him by God. Even those things we know of the Lord, apart from His special revelation in the Bible, those things which are revealed in nature, are from Him.
 - b. If we are ever to learn anything about God, He must reveal it. We cannot learn this from man.
 - c. But God has been pleased to reveal Himself through man, by way of revelation. There were those men, whom the Lord chose, who were lifted by the Spirit up into the Council chambers of the Most High. And there they saw and heard things, some of which were inexpressible, while others were things which the Lord wished to convey to His people.
 - d. Christ too is One such person who actually left a permanent residence in those chambers to come to earth to bring the greatest revelation of God which man had ever received.
 - e. John writes, "For He whom God has sent speaks the works of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure."
 - f. The Spirit of God is the Spirit of the prophets; He is the One who "moves" them, as Peter says in his second letter (1:21), to speak God's word and to write it. He also is the One who anointed Christ to speak these words.
 - g. But there is one difference mentioned here: Christ is anointed with the Spirit above measure. This is the way the King James renders this verse, and I believe it is the only reasonable one. If Christ is to be anointed with the Spirit, surely He alone is worthy to have it without measure. Also, there is no example in Scripture where any man is said to have such an anointing from Christ, if He is the One who anoints, rather than the One who is anointed.
 - h. Having then the Spirit without measure, His revelation is much more full and complete than those of the other prophets. It is not that the other revelations are

faulty, it is just that Christ's is greater. Even as the author to the Hebrews writes, "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in *His* Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power" (1:1-3).

- i. As I mentioned this morning, this revelation to Christ in His humanity, was not extensive. The Spirit could not communicate the full and infinite knowledge of the Son of God to His creaturely mind, any more than He could to yours or mine. But He certainly did more to Christ than to any other man in history.

2. Christ then is the One to whom we should listen, and to not do so would be foolish.

- a. John almost seems to be lamenting here where he says, "What He has seen and heard, of that He bears witness; and no man receives His witness."
- b. Christ is giving to His people that which is far more precious than gold or silver, and yet they are turning a deaf ear to Him.
- c. But it is not as though all have done so, for John also says, "He who has received His witness has set his seal to *this*, that God is true." Perhaps he is referring to himself here, or to others. But it is certain that not all rejected Him. There were those who received Him, and those who did also at the same time believed that God was true and not a liar.

B. The second reason then as to why John should decrease, while Christ should increase is that Christ gives a greater revelation of God's truth.

1. Now John was a prophet to be sure. When he spoke in the name of the Lord, the words he spoke were the words of God. But One greater than John was now present. It was time to listen to Him, and to move aside so that even his disciples would begin to follow Him. John lived for Christ's glory.
2. Obviously, the same should be true of us.
 - a. We don't even stand in the position of John with relation to Christ.
 - b. John was a prophet, the greatest of the OT prophets. But we are not. We are completely dependent on the prophets to reveal God's will to us. How much more then are we dependent upon the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - c. We need to set aside our own wisdom, of how we think things are or how they ought to be, and listen to the words of Christ, as He speaks to us throughout the whole of Scripture. For the Spirit of prophecy is the Spirit of Christ. He is the living Word of God!

III. Third, John Says that "the Father Loves the Son and Has Given All Things into His Hand.

A. First, Christ is the greatest object of the Father's love.

1. Christ is His beloved Son, the One in whom He is well-pleased.
2. The Father loves Christ more than any other person for He is One who more than any other bears His holy image.
 - a. As we have already seen in Hebrews 1:3, "He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power."

- b. What could be more lovely to God than God Himself? Could a mere creature compete? It would not even be possible.
3. And so John must recede into the background because God is now revealing Himself through His Son. He is revealing His beauty and glory in Christ. This is not a time to have two teachers with two groups of followers, but a time for one to gain the ascendancy, and that One must be the Son of God.
 4. And this too is a reason why we must decrease and allow Christ to increase in us.
 - a. The more we reflect the image of Christ, the more we reflect the holy image of God. And the more we reflect His image, the more delight and pleasure the Father will take in us.
 - b. The same analogy is true in our own homes. The more our children conform to our standards, the more they act and react like us, when we consider the things which we ought to be doing, the more we take delight in them. It is not that we don't love them when they fail to meet our standards, nor does God stop loving us when we do not, for we never do, but we do take more pleasure in them when they do.
 - c. For this same reason we ought to seek by all means to put on Christ, for this brings not only glory and honor to God, but also pleasure and delight.
- B. And secondly, the Father has entrusted all things into the hand of Christ.
1. This is Christ's reward for His work as the Mediator, that, as the God-man, He might have control over all things for the good of His church.
 - a. This includes the things of heaven, as well as the things of earth. It includes absolute authority over the kingdoms of the world, as well as the lives and futures of all men.
 - b. Remember what King Nebuchadnezzar said when he returned to his senses after God had humbled him for his pride, "And all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and *among* the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, 'What hast Thou done?'" (Dan. 4:35).
 2. The reason why John was to decrease was that it was God's good pleasure according to His sovereign plan that he did.
 - a. God had decreed that John would glorify Him through his death, which was shortly to take place at the hands of Herod.
 - b. It was through his death that John might best serve to advance the work of God's kingdom and glory.
 - c. This did not mean that God didn't love John; He did from all eternity. Rather, God gave to John one of the greatest honors in all of His kingdom, to lay down His life for Him. For the Christian, there can be no greater honor.
 - d. And again, it was time for Christ's authority to shine forth, and not have to compete with another religious leader.
 3. This again is a reason why we should also decrease.
 - a. There cannot be two Lord's or two sovereigns in our lives. Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold

to one and despise the other” (Matt. 6:24).

- b. If Christ’s will were to cross our own, we would very naturally begin to despise Him.
- c. But if we were to recognize His authority over us and decrease to the role of a servant, we would set aside our own desires and not seek to fulfill them, while we focused on fulfilling the will of our Lord. This, by the way, is the only way in which our lives will ever be fulfilled, namely, in the service of Christ.

IV. Lastly, John Says that Christ Is to Be the Object of Our Faith, and that Our Eternal Well-Being Depends on Our Humble Submission to Him.

- A. “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”
 - 1. Christ is Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world; He is the only door which leads to life; He is the only bread that one may eat in order to gain life.
 - a. There are not many ways to God. There is only one.
 - b. And unless we entrust ourselves to Christ, unless we believe on Him, we shall surely be lost.
 - 2. We have also seen that He is above all and all things are entrusted into His hands.
 - a. He has all authority.
 - b. He has the right to be obeyed and honored.
 - c. If we obey Him, we show that we have been truly born again from above.
 - d. But if we disobey Him, we show that we are still rebels, and that His wrath still abides on us.
- B. And so John, who was pointing to the light of salvation, now steps aside to let everyone see more clearly that light. And he who was also warning of the judgment to come, moves out of the way so that men may see that the glory of Christ includes His authority to damn men’s souls as well as to save them. He must increase, but John must decrease.
- C. We must diminish in our reliance upon ourselves and in our running of our own lives.
 - 1. If we trust in ourselves to save ourselves, we will be lost. But if we trust in Him, we will be saved.
 - 2. If we continue to guide and direct our own lives according to our own wisdom and will, we will continue under the wrath of God, but if we abandon ourselves and our own wills, we shall be delivered.
 - 3. People of God, this passage tells us that we must empty ourselves of ourselves, in order to be filled with Christ. May God grant to us therefore that we might humble ourselves under this heavenly One who is over all, that we might listen to His word, and out of a loving heart, trust and obey Him. May He help us to fully understand what it means to die to ourselves, in order to live for Christ, to give up the service of two masters, that we might serve the One who truly has absolute claim on our lives. Amen.