

# John 3:30 Commentary

John 3:30 "[He must increase, but I must decrease](#) ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** [ekeinon dei](#) (3SPAI) auxanein ([PAN](#)), [eme de elattousthai](#). ([PPN](#))

**Amplified:** He must increase, but I must decrease. [He must grow more prominent; I must grow less so.] ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**BBE:** He has to become greater while I become less.

**Cathers:** The very nature of things demands that He and His ministry grow and that I become lesser in popularity.

**CEV:** Jesus must become more important, while I become less important

**ESV:** He must increase, but I must decrease." [Note: Some interpreters hold that the quotation continues through Jn 3:36]

**NLT:** He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Wuest:** It is necessary in the nature of the case for that One to become constantly greater but for me constantly to be made less.

**Young's Literal:** Him it behoveth to increase, and me to become less;

**HE MUST INCREASE:** [ekeinon dei](#) (3SPAI) auxanein ([PAN](#)):

- Ps 72:17, 18, 19 Isa 9:7; 53:2,3,12 Da 2:34,35,44,45 Mt 13:31, 32, 33 Rev 11:15
- John 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE BACKGROUND (CONTEXT)

John the Baptist is speaking ([see image of John addressing the crowds](#)) (some interpreters feel his words extend through John 3:36)...

**After these things** (Time phrase = marks sequence - This event follows Nicodemus' encounter with Jesus) 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** (location uncertain but thought to be near Samaria - [See Map of possible location](#)), because there was much water there; and people were coming and **were being baptized** (cp Mt 3:4, 5, 6, Mk 1:4,5 compare Acts 19:4 to understand what John the Baptist was doing - his baptism was not a ritual but a reflection of genuine repentance and belief in Jesus and reception of forgiveness of their sins, these spiritual transactions being "symbolized" by the act of water baptism - see in depth study of the verb **baptizo = to baptize**)—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 (Jewish ceremonial washings - as Jews did before and after meals, but in context obviously referring to baptism). 26 And they came to John and said to him,

"Rabbi, He (Jesus) who was with you beyond the Jordan, to Whom you have testified (borne witness, given evidence of - [see Merrill Tenney's discussion of meaning of 'witness' in John; The Witness of John](#)), behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him." (John's disciples in essence place John in a position of competing with his Lord - **How tragically common are similar problems in churches today!**)

**J C Ryle Comments:** The spirit exhibited in this complaint, is unhappily too common in the Churches of Christ. The succession of these complainers has never failed. There are never lacking religious professors who care far more for the increase of their own party, than for the increase of true Christianity; and who cannot rejoice in the spread of religion, if it spreads anywhere except within their own denomination. There is a generation which

can see no good being done, except in the ranks of its own congregations; and which seems ready to shut men out of heaven, if they will not enter therein under their banner.

**The true Christian must watch and pray against the spirit here manifested by John's disciples. It is very insidious, very contagious, and very injurious to the cause of religion.** Nothing so defiles Christianity and gives the enemies of truth such occasion to blaspheme, as jealousy and party-spirit among Christians. Wherever there is real grace, we should be ready and willing to acknowledge it, even though it may be outside our own pale. We should strive to say with the apostle, "If Christ be preached, I rejoice, yes! and will rejoice." (Phil. 1:18-note) If good is done, we ought to be thankful, though it even may not be done in what we think the best way. If souls are saved, we ought to be glad, whatever be the means that God may think fit to employ.

We have, secondly, in these verses, a splendid pattern of true and godly humility. We see in John the Baptist a very different spirit from that displayed by his disciples. He begins by laying down the great principle, that acceptance with man is a special gift of God; and that we must therefore not presume to find fault, when others have more acceptance than ourselves. "A man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven." He goes on to remind his followers of his repeated declaration, that one greater than himself was coming--"I said, I am not the Christ." He tells those who his office compared to that of Christ, is that of the bridegroom's friend, compared to the bridegroom. And finally, he solemnly affirms, that Christ must and will become greater and greater, and that he himself must become less and less important, until, like a star eclipsed by the rising sun, he has completely disappeared.

A frame of mind like this, is the highest degree of grace to which mortal man can attain. The greatest saint in the sight of God, is the man who is most thoroughly "clothed with humility." (1Pe 5:5-note) Would we know the prime secret of being men of the stamp of Abraham, and Moses, and Job, and David, and Daniel, and Paul, and John the Baptist? They were all eminently humble men. Living at different ages, and enjoying very different degrees of light, in this matter at least they were all agreed. In themselves they saw nothing but sin and weakness. To God they gave all the praise of what they were. Let us walk in their steps. Let us covet earnestly the best gifts; but above all, let us covet humility. The way to true honor is to be humble. No man ever was so praised by Christ, as the very man who says here, "I must decrease," the humble John the Baptist.

**John 3:27 John answered and said,**

**"A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven"**

**Comment:** John says in essence all blessing and ministry are from God [cp Jas 1:17, Ro 11:36], which should put a stop to all competition! **Would it be that this were so in all our churches!** God is the Giver of every good gift and thus He alone deserves the glory! We can do nothing that He does not initiate and then work through us to complete (cp Jn 15:5, 2Cor 3:5,6).

**Comment:** Are there people in your life that you have found yourself resenting simply because they may be more gifted than you or have enjoyed more success than you? If there are then I would suggest that you at this very moment take time to not only thank the Lord for His eternal plan but also that you would thank Him for all those that He is using to accomplish His eternal plan... When we loose track of the truth that everything that we have has been received from the hand of God, not only can it lead us to becoming resentful of others, but it can also lead us to become boastful in terms of ourselves. Again take a moment and consider your life. Are there certain successes that you are enjoying that cause you to think more highly of yourself than you ought? Most of you will most likely say, I don't think so. But let me ask you a question when you find yourself successful at something, what is your response? Is it to sit back with a sense of personal satisfaction basking in the glow of that success, or do you quickly go into the presence of God through prayer and give Him thanks for entrusting you with the gifts and talents that He has bestowed on you that made that success possible. So, whether we are looking at our success, or the success of others, the proper philosophy for us to have is this, "A man can

receive nothing, unless it has been given him from heaven." ([Valley Bible Church](#))

**John 3:28** "You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Christ (the Messiah),' but, 'I have been sent ahead of Him.' (Mal 3:1, quoted in Mt 11:10, cp similar prophecy of John in Is 40:3 quoted in Mk 1:3, Lk 3:4, Jn 1:23)

**Jn 3:29** "He who has the bride is the bridegroom (Referring to Jesus); but the friend of the bridegroom (John referring to himself), who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. **So this joy of mine has been made full.**" (See Dr Johnson's sermon - [The Secret of Joy](#))

**Comment:** John definitely puts an end to any sense of competition between himself and Jesus by placing himself in the position of the bridegroom's friend or "best man". Once the bridegroom and bride have been brought together, the "best man's" work is completed and he fades off the scene. How foolish it would be for the best man to attempt to upstage the bridegroom, even to the point of trying to take his place! That would be absurd! And that is John's point to his disciples. John hearing of the voice of Jesus gave him joy, joy filled to the brim. While he was still in his mother Elizabeth's womb, John had leaped for joy when he heard the sound of Jesus' mother Mary (Lk 1:41, 44), which reflects the fact that even before birth John was filled with the Holy Spirit (Lk 1:15) (So much for the argument that infants in utero are not human beings, even capable of emotional expression!) John the Baptist was content to be the voice announcing the Bridegroom Jesus to be the Word (Jn 1:23). In the same way he was also content to be the witness pointing others to Jesus, Who was the Light (Jn 1:6, 7, 8 - see [Merrill Tenney's discussion of the Imagery of John which includes "Light"](#)).

**A W Pink Comments:** How precious is this! Joy of heart is the fruit of being "occupied with Christ!" ([Christ Magnified by His Forerunner](#))

**IVP Background Commentary:** The most significant emphasis of Jewish weddings was joy. ([Keener, Craig: The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament. 1994. IVP](#))

**Dave Guzik:** John's disciples seem alarmed, but it didn't bother John one bit. John would not allow envy or the fickle crowds make him forget his mission: to announce that the Messiah had come, and then to step back. John is the "best man" at the "wedding" between Jesus and Jesus' followers. In the Jewish wedding customs of that day, the friend of the bridegroom arranged many of the details of the wedding and brought the bride to the groom. John the Baptist lost his congregation - and he was happy about it! John was happy because he lost his congregation to Jesus. ([John 3 Commentary](#))

**F B Meyer comments:** And this humility was characteristic of John, though he was the greatest of woman-born (Mt 11:11 - Jesus' assessment of John!). He knew that he was not the Light (Jn 1:8), but sent to bear witness of it (Jn 1:7); not the Sun (Mal 4:2), but the star that announces the dawn, and wanes in the growing light; not the Bridegroom, but the Bridegroom's friend (Jn 3:29); not the Shepherd, but the porter to open the door into the fold (Jn 3:27, 28, 29, 30; 10:3). This humility is as rare as it is fascinating. We are all so apt to use our relationship to Christ as a means of enhancing our own importance, and attracting attention. Though we formally ascribe the supremacy to our Lord, we are elated when our name is on every lip (**Ed:** cp Pr 27:21 - O Lord deliver me from the sin of usurping Thy glory in any way. Amen! - Is 42:8, 48:11, Ex 34:14, Dt 4:24), and our work in every thought, even though we should never have been heard of had it not been for Him. (**Ed:** **Beloved, are you as convicted by Meyer's words as I am?**)

**But there was nothing of this in John.** He had the lowest possible conception of himself. Whilst all men mused in their hearts whether he were the Christ, he was ever heralding the Coming One. As they magnified the worth of his baptism, he declared that it was inferior to the Messiah's, as water is to fire in cleansing properties (Mt 3:11, Mk 1:7, 8). When they trembled before his searching words, he spoke of the great Husbandman, who, fan in hand, was about thoroughly to purge his floor (Mt 3:12). The motto of his inner life seems to have been, **"I must decrease."** Repeatedly he avowed himself unfit even to loose the sandal-thong of Him whose herald he was.

Two things led him to this blessed condition.--In the first place, he realized that a man can

receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven (Jn 3:27); and that therefore all popularity, gifts, and influence, are precious talents to be administered with the best possible stewardship. And in the second place, he had seen the Lord, as was clear from the answer he gave to the further inquiry of the deputation concerning his right to baptize.

"It is quite true," said he, in effect, "that I am not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor that Prophet (Dt 18:15 a prophecy of Messiah); but listen! Though ye know it not, the Messiah is already come, and I have seen Him. He has stood on these banks. He has mingled with these crowds. He has descended into these waters. He is standing amongst you now. The new era has dawned. And therefore I administer baptism, the sign and initiation of that long-expected time."

What awe must have settled down on the people! How they must have looked at each other, wondering of whom he spoke! Could it be that at last the day had come of which kings and prophets and righteous men had spoken, but died without seeing! **And can we wonder at the humility of the speaker?**

**We need to cultivate more of this lovely spirit, content to stand in the shade and cast a light on the blessed Lord; to be voices witnessing for Him,** whilst the speaker's form is draped in gloom. But probably nothing but close friendship with the Bridegroom of souls will ever bring this about.

**We must live nearer to Him, catching the glow of His love, baptized into its furnace heat. Oh, to love Him, to listen for His footfall with a lover's hushed spirit, to find our heaven only in His love, and in the thought that He is loved!**

Then we shall be timid of attracting a single thought to ourselves which might have found its way to Him. Then we shall be eager to hoard up all the love and devotion which men give us, that we may cast them as crowns at his feet. Then we shall be willing to be pedestals from which his beams shine the farther; as the slender, graceful curves of the lighthouse tower are unseen, whilst from its lantern the reflectors flash beams of light far out to sea. It is only to those thus humble as little children (cp Mt 18:4, 19:14) that God reveals the true character of his Son. Thus it was with John the Baptist. (from **F. B. Meyer. Gospel of John - Jn 1:23, 29, 37 Three Memorable Days** )

CONTRAST BETWEEN JESUS AND JOHN	
Jesus the Messiah	John the Baptist
The Christ	Not the Christ
The bridegroom	Friend of the bridegroom
Must increase	Must decrease
From above, Above all Speaks the Words of God	Of the earth Speaks of the earth

Notice that the table above ends with summary quotes from **John 3:31, 34** where the **Baptist** gives additional "commentary" explaining why Christ should continually be increasing...

He who comes **from above** is **above all** (**Note:** Not just "above me", not just above John the Baptist but above **all** men - this fact alone would be ample reason to justify Jesus' continually increasing!), he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all... 34 For He Whom God

has sent **speaks the words of God**; for He gives the Spirit without measure.

**John Phillips** summarizes these passages...

Jn 3:28 Positive Denial

Jn 3:29 Personal Delight

Jn 3:30 Primary Desire

**Lehman Strauss**...

The experience of Mary should be ours, when she said: "My soul doth magnify the Lord" (Luke 1:46). John recognized what each of us must come to see: namely, "He [Christ] must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

**He** ([1565](#)) (**ekeinos**) can be translated "that one", "that man", "he", the idea being that the reference is to one who is understood as relatively absent or removed from the setting on the discourse that is taking place. In other words Jesus was not present (He was baptizing in the countryside of [Judea](#)) when this was spoken by John the Baptist (at Aenon near Salim, location uncertain but thought to be near Samaria).

**A T Robertson** observes that "**He must increase, I must decrease**"..

are the last words that we have from John till the despondent message from the dungeon in Machaerus whether Jesus is after all the Messiah (Mt 11:2 = Lk 7:19). He went on to imprisonment, suspense, martyrdom, while Jesus grew in popular favour till he had His via dolorosa. "These last words of St. John are the fulness of religious sacrifice and fitly close his work" (Westcott). ([John 3 Word Pictures in the NT](#))

**Spurgeon**...

As fades the morning star when the sun himself arises, so was it the joy of the herald of Christ to lose himself in the supreme radiance of his Lord's appearing.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,  
Look full in His wonderful face,  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,  
In the light of His glory and grace.  
([Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus](#))

See related resource: [Fix Your Eyes on Jesus](#) Ann Ortlund's wonderful devotional

**MUST:**  
**A DIVINE**  
**... IMPERATIVE**  
**... NECESSITY**

**Must** ([1163](#))(**dei** [word study] from **deo** = to bind or tie objects together, put in prison, deo is also the root of **doulos** = bond-servant) refers to what is not optional but needful (**binding**) out of intrinsic necessity or inevitability. **Dei** refers to inward constraint which explains why it is often translated "**must**". **Dei** describes that which is under the necessity of happening or which must necessarily take place, often with the implication of inevitability.

Note all the uses of **dei** in **John** (Think "Divine imperatives" or "Divine Necessities"! ) - **they are very interesting!** - John 3:7, 14, 30; 4:4, 20, 24; 9:4; 10:16; 12:34; 20:9 (Rendered in NAS as "must", "had", "ought") John's inspired uses of **dei** picture the immutable, irreversible, even predetermined outworking of God's sovereign, eternal plan of redemption (cp He 9:12-note)! Our God is an awesome God Who reigns from heaven above with wisdom, power and love. (**Take a moment to worship Him** - [Play Michael W Smith's "Awesome God"](#)).

In context, the **must** is a critical verb, for it is God's sovereign plan that this **must** happen. And John knows that this is "God's **must**". The sovereign plan of God was for John the Baptist to serve as the herald, to gather a people and then to send them away to Jesus. This is what is meant in part by the divine "**must**" in this verse. Jesus' increasing was not an option or an "asterisk" to God's plan, but was the essence of the Father's plan. The accomplishment of His sovereign plan of redemption is a "**must**"! And for that we "**must**" be forever grateful! John the Baptist understood and joyfully accepted this truth and so "**must**" we!

**John MacArthur**...

Notice that word "**must**," in accord with God's eternal plan, He **must** increase. No other option! The friend of the bridegroom fades away, the luster of the star is lost in the glow of the morning sun. The old covenant fades out, the new is here (cp He 8:6-note, He 8:7-note, He 8:13-note). The shadows retreat and the real substance arrives (cp Col 2:16, 17-note; He 10:1, 2-note, He 10:3, 4-note). So we see the old fading, we see the transition. ([From John to Jesus](#))

**Deffinbaugh...**

The "**must**" of Jn 3:30 is crucial. John is showing deep humility, it is true, but he is also saying that this is the way it "must" be, the way it will be—because this is the plan and the purpose of the sovereign God. ([John 3:22-36--John's Joy and His Disciples' Jealousy](#))

**Valley Bible Church** on the phrase "**He must increase**"...

There is no other way to live for Christ! This is an operational imperative! It is a must, not an option. As **William Carey** a great missionary pioneer lay dying, he turned to his friend and said,

"When I am gone, don't talk about William Carey: talk about William Carey's Savior. I desire that Christ alone be magnified."

That was the spirit of John the Baptist as well. "He must increase but I must decrease." ([Valley Bible Church](#))

**Matthew Poole...**

"He must increase," in honour, and dignity, and reputation in the world; he is the rising sun, (to give you notice of which I was but as the morning star), he must shine every day more and more.

**Thomas Constable...**

Far from discouraging people from following Jesus, as his disciples implied he should, John would continue to promote Him. He viewed this as God's will and therefore said it "must" be so. Would that all of us who are God's servants would view Jesus' position and our own similarly. Submission to God's will and the exaltation of Jesus, not prominence in His service, should bring joy to His servants. ([John 3 Commentary](#))

That **Jesus** continually increases is essential to the end proposed by His Father, ultimately and supremely that...

at the name of **Jesus** every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that **Jesus Christ is Lord**, to the glory of God the Father. (Php 2:10, 11-note).

The **TDNT** comments that **dei**...

expresses the character of necessity or compulsion in an event. The term itself does not denote the authority which imparts this character. It is thus given its precise significance when conjoined with this power. In most cases the word bears a weakened sense derived from everyday processes. It thus denotes that which in a given moment seems to be necessary or inevitable to a man or group of men... In the language of philosophy the term expresses logical and scientific necessities... Ethical or even religious obligations may also be denoted (as used in Titus 1:7). ([Kittel, G., Friedrich, G., & Bromiley, G. W. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. Eerdmans](#))

**Warren Wiersbe...**

The word **must** is used in three significant ways in this chapter. There is the "**must**" of the sinner (John 3:7), the "**must**" of the Saviour (John 3:14), and the "**must**" of the servant (John 3:30). ([Wiersbe, W: Bible Exposition Commentary. 1989. Victor](#))

**Increase** ([837](#))(**auxano**) means to cause to grow or cause to become greater in extent, size, state, or quality. Here John describes the necessity for Jesus to be continually (**present tense = continuous action**) increasing in prominence and esteem. Clearly Jesus Christ had first place in John's life! What about your life?

As **John Butler** says...

Any person who would serve the Lord properly must embrace this attitude if their light is to shine at the right places and times.

**A W Tozer**



John condensed into that one final sentence (Jn 3:30) the secret of his own spiritual greatness: "Jesus must increase, but I must decrease." (Men Who Met God)

**Auxano** - 23x times in 23v -- Matt. 6:28; 13:32; Mk. 4:8; Lk. 1:80; 2:40; 12:27; 13:19; Jn. 3:30; Acts 6:7; 7:17; 12:24; 19:20; 1 Co. 3:6f; 2 Co. 9:10; 10:15; Eph. 2:21; 4:15; Col. 1:6, 10; 2:19; 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18. **NAS** = causes the growth(1), causing the growth(1), full grown(1), grew(1), grow(8), growing(2), grows(2), increase(2), increased(2), increasing(2), spreading(1).

## WHEN JESUS INCREASES JOY INCREASES

**John Piper...**

When Jesus becomes greater in the world and I become lesser in the world (Jn 3:30), my joy increases (see Jn 3:29). And when this is the purpose and plan of Jesus Himself, it is not egomania. It's love. So my answer to the question of why John the Baptist is brought in right here (in John 3:22ff) is to illustrate a joyful response to the radical things Jesus had been saying to Nicodemus about Himself and about the sovereign work of God in salvation. You could call it a joyful response to God's sovereign self-exaltation...

God sent him (John the Baptist) for this. This was God's plan. Gather a people and then give them up. Rise like a star in the wilderness, and then burn out like a meteorite. That's the plan. John knows it. And as it happens, his joy increases. ([He Must Increase, I Must Decrease](#))

**Rodney Whitacre...**

John's **joy** is in fulfilling God's will for his life--a model of Christian discipleship. He raises the question for all who would be disciples of Jesus, **Where do we find our joy?** It is easy to get distracted by the pleasurable blessings of this life. We should be thankful and receive gratefully God's blessings, but our joy's deepest foundation is found in God Himself. That He is as Jesus revealed Him to be is our joy, as is the fulfilling of his purposes for our own lives (cf. Jn 15:10,11), and we see this joy here in the Baptist. ([John - The IVP New Testament Commentary Series](#)) (Bolding added)

**Barton...**

John's willingness to decrease so that Jesus would increase reveals unusual humility. It also reveals how much he was like Jesus in character (cp Php 2:3, 4-note, Php 2:5-note). ([Barton, B. et al: The NIV Life Application Commentary Series: Tyndale](#))

**Hendriksen**

Note the **must**, indicating that this is in accordance with God's eternal plan. Of what use is a herald after the king has arrived? (Mt 3:3, Mk 1:3, Lk 3:4, Jn 1:23) Why should crowds continue to surround the forerunner (Lk 1:17) after his task has been accomplished? When he lays aside his responsibilities, let the multitude depart. Let them follow the King! Let them realize that the Latter is glorious in His origin and has a glorious message (cp Mt 7:28, 29-note, Mary and Martha - Lk 10:39, 42). ([Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. NT Commentary Set. Baker Book](#))

## THE SECRET OF JOY

**Dr S L Johnson** adds that John says Christ increasing and John decreasing...

... is the vital conclusion of all that John's talking about and I'd like to spend just a few moments on it because these simple words, "He must increase but I must decrease," seven little words, are extremely important for understanding the source of joy.

First of all, John knows Jesus' place. **He must increase.** That really is the place of our Lord, He must increase. **Henry Drummond** has spoken of "*Otherism*" as the joy of living for others. The Apostle Paul when he exhorts us to rejoice says, "**Rejoice in the Lord.**" (Php 4:4-note)... I'm frequently in Christians' homes and see placards on the walls of their homes expressive of their faith. One that I've seen in this country more than once is a little plaque on the wall that says, "**The Secret of Joy.**" And then underneath, "God first, others next" and underneath that, "self last". The secret of joy, God first, others next, is Drummond's "*Otherism*", self last. I think that's expressed here, "**He must increase.**" Our thoughts concerning Him must take the preeminent

place.

By the way, this little word **must** occurs three times in this chapter, and in these three instances, life is summed up. Because we are told, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness; even so **must** the Son of Man be lifted up," (Jn 3:14) that's the necessity of the Cross. There is no life apart from the Cross. If you're hear this morning and you've never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ you don't have life. The only way in which we can have spiritual life is to receive it as a gift from God by virtue of the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ who died upon that cross (Jn 3:15). "He must be lifted up," "that whosoever believeth in him may not perish but have everlasting life." (Jn 3:16)

Now the next **must** is just as important. Jesus said, Jn 3:7, "Marvel not that I said unto thee ye **must** be born again." He **must** be lifted up for atonement to be made, you **must** be born again to enter and see the Kingdom of God. (See also Phil Newton's sermon on Jn 3:1-8 [Does "Must" Really Mean Must?](#))

And then the Christian life is simplified into three little words, "**He must increase.**" Those are three beautiful **musts** aren't they? I know you've heard preachers preach on the three musts of John 3. Well that's what they are and they do speak volumes. Paul put it another way, he said, "that He might have the preeminence." So, "He must increase," and John knows the secret of joy is to recognize that first. Then secondly he says, "But I must decrease." John knows Jesus' place, but John also knows John's place. "I must decrease." James Denney once said something that I think expresses a very important truth. You'll sometimes find this on little churches in the Highlands of Scotland. Near the pulpit there will be a sign that says,

"No man can give at once the impression that he himself is clever and that Christ is mighty to save."

We don't want to share the glory with Jesus Christ -- He must increase, I must decrease.

And finally, John knows John's disciples' place. Now he says above in John 3:28, "You yourselves bear me witness that I said I'm not the Christ but I'm sent before him." I'm the friend of the bridegroom, I stand and hear his voice, it's the bridegroom to which the bride is attached. And so my task is to attach you to him if I can through the preaching of the word. Now you know I think this as I say must have been rather difficult for John because he's the older, experienced preacher now. He's not a whole lot older than our Lord in years, but he's had his time of popularity and now people are drifting away from him and are going to be following the Lord Jesus Christ and so it was difficult for him. It's difficult for an older minister to give up things. When the time comes, when he must do it, it's sometimes very difficult to do. And I can appreciate the struggles that John might have had. But we must remember in the Lord's work, the important thing is not the worker, the important thing is the work that God is doing.

Thomas Chalmers was one of the greatest of the Scots, very prominent in the Free Church responsible for a great deal of the spiritual stamina of Scotland in the 19th Century. And Mr. Chalmers once said, "Who cares for the Free Church?" He was one of the greatest of the free churchmen himself.

"Who cares for the Free Church compared with the Christian good of Scotland? Who cares for any church or denomination or group or fellowship or party compared with Christ? Get the movement out of sight, magnify Jesus, He must increase, the movement decrease. The movement rises, does its work, passes away into the limbo of forgotten things. The Christ to Whom it points goes on, widen your horizons."

How true, people sometimes think of Believers Chapel as something that is the significant thing. No, no Believers Chapel is not the significant thing; it's what God is doing that is the significant thing. He must increase, I must decrease. One of the greatest encouragements of the ministry of the word of God is that the Lord Jesus Christ carries on his work.

How do you think the apostles felt when Jesus left them? They would probably have said, "Look, we don't have a chance now, he's gone." But the facts are that the Holy Spirit came and indwelt every one of them. And Jesus himself had said, "It's expedient for you that I go away, for the Comforter will not otherwise come." The important thing is to remember the first place that Jesus Christ has. He must increase, we must decrease.

When **William Carey** was dying, he turned to a friend and said,

"When I'm gone, don't talk about William Carey, talk about William Carey's Savior. I desire that Christ alone might be magnified."

That's a Biblical viewpoint it seems to me.

**Well, what is the secret of joy?** Well according to John the Baptist, it's putting Christ first, others next, self



last. I have one complaint about preachers, they often don't tell us, like I think it was E. Stanley Jones who said, "They don't tell us the how." How can we put him first? Well, you look through a passage like this and you look for some clue, what is it that enabled John to say what he said? "This my joy therefore is fulfilled." Here is a man who has joy in the midst of very difficult circumstances, what is it? Well I suggest to you that it's found in one little clause in John 3:29,

"He that hath the bride is the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom."

Now here he describes himself, "The friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him." That's how he describes himself, "I'm a person who stands and hears him." I suggest to you that's the clue to John's securing the relationship to the Lord that enabled him to rejoice at the crowd leaving him and following the Lord Jesus Christ. How in the midst of apparent disappointment, he found great joy in it.

A Nigerian preacher once said,

"You can't place a load on a running donkey."

Well that's the third world's way of saying what you need to do is to get off by yourself and be alone with the Lord for a while. That's how John managed to accomplish what he accomplished. All that time that he spent in the desert was very important; out there he came to know the Lord God. And so he stood and heard him. As Paul puts it in 2Cor 3:18,

"But we all with open face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image by the Spirit of the Lord from glory to glory."

Our responsibility is to look, his responsibility is to transform. And so as we look into the Scriptures and meditate upon them, he works his great transforming power.

To put it in another figure, an illustration as our Lord did, he came to Bethany one day where Mary and Martha and Lazarus lived. They met him at the door, Martha immediately went into the kitchen and you could hear the dishes and the pans and pots making their noises, for she was preparing something for the Lord and Mary went over and sat down at Jesus' feet. And the text says, "She went on hearing his word." (see Lk 10:38, 39, 40, 41, 42) Martha became disturbed, came out, she was upset. She said, "Lord, do something about Mary." And he said, "Martha, Martha, you're careful and troubled about many things, but just one thing is needful, and Mary has chosen that good part, and furthermore, it shall not be taken away from her." So Mary was sitting at his feet and hearing his word, and she was growing in likeness to the Lord Jesus Christ. Something was transpiring in her while Martha's in the kitchen serving. It's alright to serve. Later on in the 12th chapter of the Gospel of John, Martha's still serving but there's no word of rebuke there (Jn 12:2, 3). It's perfectly alright to serve, but service must flow out of fellowship with him. So to stand and hear him, to sit at his feet and hear his word, to look into the mirror, these are the things that lead to the transformed life. Our responsibility is simply to look, simply to stand, simply to hear. And we'll know the **secret of joy** in measure.

**I suggest to you if it's not that, then it also is the order of those words in John 3:30. Maybe it's both, "He must increase, but I must decrease." There is a logic here because as he increases necessarily I decrease. For the more I am occupied with Him, like the red oaks in the spring when the sap begins to rise in those red oaks, those dead leaves that have been hanging onto the tree all through winter finally begin to fall off. And the manifestations of the old life leave as the sap of the new life in Christ becomes predominant in the life of a Christian occupying with Him.**

Now, it seems to me that John is one of those magnificent individuals who has really come to know what it is to spend time with the Lord. I like what our Lord said about John, he said to the crowds, "What did you go out to see when you went out to see John? Did you go out to see a prophet? Yes I tell you he was a prophet but he was more than a prophet, he's the forerunner." (Mt 11:9) But then he said also, "I tell you, among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist. Notwithstanding he that is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he." (Mt 11:11) "He was a burning and shining light," John says. "And you were willing for a season to rejoice in his light." (Jn 5:35) Yes they rejoiced in John's light, and he rejoiced in what happened because he stood and heard him. And if we are to know true spiritual joy, it will not be found except in the relationship that we enjoy with Jesus Christ. May God help you to make one of the aims of your life fellowship with him. You cannot enjoy that apart from the Scriptures.

**Let me just give you a simple suggestion.** This week, spend some time each day in the reading of the word of God, and **meditation** upon it, reflection upon it (see Primer on Biblical Meditation). Open to one of the gospel accounts, put yourself in the place of the men with whom our Lord met, be there with them, reflect upon

the things. Remember that Nigerian preacher who said, "You cannot put a load on a running donkey." Stop! I'm not calling you donkey's you understand. But stop, and give yourself to acquaintance with him. You'll be different next week. (Read his full sermon [The Secret of Joy](#)) (Bolding and color added for emphasis)

J C Ryle...

a faithful minister will always exalt Christ. We read that when John saw the state of mind in which his hearers were, he told them of a coming One far mightier than himself. He refused the honor which he saw the people ready to give him, and referred them to Him who had the "winnowing fork in his hand,"--the Lamb of God, the Messiah.

**Conduct like this will always be the characteristic of a true "man of God." He will never allow anything to be credited to him, or his office, which belongs to his divine Master.** He will say like Paul, "we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus, the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." (2Co 4:5) To commend Christ dying, and rising again for the ungodly--to make known Christ's love and power to save sinners, this will be the main object of his ministry. **"He must increase but I must decrease," will be a ruling principle in all his preaching.** He will be content that his own name be forgotten, so long as Christ crucified is exalted (1Co 1:23, 2:2, cp Ga 6:14-note).

Would we know whether a minister is sound in the faith, and deserving of our confidence as a teacher? We have only to ask a simple question, Where is Christ in his teaching? Would we know whether we ourselves are receiving benefit from the preaching we attend? Let us ask whether its effect is to magnify Christ in our esteem? A minister who is really doing us good will make us think more of Jesus every year we live. ([Luke chapter 3](#)) (Bolding and color added for emphasis)

Puritan writer **Thomas Brooks**...

Luther used to say, "that a minister must take heed of bringing three dogs into the pulpit, namely, pride, covetousness, and envy." The friends of the bridegroom must not woo and sue for themselves—but for the bridegroom. Dispensers of the gospel are the bridegroom's friends (**Ed**: We are actually His Bride, but we are also His friends), and they must not speak one word for the bridegroom and two for themselves, as has been the trade of many weak and worthless men. **It is the greatest glory of a minister in this world to be high in spiritual work and humble in heart.**

**Vain-glory is a pleasant thief;  
it is the sweet spoiler of spiritual excellencies.**

(Vain-glory = undue, excessive, ostentatious pride and elation in one's own achievements)

Paul was very humble in the exercise of his ministry: none so high in worth as he, nor any so low and humble in heart as he. Though he was the greatest among the apostles—yet he accounts himself "less than the least of all saints;" yes, he counted it not only his duty but his glory, to be a servant to the weakest saints: "To the weak I became as weak;" "Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not," 1Co 9:22, 2Co 11:29. (from [The Unsearchable Riches of Christ - subsection HOW ministers are to preach Christ to the people](#)) (Bolding and color added for emphasis)

**I MUST DECREASE: eme de elattousthai. (PPN):**

- Ac 13:36,37 1Co 3:5 2Co 3:7, 8, 9, 10, 11 Col 1:18 Heb 3:2, 3, 4, 5, 6
- John 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

The antithesis of John's attitude is that expressed by **Diotrephes**...

3John 1:9 I wrote something to the church; but **Diotrephes**, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say.

**Strauss comments:** What is important is the lesson we all need to learn from the life of Diotrephes. He was a man with a personal ambition. John writes, "He loveth to have the preeminence." The word preeminence comes from two Greek words which mean, "to be fond of being first." Diotrephes was a little pope. He was actually trampling underfoot the truth of the headship of Christ over the Church. There are only two places in the New Testament where the word "preeminence" appears, here in 3John 9 and in Colossians 1:18 (note) where we read,

"And He is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence."

Diotrephes thought more highly of himself than he did of Christ. He could not say with John the Baptist, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). Someone has said, "Diotrephes is the father of a long line of sons who have not learned to distinguish between love for Christ and His Church and love for their own place in it."

It is told of Dr. Lee Robertson that he wrote an article on Diotrephes for a denominational paper, and the editor told him that twenty-five officials in the church stopped the paper to show their resentment against being personally attacked. These are the offspring of Diotrephes who reject the authority of Christ and take it to themselves. (Lehman Strauss Commentaries – The Epistles of John: Devotional Studies on John's Three Letters)

## ILLUSTRATION FROM PAUL'S LIFE

### CHRIST INCREASING

### PAUL DECREASING!

It is interesting to see this same unselfish, increasingly humble spirit in another of God's great ambassadors for Christ, the apostle Paul. As Jesus became more and more preeminent in his heart and ministry, his self assessment was progressively "decreasing"! May our matriculation in the school of faith and affliction cause each of us to go toward "the rear of the class" rather than toward the "front of the class" (in our own estimation)!

55AD	1Cor 15:9	The least of the <b>apostles</b>
61AD	Eph 3:8	The very least of all <b>saints</b>
63-66AD	1Ti 1:15	Foremost of <b>sinners</b>

**I must** - The word **must** is added by the translators for clarity.

**Decrease** (1642) (**elattoo**) has 3 meanings: (1) to make less, make lower, cause to be lower in status, dignity or position (as He 2:7 and He 2:9 both quoted from the Lxx of Ps 8:6); (2) to become less important or diminish in status as used here in Jn 3:30; (3) in the passive/middle voice elattoo means to be worse off and so to be in need (Lxx = 1Sa 2:5, 2Sa 3:29, Ps 33:11).

Two other NT uses of **elattoo**...

Hebrews 2:7-note "YOU HAVE **MADE** HIM FOR A LITTLE WHILE **LOWER** THAN THE ANGELS; YOU HAVE CROWNED HIM WITH GLORY AND HONOR, AND HAVE APPOINTED HIM OVER THE WORKS OF YOUR HANDS;

Hebrews 2:9-note But we do see Him who was **made** for a little while **lower** than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.

**Elattoo** - 11x in the **Septuagint (LXX)** - Num 26:54; 33:54; 1Sa 2:5; 21:16; 2Sa 3:29; Ps 8:6; 33:11; Jer 37:19; 51:18; Ezek 24:10; Dan 6:13

1 Samuel 21:15 "Do I lack (Heb = chaser = needy, lacking; Lxx = elattoo) madmen, that you have brought this one to act the madman in my presence? Shall this one come into my house?"

Some of John's disciples apparently failed to fully comprehend what John had said about being the friend of the Bridegroom (and what he had taught about baptism) and so later in Acts we encounter a group of disciples who continued to follow John's rather than Jesus (Acts 19:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7). There is always a temptation among men to follow a man rather than the Man Christ Jesus. Not only was Jesus superior to Judaism, but He was also superior to the movement that centered about the man John the Baptist. We need to be very wary of following and esteeming any human man above the God Man. The preeminence and exaltation of Christ has always been God's plan, and thus a good benchmark with which to evaluate all ministry is does the preaching, teaching, etc result in "Jesus increasing and self decreasing"? If not, perhaps a serious reappraisal of the goals of that ministry is in order!

It is notable that the imprisonment of John was the ultimate "**decrease**," for this brought a permanent end to John's public ministry.

John wanted men to forget him and see only the King.

**James Boice...**

This should be our pattern (Jn 3:30). If we are to witness for Jesus Christ, we must first of all forget ourselves—our likes, our dislikes, our needs, our personal interests, our free time, even at times our work or our ambitions—and we must think first of the other person and of his need for the Savior. (Php 2:3, 4-note) **What is it that will make a person forget himself in order to point to Jesus?** Only an awareness of Jesus' worth and glory!

Some years ago an African convert became a great witness to Jesus in spite of the fact that he suffered from the painful disease known as elephantiasis. This is a terrible thing in many tropical countries. It causes the skin of a person to become coarse, thick and enlarged. This poor Christian had elephantiasis in his legs, so it was extremely difficult for him to walk. Nevertheless, he thought nothing of making his way around the village to introduce others to the one who had transformed his life.

After a period of several months, during which he had visited all of the huts in his village, this man began to take the gospel to another village that lay two miles away through the jungle. Every morning he started out painfully on his monstrous legs, and every night he returned, having visited as many of the homes in the second village as possible. After visiting these homes he remained in his own village for several weeks before becoming restless again.

He asked the missionary doctor if another village which he knew of and had visited as a child had heard the gospel. The missionary said it had not. The African Christian wanted to take the good news there, but the missionary advised against it because the village lay more than 12 miles away over dangerous jungle paths. The burden so grew upon this Christian that one day he slipped away quietly before dawn. The missionary learned later that the elephantiasis convert had arrived in the new village some time after noon, his legs bruised and scratched, and had begun immediately to tell the people about Jesus.

He went to everyone in the village. Then at last, when the sun was sinking low in the sky, he began his dangerous trip back along the jungle paths toward home. At midnight he arrived, bleeding and almost unconscious, at the house of the missionary doctor who tended to him and dressed his feet.

Here was a man who had been sent by God to point men and women to the Lord Jesus Christ. He was effective because he had forgotten himself in serving his King. (Reformation and Revival Vol 2. 1993)

**McDonald** rightly concludes that...

The entire object of John's ministry is summarized in this verse (Jn 3:30). He labored ceaselessly to point men and women to the Lord, and to make them realize His true worth. In doing this, John realized that he must keep himself in the background. For a servant of Christ to seek to attract attention to himself is really a form of disloyalty. Note the three "musts" in this chapter: for the Sinner (Jn 3:7); for the Savior (Jn 3:14); and for the Saint (Jn 3:30). ([MacDonald, W & Farstad, A. Believer's Bible Commentary: Thomas Nelson](#))

**Matthew Poole...**

God hath indeed used me as a prophet, yea, more than a prophet, not to foretell Christ alone, but to point him to you. I have had my time, and finished my course, and God hath given me a reputation proportioned to the work he gave me to do, and to the time in which I was to work; but I must every day decay, and grow less and less, as Christ increaseth and groweth more and more.

**Leon Morris** makes a good point that...

It is not particularly easy in this world to gather followers about one for a serious purpose. But when they are gathered it is infinitely harder to detach them and firmly insist that they go after another. It is the measure of John's greatness that he did just that. (The Gospel According to John, The New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979], 242).

**A W Pink...**

"He must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn 3:30). Blessed climax was this to the lovely modesty of John, and well calculated to crush all party feeling and nip in the bud any jealousy there might be in the hearts of his own disciples. In principle this is inseparably connected with what he had just said before in the previous verse. The more I "decrease" the more I delight in standing and hearing the voice of that blessed One who is Altogether Lovely.

And so conversely. The more I stand and hear His voice, the more will He “increase” before me, and the more shall I “decrease.” I cannot be occupied with two objects at one and the same time. To “decrease” is, we take it, to be less and less occupied with ourselves. **The more I am occupied with Christ, the less shall I be occupied with myself. Humility is not the product of direct cultivation, rather it is a by-product. The more I try to be humble, the less shall I attain unto humility. But if I am truly occupied with that One who was “meek and lowly in heart,” if I am constantly beholding His glory in the mirror of God’s Word, then shall I be “changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2Co 3:18). ([Christ Magnified by His Forerunner](#))** (Bolding and color added)

**Grover Gunn** asks...

Have you ever heard the classic Greek myth of Echo and Narcissus? Narcissus was a youth so handsome that all the girls were attracted to him, but he always ignored them. He was too self-centered to pay any attention to them. Narcissus even ignored the efforts of the beautiful nymph Echo, daughter of Zeus, to win his affections. The goddess Nemesis decided to punish Narcissus for his calloused rejection of Echo. One day when Narcissus bent over a clear pool to get a drink, Nemesis caused him to fall in love with his own reflection. He remained by the pool, staring at his own image in the water. He would not leave for anything. He was so preoccupied that he even refused food and drink. There by the pool, he eventually died. His love of self had proven to be the death of self. His self-love had been suicidal. There are many people today like Narcissus. In fact, we call them Narcissistic. They are self-centered, self-absorbed beings whose prevailing passion is their own self-gratification. Their universe revolves totally around themselves. Their constant quest is to try to get the greatest amount of pleasure with the least amount of pain. Their constant question in every situation is, What’s in it for me? They even view religion not as a means of glorifying and serving God but as a means of self-fulfillment and self-improvement. Rather than seeing themselves as existing for God’s glory, they see God as existing for their benefit. Thus they have an ungodly sort of godliness because self and not God is at its center. The moral of the myth of Narcissus is that such self centeredness is really not in one’s best self-interest. In fact, in the long run it is harmful and destructive to the self. Here is the paradox, the irony: to find true and satisfying self-fulfillment...

Jesus’ increasing and the Baptist’s decreasing is a case of necessity. This is the way it must be. This is the divine plan. In the mystery of providence, history must move in this ordained direction; it is inevitable. This also is what is best, what works to the greatest good. Any other theoretical possibility is a practical impossibility in the real world. Jesus’ not increasing to the point of covenant preeminence where He is the firstborn among many brethren is simply unthinkable. Jesus’ not increasing to the point of cosmic pre-eminence where He is the firstborn over all creation is simply out of the question. As the prophet Isaiah had said about the Messiah, “He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high” (Isaiah 52:13). How can John complain when God brings this to pass?... Who is the center of your universe, yourself or Jesus? Making yourself the center of your universe makes about as much sense as making the moon the center of the solar system. Putting the cold, dead, puny moon in the place of the sun would be lunacy. And it is lunacy to live a self-centered life instead of a Christ centered life. As we learn from the myth of Narcissus, living a self-centered life is a fatal mistake. He must increase, and we must decrease. ([Sermon](#))

**John Phillips**...

On one occasion, David Livingstone, the intrepid pioneer missionary to Africa, brought some natives with him from the deep interior to the coast. There the land suddenly ended. One of the astonished Africans said, “We followed the white father through forests and across plains, up mountains and into deep valleys. The land went on and on. Then, all of a sudden, it came to an end. ‘There is no more of me,’ it said.” John said much the same. “I have brought you to the water. There is no more of me, no more that I can do. Here is the end of John. Now you need Jesus. ‘He must increase, but I must decrease’” (John 3:30). (Exploring the Gospel of Mark)

**Ron Mattoon**...

If we are going to be what Christ wants us to be, we must be empty of selfish desires and totally yielded to the will of God.

It’s the man that bows the lowest in the presence of God that stands the straightest in the presence of sin. Someone said, “Swallowing pride is good for you. It won’t give you calories or indigestion.” Benjamin Whichcote said, “None are so empty as those who are full of themselves.”

If we are to have victory in our life, SELF needs to be removed from the throne of our heart and Christ needs to be enthroned. He must increase and I must decrease (John 3:30).

**Butler** writes that...

John saw the progress of Christ's ministry and that it was time for John to fade out of the picture. The more of Christ, the less of John. In application, the more of Christ in my life, the less of self. Then we can say as the Apostle Paul said, "For me to live is Christ" (Philippians 1:21-note). (Analytic Bible Expositor)

**Comment:** Fill in the following blank with your name. Make it your passion and your prayer! The more of Christ, the less of \_\_\_\_\_.

## **"I"** **THE OLD** **SELF**

**I must decrease** - **"I"** is the Greek personal pronoun **Ego**. In this context John is saying that the **Ego** must decrease, or stated another way, it must die. It speaks of the denial of self to which Jesus called all who would be His disciples (Mk 8:34, Mt 16:24, Lk 9:23, 24,25, 26, 27, 14:33).

**Denial of self** is synonymous with the willingness to **die to self**. The old **"I"** which continually seeks recognition and glory for itself must die daily (Lk 9:23), even moment by moment, in order for the life of Christ to be manifest in and through us (cp 2Co 4:10, Ro 8:13-note, Col 3:5-note, Gal 2:20-note). John the Baptist clearly had truly learned to **die to self** and thus he was enabled to triumph over the continual temptation from the old self to receive the acclaim and glory of men. His reward? Supernatural joy as he choose joyfully to point all men to Jesus. (Jn 3:26, 27, 28, 29). This struggle with self is one that all of God's children daily wrestle with, whether they are in the spotlight or behind the scenes. Self always seeks recognition from men.

**Roy Hession** discussed the nefarious nature of our "old self" in his modern day classic **"Calvary Road"** ([Online here](#)) writing that if...

we are to come into this right relationship with Him (Christ) (**Ed:** Clearly John the Baptist had come into a "right relationship" with Christ), the first thing we must learn is that our wills must be broken to His will (and that this breaking) is the beginning of Revival. It is painful and humiliating, but it is the only way. It is being "Not **I** ,but **Christ**" (Gal 2:20-note) and a **"C"** is a bent **"I."** The Lord Jesus cannot live in us fully and reveal Himself through us until the proud self within us is broken. This simply means that the hard unyielding self, which justifies itself, wants its own way, stands up for its rights, and seeks its own glory, at last bows its head to God's will (cp our perfect "Example" [1Pe 2:21-note], the Lord Jesus - "not My will, but Thine be done" Lk 22:42), admits its wrong, gives up its own way to Jesus, surrenders its rights and discards its own glory - that the Lord Jesus might have all and be all. In other words it is dying to self and self-attitudes.

And as we look honestly at our Christian lives, we can see how much of this self there is in each of us. It is so often self who tries to live the Christian life (the mere fact that we use the word " try " indicates that it is self who has the responsibility). It is self, too, who is often doing Christian work. It is always self who gets irritable and envious and resentful and critical and worried. It is self who is hard and unyielding in its attitudes to others. It is self who is shy and self-conscious and reserved. No wonder we need breaking. As long as self is in control, God can do little with us, for the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22, 23-note), with which God longs to fill us, is the complete antithesis of the hard, unbroken spirit within us and presupposes that it has been crucified.

Being broken is both God's work and ours. He brings His pressure to bear, but we have to make the choice. If we are really open to conviction as we seek fellowship with God... , God will show us the expressions of this proud, hard self that cause Him pain. Then it is, we can stiffen our necks and refuse to repent or we can bow the head and say, "Yes, Lord."

**Brokenness in daily experience is simply  
the response of humility to the conviction of God.**

And inasmuch as this conviction is continuous, we shall need to be broken continually. And this can be very costly, when we see all the yielding of rights and selfish interests that this will involve, and the confessions and restitutions that may be sometimes necessary. (Excerpt from Chapter 1 of [Roy Hession's The Calvary Road.](#))



## LET JOHN 3:30 BE THE MOTTO OF YOUR LIFE

Dave Guzik

He must increase, but I must decrease: This should be the motto of every Christian, especially leaders among God's people. Jesus should become greater and more visible, and the servant should become less and less visible. ([John 3 Commentary](#))

Is not John 3:30 another way of answering the **Westminster Shorter Catechism's** first question "What is the chief end of man?", the answer of course being that "Man's chief end is to **glorify** God, (1Co 10:31, Ro 11:36) and to **enjoy** him for ever. (Ps 73:25, 26, 27, 28) (Note the association of glorifying God and experiencing joy! **How's your joy?**)

**Robert S. Rayburn** speaking about the last words recorded in this Gospel from the lips of John the Baptist (Jn 3:30) echoes some of the thoughts of Roy Hession on the **vanity of the self life**...

We've had a couples' retreat over the past few days. You men, your testiness at home, your lack of a true daily interest in the happiness of your wives, your far too little engagement with your children at the level of their hearts and minds: what is that, but far too much of you and far too little of Jesus Christ. Are you willing to lay your interests down, even acknowledge your wrong before your wife, to see Christ increase? Are you willing to become less and him to become greater in your life?

You women, your spirit of complaint, your incessant desire for more, your critical spirit – be entirely honest with yourselves – what is that, but far too much of you and far too little of Jesus Christ. In how many ways, in how many different ways, would your life change, your attitudes, your behavior, your speech, if it were more the aspiration and the commitment and the determination of your life that you decrease so that Jesus might increase?

What things would fall away – both sins and behaviors that are not in themselves sinful but simply take up too much of your time without really advancing Christ's interests, honor, and pleasure in your life. Over how many things in your life could it now be written: "He must become greater; I must become less." Over how many things in your life should it be written, "He must become greater; I must become less."

What a perfect exemplar of the Christian John the Baptist was that day. And what a perfect honor John the Evangelist paid to his former teacher. Remember, John, the author of the Gospel, was first a disciple of John the Baptist before he was a disciple of Jesus. How John the Evangelist loved and admired John the Baptist!

It was no accident that in John's Gospel the very last words of John the Baptist, the last words we hear the great man speak, are some of the greatest words ever spoken. "He must become greater; I must become less." John's silence there after in the Gospel is the Evangelist's tribute to his former master. John did become less; it wasn't just words for him.

And so those words are the last echo of John's voice, coming down to us across the ages. The Lord Jesus said of John the Baptist, "Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John..."

Put those two facts together and ponder them for your own life. And if you aspire to Christ's approval and the heavenly Father's approval, then you cannot do better than make the motto of your life, all day and every day, "He must become greater; I must become less!" ([John 3:22-30 A Wonderful Example](#)) (See this sermon for an interesting comparison of the life of [Robert Murray McCheyne](#) to John the Baptist)

As the Puritan pastor **Richard Baxter** (1615-1691) lay on his deathbed, someone encouraged him with a reminder of the good which so many had received from his preaching and writings. To this accolade Baxter replied...

I was but a pen in God's hand, and what praise is due to a pen?

Warren Wiersbe...

Often press releases and book reviews cross my desk, along with conference folders; and at times I am perturbed by what I read. Very few speakers and writers are ordinary people. They are "world travelers" or "noted lecturers" who have addressed "huge audiences." They are always in "great demand," and their ministries are described in such ways that they make the Apostle Paul a midget by comparison.

A Presbyterian pastor in Melbourne, Australia introduced J. Hudson Taylor by using many superlatives,

especially the word great. Taylor stepped to the pulpit and quietly said, “Dear friends, I am the little servant of an illustrious Master.” If John the Baptist in heaven heard that statement, he must have shouted “Hallelujah!” ([Wiersbe, W: Bible Exposition Commentary. 1989. Victor](#))

W A Criswell...

It's like that godly man **F. B. Myer** of London who I suppose was one of the sweetest, princeliest, gentlest, kindest, most loving preachers that ever lived. I don't know how many of his books are in my library. I love reading them (**Ed: Recommended - Commentary on John's Gospel by F. B. Meyer - Devotionally oriented**). When F. B. Myer was in the very zenith of his ministry in London there came to London a nineteen year old boy. And overnight, I don't mean over a day or over a week, I mean overnight that boy was world famous. They'd take that boy, about twenty-one years old now, they'd take that boy and put him in the biggest hall, seat twenty-thousand people, take him put him in a hall in London, and you couldn't get in the place. It was phenomenal. The young fellow's name was **Charles Haddon Spurgeon**.

Rodney Sawtell is a student in Spurgeon's College. That's their seminary in England. And when Spurgeon came to London and the throngs gathered to hear him preach, and his name was on every lip—when David Livingston died, he died with a copy of one of Spurgeon's sermons in the top of his hat—and F. B. Myer says in one of those little personal glimpses in his autobiography that when Spurgeon came to London and the throngs turned toward him, and his name was spoken on every street by every heart, he said **he was filled with envy**. Well brother, I could sure understand that. Think of that. Right in the zenith of his ministry a young fellow come and the throngs go hear him and just forget about him.

**F. B. Myer** says, “I took it to the Lord; got down on my knees and on my face before the Lord, and I said to the Lord, ‘It's not right, this feeling of envy that I have in my heart.’”

**F. B. Myer began praying for Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the boy wonder, the boy preacher.** He began asking God to give him a double portion of the Spirit from Heaven, give him twice as many souls. Give him a fame that circles the world ten times, not once.

And F. B. Myer says it was not long until he began to look upon every triumph of the young Spurgeon as though it were his own. When Spurgeon would preach to thousands of people, Myer said he'd **rejoice** as though he himself had done it (**Ed: cp John the Baptist's response - Jn 3:29**). And when Spurgeon won throngs to the Lord it was as though Myer had done it, he said, he so prayed for the young fellow and **rejoiced** in his glorious ministry. That is the spirit of John the Baptist; in honor, preferring one another, **rejoicing** in somebody else's success, glorying in God's blessings upon him. The spirit of John the Baptist, “**This my joy, therefore, is complete,**” it's full and running over.

A third thing; it is not only humbleness in glory, it's not only **joy in another's success**, but it is **devotion in preparation for their work**.

“He must increase, I must decrease.

“I'm just getting ready for Him. That's my mission, my calling, my assignment, my task; He must increase, I must decrease.” Getting ready for the great work to come. Haven't you read this poem?

#### The Bridge Builder

An old man going a lonely way,  
Came at the evening, cold and grey,  
To a chasm vast, and deep, and wide,  
The old man crossed in the twilight dim,  
The sullen stream had no fear for him  
But he turned when safe on the other side,  
And built a bridge to span the tide  
Old man, said a fellow pilgrim near,  
You're wasting your strength with building here  
Your journey will end with the ending day,

You never again will pass this way  
You've crossed the chasm deep and wide,  
Then why build a bridge to span the tide?  
The builder lifted his old grey head,  
Good friend, in the path I've come, he said  
There followeth after me today,  
A youth whose feet must pass this way  
This chasm that has been naught to me,  
To a fair head youth may a pitfall be  
He too must cross in the twilight dim,  
Good Friend, I am building this bridge for him.

--Will Allen Dromgoole

Oh, in a thousand ways, and upon a thousand times do I think about this in the work we're trying to do. There's a generation coming after us. There's a throng of young men and women who are going down this road. I've got to make ready their way and they're coming. We've got to do good for them. And may we rejoice, and exalt the Lord, and exalt in His name as we see them coming up, and someday taking our places. Somewhere there's a young fellow whom God is preparing for this pulpit, a dedicated, consecrated boy, somewhere. We're getting ready for them, the generation that is following after us.

O Master, whether it's in the home with our children, or whether it's in the church with our Lord, God bless us as we make a good ready for them. ([THE SPIRIT OF JOHN THE BAPTIST](#))

**Brian Bell** - Every young student knows of Isaac Newton's famed encounter with a falling apple. Newton discovered and introduced the laws of gravity in the 1600s, which revolutionized astronomical studies. But few know that if it weren't for Edmund Halley, the world might never have learned from Newton. It was Halley who challenged Newton to think through his original notions. Halley corrected Newton's mathematical errors and prepared geometrical figures to support his discoveries. Halley coaxed the hesitant Newton to write his great work, Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy. Halley edited and supervised the publication, and actually financed its printing even though Newton was wealthier and easily could have afforded the printing costs. Historians call it one of the most selfless examples in the annals of science. Newton began almost immediately to reap the rewards of prominence; Halley received little credit. He did use the principles to predict the orbit and return of the comet that would later bear his name, but only AFTER his death did he receive any acclaim. And because the comet only returns every 76 years, the notice is rather infrequent. Halley remained a devoted scientist who didn't care who received the credit as long as the cause was being advanced. ([John 3:22-36](#))

**Brian Bell** -After a performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, the audience gave conductor Arturo Toscanini and the Orchestra a prolonged ovation. Toscanini, filled with emotion, turned to his musicians and whispered, "I am nothing, you are nothing." Then, in almost adoring tones, Toscanini said, "But Beethoven is everything!" Likewise, we must recognize that Jesus is everything! ([John 3:22-36](#))

**Barnhouse...**

When Christ's ministry began to take pre-eminence, John the Baptist said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). This must be the attitude of every believer who would have the mind of Christ. Each must realize that it is not degrading to take a position of equality with all other believers, accepting the place of no reputation so that, by grace, we may be transformed and the divine nature be manifested in us. In fact, we are told, "In humility count others better than yourselves" (Phil. 2:3).

**Harry Ironside** observes that since God

has chosen to give to us the privilege of making known the riches of His grace, a holy privilege, and yet a very responsible one. It should lead every servant of Christ to ask himself,

"Am I really in touch with God, am I seeking my own interests, can it be that I am actuated by selfish motives, by vain-glory, simply trying to attract attention to myself and my ministry instead of taking a place like that of John the Baptist of old who pointed the people away from himself to Christ saying, 'He must increase, but I

must decrease" (John 3:30)?

This was the attitude of Paul and this will be the attitude of every true minister of God. "We are laborers together with God." They are not left to work in their own strength, but are to give out their message in dependence upon the indwelling Holy Spirit. That is the difference between preaching and worldly oratory. An orator may take a passage from the Bible and read it in a most thrilling way, but that would not be preaching, because he would not be doing it in the power of the Holy Ghost. A poor unlettered man may stand up and preach the gospel in halting English, and yet in such divine power that men would break before it and be led to confess their sins and trust the Saviour...

If God gives me any little gift at all, He gives it not that I may gather people about myself, but He gives it to me for the blessing of others, for the salvation of sinners and for the edification of saints. In John the Baptist we have a lovely picture of what every gifted servant of Christ really ought to be. John says, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord" (John 1:23). And pointing to the Saviour, he says, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). John found his delight in lifting up Christ, not in directing people's attention to himself. All gifts are given that Christ may be exalted, and in that way others find blessing. (Commentary on 1 Corinthians)

Every faithful minister of the new dispensation wants to lift up the Lord Jesus before the admiring gaze of His people so that, looking on Him, they will be transfigured into His likeness. Like John the Baptist, the true teacher says, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). (Commentary on Colossians)

It is this utter absence of self-seeking that commends any true servant of Christ. We see such an attitude in John the Baptist, who said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). It should be the supreme characteristic of the evangelist, pastor, or teacher. Where this spirit of self-abnegation for the glory of the Lord is really found, it commends the ministry, though it makes nothing of the minister. Oh, that we all might be more selfless! (Commentary on Philippians)

**Vine** comments that Jn 3:22-30...

gives a beautiful picture of John the Baptist... To him Jesus was everything; His exaltation and His interests were his consuming object... In this lowliness and satisfaction John the Baptist is an example to us. The intimacy of our relationship to the Bridegroom is no doubt greater positionally than his (**Ed**: For we are the Bride of Christ, while John was in a sense "the best man"). It should be so with us as it was with him, the only thing that should matter should be that Christ is glorified by us and in all our ways and circumstances (cp 1Cor 1:31KJV, Ps 105:3). That Christ may be magnified in our bodies (cp 2Co 4:11)—if that dominates our desires, aims and ambitions, all will be well with us, no matter how greatly we may be despised, no matter how great may be our suffering and trial. ([Vine, W. Collected writings of W. E. Vine. Nashville: Thomas Nelson](#))

**Richards**...

How great a protection John's attitude is from the Christian's greatest temptation: pride. Even the little man is tempted to be proud that he's so humble. And the Christian who knows success is in danger indeed! John wasn't concerned about the smaller crowds that came to hear him when Jesus was preaching in the same district. His great joy was that Jesus become greater, and he himself less. The person who is ready to accept a John-like role in life will, like John, find himself often "full of joy" (Jn 3:29). (The 365-Day Devotional Commentary)

## THE GRACE OF HUMILITY

**J C Ryle**...

John the Baptist was an eminent saint of God. There are few names which stand higher than his in the Bible calendar of great and good men. The Lord Jesus Himself declared that "Among those who are born of woman there has not risen a greater than John the Baptist." (Mt 11:11.) The Lord Jesus Himself declared that he was "a burning and a shining light." (Jn 5:35.) Yet here in this passage we see this eminent saint lowly, self-abased, and full of humility. He puts away from himself the honor which the Jews from Jerusalem were ready to pay him. He declines all flattering titles. He speaks of himself as nothing more than the "voice of one crying in the wilderness," (Mt 3:3) and as one who "baptized with water." (Mt 3:11, 12) He proclaims loudly that there is One standing among the Jews far greater than himself, One whose shoe-latchet he is not worthy to unloose (Mk

1:7). He claims honor not for himself but for Christ.

**To exalt Christ was his mission,  
and to that mission he steadfastly adheres.**

**The greatest saints of God in every age of the Church have always been men of John the Baptist's spirit.** In gifts, and knowledge, and general character they have often differed widely. But in one respect they have always been alike--they have been "clothed with humility." (1Pe 5:5-note) They have not sought their own honor. They have thought little of themselves. They have been ever willing to decrease if Christ might only increase, to be nothing if Christ might be all. And here has been the secret of the honor God has put upon them.

**"He that humbles himself shall be exalted."**

(Lk 14:11.)

If we profess to have any real Christianity, let us strive to be of John the Baptist's spirit. Let us study **HUMILITY**. (See studies on humility - **tapeinos = adjective = humble**, **tapeinoo = verb = to humble** and **tapeinosis = noun = "humility"**, cp **humility of mind**) This is the **grace** (**Ed**: Beloved, have you ever considered "humility" as a grace, as unmerited favor, as a gift bestowed on you because He desired to do so, not because your actions or attitudes warranted His precious gift of humility!) with which all must begin, who would be saved. We have no true religion about us, until we cast away our high thoughts, and feel ourselves sinners. This is the **grace** which all saints may follow after, and which none have any excuse for neglecting. All God's children have not gifts, or money, or time to work, or a wide sphere of usefulness; but all may be **humble**. This is the **grace**, above all, which will appear most beautiful in our latter end. Never shall we feel the need of humility so deeply, as when we lie on our deathbeds, and stand before the judgment-seat of Christ (See **bema**). Our whole lives will then appear a long catalogue of imperfections, ourselves nothing, and Christ all (cp Col 2:9-note, Col 3:11b-note). ([JOHN chapter 1](#))

The **spirit of John the Baptist** is so counter to that espoused and esteemed by the fallen world (and even by many believers who are not filled with and walking by the Spirit, not growing in Christ-likeness!) **John Wesley** once observed that "neither the Romans nor the Greeks had a word for humility." The very concept was so foreign and abhorrent to their way of thinking that they had no term to describe it. To be low on the social scale, to know poverty, or to be socially powerless was considered shameful to the proud Greeks. Thus they used **humility** almost exclusively in a derisive way, and in fact most often to describe a slave. And so we see the paradox of Christianity, where Jesus describes His lowly servant John the Baptist as greater than any of his predecessors who were born of women (Mt 11:11), and proclaims believers shall be even greater than John! The way up in God's Kingdom is always downward, ever decreasing!

## **HOW TO RECOGNIZE HUMILITY**

The great Puritan writer **Thomas Watson** once ask...

**How may a Christian know that he is humble—and consequently godly?**

His answer consisted of 10 separate parts ([click and read all ten! - you will need to scroll about halfway down the page!](#)), answer 8 reading as follows...

**Answer 8:** A humble man is willing to have his name and gifts eclipsed, so that God's glory may be increased. He is content to be outshone by others in gifts and esteem, so that the crown of Christ may shine the brighter (**Ed**: O beloved, how we ["I"] need to read that statement again!). This is the humble man's motto: "Let me decrease; let Christ increase." It is his desire that Christ should be exalted, and if this is effected, whoever is the instrument, he rejoices. "some preach Christ of envy" (Php 1:15-note). They preached to take away some of Paul's hearers. "Well," says he, "Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice" (Php 1:18-note) (**Ed**: Compare Paul's rejoicing with John the Baptist's joy being made full by Christ increasing and himself decreasing in prominence in the eyes of other men. May His tribe increase! And may their joy overflow!!!). A humble Christian is content to be laid aside, if God has any other tools to work with which may bring Him more glory (**Ed**: **"Am I willing to step out of the spotlight that Christ might increase, that God might be more greatly glorified?"**). ([The Godly Mans Picture](#))

**Comment:** It strikes me that a "John the Baptist", Savior increasing, Self decreasing attitude would be a great "cure" for a spirit of jealousy, envy, competition, etc, that is all too common in modern day Christendom, even among genuine believers.

## Matthew Henry (concise)...

John was fully satisfied with the place and work assigned him; but Jesus came on a more important work. He also knew that Jesus would increase in honour and influence, for of his government and peace there would be no end, while he himself would be less followed. John knew that Jesus came from heaven as the Son of God, while he was a sinful, mortal man, who could only speak about the more plain subjects of religion. The words of Jesus were the words of God; he had the Spirit, not by measure, as the prophets, but in all fulness. Everlasting life could only be had by faith in Him, and might be thus obtained; whereas all those, who believe not in the Son of God, cannot partake of salvation, but the wrath of God for ever rests upon them.

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## The great evangelist **George Whitfield**...

I had the pleasure of introducing my honoured and reverend friend, Mr. John Wesley, to preach at Black-heath. The Lord give him four thousand times more success than He has given me.

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## Rod Mattoon...

Integrity is willing to lose personal fame, status, or wealth so that others will be protected, blessed, benefited, or treated right. When we look at the integrity of John the Baptist, we find that he turned his followers over to Jesus, beginning with the baptism of Jesus. John turned his popularity and ministry over to the Lord so people would be saved and blessed. That was his responsibility and he fulfilled it as he said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). (Treasures from 2Corinthians)

Our desire should be to seek the approval of the Lord Jesus Christ above everything else. If we will do this, we will be able to shield ourselves against the snares of flattery. We will have the same attitude as John the Baptist who said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). (Comments on Proverbs 26:28)

(An Illustration of John's decreasing) John said, "I am a voice." (Jn 1:23) He did not say, "I am THE voice." He was a pointer to the King of kings, not to himself. Our ministry as preachers is to point people to Christ and not to ourselves. The hero of the church is to be Jesus, not the pastor. When you listen to others preach, listen carefully for the focus of the sermon. Is it Christ or is it the preacher glorifying himself?...

John was content for Jesus to have the higher place of recognition and glory. This attitude is summarized in John 3:30. When you are content to do what God wants you to do and let Jesus be honored in your life, God will do great things for you beyond your comprehension. John acknowledges the fact that Christ was greater or of a higher rank than John and that He existed before John. The appearance of Christ is seen throughout the Old Testament. (Treasures from John)

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## John Wesley...

So they who are now, like John, burning and shining lights, must (if not suddenly eclipsed) like him gradually decrease, while others are increasing about them; as they in their turns grew up, amidst the decays of the former generation. Let us know how to set, as well as how to rise; and let it comfort our declining days to trace, in those who are likely to succeed us in our work, the openings of yet greater usefulness

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## Welwyn Commentary ...

(in comments on Job's "humiliation" - Job 40:2) Shrinking in self-importance before God's greatness is an essential part of growing up in the: Christian life. Growing downwards into humility (from the; Latin word humilis, meaning 'low') is the point to which God wants to bring each one of us. Bursting the bubble of self-importance is what we need. Job is reflecting here what John the Baptist would say of his Lord: 'He must become greater; I must become less' (John 3:30). We are to settle for being insignificant and dispensable...

In service, as in salvation, the praise must go to God and not to man.

when the gospel is preached in power, 'by the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven' (1Pe 1:12), those who proclaim it are obscured by the glory of Christ. This is the exact opposite of much modern expectation, where



success is commonly measured by the fame and prominence of the messenger, whether he be pastor or evangelist. Lip-service is rendered to the Baptist's dictum, 'He [Christ] must increase, but I must decrease' (John 3:30), but there are few who are so self-effacing in practice

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Ruth Bryan writes...

As Jesus is exalted in the soul, self is abased. Most ardently do I long to grow in willingness to be poor in self, that I may be learning experimentally more of His unsearchable riches—who will be all or nothing.

To His praise I must confess, that the more I am taken up with Him, the more blessedly do I realize His grace to be sufficient for me—and that amidst many trials and temptations, and through all the plague of indwelling sin.

I find sin is more subdued by looking at Him, rather than looking at it; because our Father has laid all our help upon this mighty One.

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John the Baptist captured the ultimate purpose of human existence when he said, "He must become "mater; I must become less" (Jn. 3:30). (From Discipleship Magazine)

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In a sermon by **C H Spurgeon** ([Martha and Mary](#)) on the well story of devoted **Mary** and busy **Martha** (see Lk 10:38, 39, 40, 41, 42) we read...

Martha's spirit has this mischief about it also, that it brings **self** too much to remembrance. We would not severely judge Martha, but we conceive that in some measure she aimed at making the service a credit to herself as the mistress of the house; at any rate, **self** came up when she began to grow weary, and complained that she was left to serve alone (**Ed**: Dear reader can we not identify?!!!).

**Like Martha, we also want our work to show well; we like those who see it to commend it, and if none commend it we feel that we are harshly treated, and are left to work alone.**

Now, to the extent in which I think of myself in my service I spoil it (**Ed**: Keep in mind that this is the "Prince of Preachers" speaking!). **Self** must sink, and Christ be all in all. John the Baptist's saying must be our motto, '**He must increase, I must decrease**;' for Jesus' shoe-latchet we are not worthy to unloose.

**Too much work and too little fellowship will always bring self into prominence. Self must be prayed down, and fellowship with Jesus must keep it down.**

Martha seemed to imagine that what she was doing was needful for Christ. She was cumbered about much serving, because she thought it necessary that there should be noble hospitality for the Lord. We are all too apt to think that Jesus needs our work, and that He cannot do without us.

The **preacher** enquires what would become of the church if he were removed!

The **deacon** is suspicious that if he were taken away there would be a great gap left in the administration of the church.

The **teacher** of a class feels that those children would never be converted, Christ would miss of the travail of his soul, were it not for him.

Ah, but a fly on St. Paul's Cathedral might as well imagine that all the traffic at his feet was regulated by his presence, and would cease should he depart. I love you to think that Christ will do much work by you, and to attach as much weight as you can to your responsibilities, but as to **Jesus needing us** — the thing is preposterous! Mary is much wiser when she feels, "He desires me to receive his words, and yield him my love; I would gladly give him food, but he will see to that; he is the Master of all things, and can do without me or Martha. I need him far more than he can need me."

**We spoil our service when we over-estimate its importance, for this leads us into loftiness and pride.**

Martha, under the influence of this high temper, came to complain of her sister, and to complain of her Lord too, as if he were excusing her idleness. "Do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?" How it spoils what we do for Christ when we go about it with a haughty spirit; when we feel "I can do this, and it is

grand to do that; am not I somewhat better than others? Must not my Master think well of me?" The humble worker wins the day. God accepts the man who feels his nothingness, and out of the depths cries to him; but the great ones he will put down from their seat, and send the rich ones empty away. Activity, if not balanced by devotion, tends to puff us up, and so to prevent acceptance with God. (**Read Spurgeon's entire pithy proclamation - [Martha and Mary](#)**)

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#### Alan Carr in his sermon on Mark 1:1-8

**The Message Of A Humble Servant** – John the Baptist was a bold preacher. He thundered out against sin and called for people to repent. But, when he began to talk about Jesus Christ, John became a very humble preacher. He tells the people who heard him preach that compared to Jesus, he was a nobody! He tells them that he isn't even worthy to do the job of the lowest household slave. John says, "I am nothing, but He is everything!" John says, "I didn't come to call people to me; I came to point people to Him!" **That is a humility that is lacking in these days.**

This highlights one of the reasons people refuse to deal with their sins. People often compare themselves to the wrong standard. If you look around, you can always find someone who lives worse than you do. You can hold them up and say, "See, compared to this person, I don't look too bad." That may be true, but if you honestly compare your life to Jesus Christ you would see how bad you really are.

The people were flocking to John. He had the ear of the nation. He had the people eating out of his hand. But, when John saw Jesus, John saw how needy John was! When John saw Jesus he saw that John was nothing and Jesus was everything. That is why John was willing to step aside so that Jesus might shine, John 3:30.

That is why John magnified Jesus! He knew that if people could just see Jesus they would see themselves as they really were. If they saw themselves as they really were, they would see their need of Jesus. They would want Him to be their Savior and Lord. So, John pointed men to Jesus. That's the message people need in this day! If people could ever see Jesus, whether they were saved or lost, they would have a desire to humble themselves before Him. They would willingly bow to Him in salvation, surrender and service. (**[Mark 1:1-8 The Beginning of the Gospel](#)**)

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(In his sermon on the book of Ruth, Pastor Carr says) Ruth 3:8 **She Was At His Feet** – A picture of humility and submission. For Jesus to stand tall in our lives, we must be willing to place ourselves at His feet – (Illustration - John the Baptist – John 3:30.) (Illustration - Mt. 23:12; 1Pe 5:6) I must get very little so that He can be very large! (**Ref**) (**Ed comment:** While I agree with the last sentence in principle, I think the way we "get very little" is to see a very big God, to see Jesus high and lifted up [cp The apostle John's response in Re 1:17-note!]. When He is pointed to... when He is exalted... when He is our all in all **[YouTube - You are My All in All](#)**], it is then that we begin to have a proper perspective of who we are.)

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#### John Piper...

The litmus test of our faithfully displaying the truth and beauty of Christ in our lives is not in the opinion of others. We want them to see Christ in us and love Him (and thus, very incidentally, to approve of us). When John the Baptist said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30), he spoke for every true Christian. We must insist on being less than Christ. I am vigilant, as far as it depends on me, to be less than Christ to others. (From **Life as a Vapor: Thirty-One Meditations for Your Faith** - This excerpt is from Chapter 1 [which can be downloaded] entitled Does It Matter What Others Think? - **[Download chapters 1-3 PDF](#)**.)

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Kent Hughes writes in his modern day classic **Disciplines of a Godly Man** that...

**True spiritual leadership  
knows nothing of a self-promoting spirit.**

Unfortunately, church leaders have not always appropriated this lesson. John Claypool said in his 1979 Yale Lectures on Preaching that while in seminary he experienced jealous jockeying for position, and that life in the parish ministry had not been much different. His tragic comments came after attending national conventions of

church leaders where most of the conversation in the hotel rooms either were full of envy for a leader who was doing well or scarcely concealed delight over the failure of another.

Truly spiritual leadership knows none of this, as the example of the great Charles Simeon eloquently shows (Ed: Read [I also recommend listening to the Mp3] John Piper's synopsis of Simeon's service aptly entitled [Brothers, We Must Not Mind a Little Suffering](#)). Simeon, who pastored Holy Trinity in Cambridge at the beginning of the nineteenth century, is credited with establishing the evangelical wing of the Church of England through his immense leadership exhibited in his powerful personality, his great preaching which filled twenty-one influential volumes, and his personal discipleship of some of the Church's greatest missionaries and leaders. Such a man could have been tempted to resent others who might displace him — as, for example, when his health broke and he had to spend eight months away recuperating and his curate, Thomason, stepped in to preach. Thomason surprised everyone with a preaching ability that rivaled Simeon's. And what was the great man's response? Rejoicing! In fact, as his biography says, he referenced John 3:30 ("He must become greater; I must become less") and told a friend, "Now I see why I have been laid aside. I bless God for it." (Hughes, R. K. Page 184. Disciplines of a Godly Man)

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### Zodhiates...

A minister who had to move to an obscure country parish in England because of ill health never gained acceptance among the villagers whom he sought to serve. Being unable to do much work, he procured a preacher from Wales who attracted large304 congregations. His family was a little jealous of this unexpected preference, but he rebuked them. "Take me to hear him," he said. "God honors him, and I will honor him. Have you ever studied that text, 'He must increase, but I must decrease' [John 3:30]? 'A man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven [John 3:27].'" How many preachers would be able to accept a more popular man in their pulpit in that spirit? (An Exegetical Commentary on First Corinthians One)

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### John Butler...

There are a number of ministers today, even in fundamentalists' ranks, who need to be reminded of these practices of the forerunner. They need to put more emphasis on the message, and they need to put more emphasis on Christ and less on themselves.

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From **A. K. H. B., Graver -- Thoughts of a Country Parson** read these comments on John 3:30...

Here is the secret of great usefulness. Here is the thing that will keep us kindly, unenvious, and unsoured in spirit; to utterly cast our self-seeking, self-assertion, self-conceit, to quite forget ourselves and our own importance and advancement, and with a single heart to think of our God and Saviour, and of the advancement of His glory in the saving and comforting of souls. Just in proportion to the degree in which you cease to think of self, and with a single eye make your Master's glory your great end, will be the good you will do. There is nothing that goes home to the hearts of people you try to influence for good, like the conviction that you are not thinking of yourself at all; but that you are thinking of them, and of Christ's glory in their advantage and blessing here and hereafter. It is not the fussy person trying to do good, but with much self-consciousness and self-conceit mingling with all his doings—it is not that man who will do most good. It is rather the humbler servant whose whole life says, "Now I am not working for effect; I don't care what you think of me; I am aiming at your good and Christ's glory only." For that humble servant, without perhaps ever thinking of it, has caught the sublime spirit of one concerning whom his Saviour said that a greater was never born of woman; and whose words about his Saviour were these, spoken ungrudgingly and with all his heart: "He must increase; but I must decrease."

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**James Stalker** applies John 3:30 noting that...

it is to be feared **envy** enters sometimes into the most sacred service. The human nature in a minister is tried when someone is settled in the same town whose fame puts out the light of his popularity, and it may take a time before even a good man can say,

**'He must increase, but I must decrease.'**

There is a kind of vicarious envy which it is even more difficult to check—when a man's family or friends are more jealous of his position and influence than he is himself, and find it more difficult than he to brook the interference of a rival. Thus, in the Old Testament, the family of Moses looked with an evil eye on the prophesying of Eldad and Medad. But the great man of God, rising above the sentiments of his own champions, said to Joshua, 'Do you envy you for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them.' ([SEVEN DEADLY SINS - PRIDE](#))

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## SELF-EFFACEMENT

**J R Miller** - He must increase—but I must decrease ("Ministry of Comfort" 1898)...

**Be careful** (present imperative = command calling for continual attention) not to do your "acts of righteousness" before men **to be seen by them**. - Mt 6:1-note

"Everything they do is done for men to see." Matthew 23:5

### SELF ALWAYS DIES HARD

One of the most difficult lessons to learn, is self-effacement. SELF always dies hard. It seems to us that we have a right to put our name on every piece of work we do, and to get full honor for it. We like people to know of the good and virtuous things we do, the kindnesses we show, of our benevolences, our sacrifices, our heroism and services.

Yet we all know that this is not the attitude towards ourselves and our own work, which our Lord approves. Jesus expressly bids His followers to take heed that they do not perform their good works before men—to be seen by them. The last phrase is the emphatic one—"to be seen by men." We must often do our good works before men; indeed we are commanded to let our light shine before men—that they may see our good works and glorify our Father. It is not doing worthy things before men which is condemned—but doing them in order to be seen by men. We are not to live for the eye of men and for human praise—but for the eye of God and for His approval.

Jesus proceeded in the same connection to say that when we give alms, we should not let our left hand know what our right hand is doing, that our alms may be in secret. Then God alone can recompense us—and He will. Regarding prayer, too, the same counsel is given. There were those who made a show of their private devotions, performing them in some conspicuous place, in order that they might be seen by men, that men might regard them very devout. "They have their reward," said Jesus. They get what they seek—they are seen by men—but they are not heard by God. Jesus exhorts that, avoiding this display of devoutness to attract men's attention, His disciples should enter into their inner chamber when they pray and should shut their door and pray to the Father who sees in secret. We are not to infer from this, that no prayer ever should be made in public—public prayer is an important duty; the teaching is that all acts of devotion should never do anything in order to get human notice and commendation.

We may apply this teaching to all life. We are to live only to please God. Jesus said of Himself—and His mode of life was a pattern for us—"I do always those things which please My Father." He never wrought for human eye—but always for the divine approval. It mattered not to Him, therefore, whether any but God knew what He was doing. The prophet said of Him, "He shall not cry out, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street," and His life fulfilled this foretelling. If we can learn this lesson of living and working for God's eye only, it will give us a wonderful sense of freedom; it will exalt our ideal of life and duty, and will inspire us always to the best that we can do.

There is another phase of the same lesson. Not only should we do all our work for the divine approval—but we should not be careful to get our own name on what we do. If it is done solely for the honor of Christ, why should we be solicitous to have everybody know our part in it? Should it not be honor enough to have Christ accept our work and use it?

### ILLUSTRATION OF GRACE OF

## SELF EFFACEMENT

John the Baptist, in his life and ministry, illustrated the grace of self-effacement as few other men have done. When he first began to preach, great throngs flocked about him. When Jesus came and began to preach, the crowds melted away from John and went after the new preacher. It was not easy for John to see this and not be disturbed by it. But it caused him no bitter pang. He rejoiced in seeing Jesus thus honored, though at the cost of his own fame. "He must increase—but I must decrease," was his answer, when his disciples grew envious of the Galilean Rabbi. He understood that the highest use to which his life could be put was to add to the honor of his Master. He was glad to be unnoticed, to have his own name extinguished, that the glory of Christ might shine the more brightly.

The same renunciation of self should characterize all who follow Christ. They should seek only to get recognition for Him, willing themselves to be unrecognized and unhonored. Yet not always are the Master's friends content to be nothing—that the praise may be given to Christ. Too often do they insist upon having their own name written in bold letters on their work. It would be the mark of a higher degree in spiritual attainment, if we were willing to be anonymous in every service for Christ. Even in the things men do which are necessarily conspicuous, in which it is impossible to hide the hand that works, there should always be in the heart the paramount desire to please and honor Christ. If in what they do, however beautiful and worthy it may be in itself, the wish is "to be seen by men," the beauty is blotted, and the worthiness vitiated. Only what we do for the honor of Christ—is really gold and silver and precious stones in the building; all the rest is but wood, hay, and stubble, which cannot abide.

Another practical application of this lesson is to the way we do the common deeds of love in our everyday life. We should seek to obliterate self altogether, and every thought of what is to come to us, from the thing we do. The faintest trace of a mercenary spirit in any service we may be rendering to another, leaves a blot upon the deed and spoils its beauty. The true reward of kindness or self denial is that which comes from the act itself, the joy of helping another, of relieving distress, of making the heart a little braver and stronger for the toil or struggle which we cannot make easier.

Are we willing to go about ministering blessing to others—and then forget what we have done? Are we willing to be as the dew which loses itself as it sinks away into the bosom of the rose, only to be remembered in the added sweetness of the flower? Are we willing to do deeds of love, and then keep absolutely quiet about what we have done? Is there not among us too much of the spirit which our Lord so severely condemned—sounding a trumpet before us when we are going out to do some deed of charity, some act of kindness? We all are quite ready to note the blemish in others—when they talk about their own piety and devoutness, or about their good deeds and their acts of self denial and helpfulness. We say the desire to have people know how holy he is and how useful, dims the luster of a man's graces. Moses knew not that his face shone, and the truest and divinest godliness is always unaware of its shining. We say this when we are speaking of others' self praise—but are we different from them? Do we do our deed of love and straightway hide the knowledge of it away in our heart?

Henry Drummond puts the lesson well in these short sentences: "Put a seal upon your lips and forget what you have done. After you have been kind, after love has stolen forth into the world and done its beautiful work, go back into the shade again and say nothing about it. Love hides even from itself." We could not do better than write out these words and place them where we must see them every day, and then make them the rule of our life, until we have indeed learned to seal our lips and be silent about ourselves and what we have done; to steal forth quietly on errands of love, do our errands, then hurry back into the quiet whence we set out, and to hide even from ourselves the things we have done to help others, never thinking of them again. Talking about these gentle and sacred ministries is like handling lovely flowers—it spoils their beauty.

Tell no one of the kindness you have been doing. Do not keep a diary, writing therein a minute record of your charities, your words and deeds of love. Let them be forgotten on the earth, even by yourself. There is a place where they all will be written down. That is record enough.

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## SELF

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Only what we do for the honor of Christ—is really gold and silver and precious stones in the spiritual building; all the rest is but wood, hay, and stubble, which cannot abide.

Are we willing to do deeds of service and love, and then keep absolutely quiet about what we have done? Is there not among us, too much of the spirit which our Lord so severely condemned—sounding a trumpet before us—when we are going out to do some deed of charity, some act of kindness?

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**John MacDuff...**

Let the mental image of that lowly Redeemer be ever bending over us. His example may well speak in silent impressiveness, bringing us down from our pedestal of pride. There surely can be no labor of love too humiliating when He stooped so low. Let us be content to take the humblest place—not envious of the success or exaltation of another; not, "like Diotrophes, loving pre-eminence;" (3Jn 1:9) but willing to be thought little of; saying with the Baptist, with our eye on our Lord,

**"He must increase,  
but I must decrease!"**

How much we have cause to be humble for!—the constant cleaving of defilement to our souls; and even what is partially good in us, how mixed with imperfection, self-seeking, arrogance, vain-glory! A proud Christian is a contradiction in terms. The Seraphim of old (type of the Christian Church, and of believers) had six wings—two were for errands of love but "with four he covered himself!" It has been beautifully said, "You lie nearest the River of Life when you bend to it; you cannot drink, but as you stoop." The corn of the field, as it ripens, bows its head; so, the Christian, as he ripens in the divine life, bends in this lowly grace. Christ speaks of His people as "lilies"—they are "lilies of the Valley," they can only grow in the shade!

"Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God." "Go" with what Rutherford calls "a low sail." It is the livery of your blessed Master; the family badge—the family likeness. "With this man will I dwell, even with him that is humble." Yes! the humble, sanctified heart is God's second Heaven!

"Arm yourselves likewise with the same mind." ([Read the entire section entitled "Humility"](#))

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**MARCH 28—Just A Huckster** - He must increase, but I must decrease.—John 3:30

Some young preacher will study until he has to get thick glasses to take care of his failing eyesight because he has an idea he wants to become a famous preacher. He wants to use Jesus Christ to make him a famous preacher. He's just a huckster buying and selling and getting gain. They will ordain him and he will be known as Reverend and if he writes a book, they will make him a doctor. And he will be known as Doctor; but he's still a huckster buying and selling and getting gain. And when the Lord comes back, He will drive him out of the temple along with the other cattle.



We can use the Lord for anything—or try to use Him. But what I'm preaching and what Paul taught and what was brought down through the years and what gave breath to the modern missionary movement that you and I know about and belong to was just the opposite: "O, God, we don't want anything You have, we want You." That's the cry of a soul on its way up.

Lord, give us that hunger to know You; deliver us from the pride that makes us want to use You. Let me pray today with John, "He must increase, but I must decrease." Amen.

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Octavius Winslow...

JANUARY 11. For none of us lives to himself, and no man dies to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. Romans 14:7-8

THE Lord Jesus can only erect and carry forward His kingdom in the soul upon the ruins of self: and as this kingdom of grace is perpetual in its growth, so the demolition of self is a work of gradual advancement. As the inner life grows, Christ grows more lovely to the eye, more precious to the heart. His blood is more valued, His righteousness is more relied on, His grace is more lived upon, His cross is more gloried in, His yoke is more cheerfully borne, His commands are more implicitly obeyed. In all things Christ is advanced, and the soul by all means advances in its knowledge of, and in its resemblance to, Christ.

**Reader, is Christ advanced by you? Is His kingdom widened, is His truth disseminated, is his fame spread, is His person exalted, is His honor vindicated, is His glory promoted, by the life which you are living?**

Oh, name not the name of Christ, if it do not be to perfume the air with its fragrance, and to fill the earth with its renown.

**This "living unto the Lord" is a life of self-denial; but have the self-denying, the self-renouncing, no reward?** Oh yes! their reward is great. They are such as the King delights to honor. When John the Baptist declared, "**He must increase, but I must decrease,**" and on another occasion, "whose shoe-latchet I am not worthy to unloose," Christ pronounced him "the greatest born of women." When the centurion sent to say, "Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof," our Lord places this crown upon his faith, "I tell you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." When the publican exclaimed, "God be merciful to me a sinner," he descended from the temple "justified rather" than the self-vaunting Pharisee. Yes, "when men are cast down, then there is lifting up." And what tongue can describe the inward peace, satisfaction, and contentment of that soul in whom this self-denying life of Christ dwells! Such a one has a continual feast. He may be deeply tried, sorely tempted, heavily afflicted, severely chastened, but his meek and submissive spirit exclaims, "It is the Lord, let Him do as seems good in His sight." Another characteristic of this life is—it is a conflicting life. It always wears the harness, and is ever clothed with the armor. Opposed by indwelling sin, assailed by Satan, and impeded by the world, every step in advance is only secured by a battle fought, and a victory achieved. It is also a holy life: springing from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, it must necessarily be so. All its actings are holy, all its breathings are holy, all its fruits are holy, and without holiness no man has this life, or can be an inheritor of that life to come, of which this is the seedling and the germ, the foretaste and the pledge. Need we add, that happiness, progression, and deathlessness are equally its characteristics? Happiness is but a phantom and a name, where Christ dwells not in the heart. Progression is but an advance towards eternal woe, where the love of God is not in the soul. And death is an eternal, lingering despair, where the Spirit of life has not quickened the inner man, creating all things new.

Christian reader, that was a blissful day that witnessed your resurrection from a grave of sin to walk in newness of life! Happy hour when you left your soul's shroud in the tomb, exchanging it for the robe of a glorious deathlessness—when your enmity was conquered, and you were led in willing and joyous captivity, amid the triumphs of your Lord, to the altar where He bled—self-consecrated to His service! Ever keep in mind your deep indebtedness to sovereign grace, your solemn obligation to Divine love, and the touching motives that urge you to "walk worthy of the vocation with which you are called." And welcome all the dealings of God, whatever the character of those dealings may be, designed as they are but to animate, to nourish, and to carry forward this precious life in your soul. ([EVENING THOUGHTS or DAILY WALKING WITH GOD](#))

**THE SIN OF**

## ENVY

John Angell James (1828)...

Ah! how much envy there indeed is—even in the church of God. How much of that censoriousness and detraction which is indulged under pretense of bemoaning the follies of others, is to be traced up to this evil source! How often is a 'little infirmity' pitched upon and deplored, with no other motive than to discredit and disparage that sterling excellence with which it happens to be associated—the 'speck' is pointed at and magnified, perhaps with a look of sorrow, and a tone of lamentation—but only to draw off public attention from the luster which is admired and envied! Envy has a thousand devices to practice against its object—under the veil of deceptive respect!

**Is there any sin to which even the ministers of the gospel are more exposed than this? Is there any sin which they more frequently commit?**

How much grace does it require in any man to see the popularity, and hear of the usefulness of others—and to find himself overlooked and forgotten—without being envious! Perhaps the applauded individuals are his juniors in age, and his inferiors in literature, and taste, and science—and yet while he lies unnoticed—they are swept along their course with full gales of popular applause. How few, even of those whose business it is to preach contentment, and humility, and love, can with sincerity say,

"I am quite satisfied that the honor should be denied to me—and rest upon the brows of others. I am prepared to say without a murmur, **he must increase—but I must decrease.**"

This is indeed the virtue of heaven—to see others occupying a higher sphere than ourselves, more caressed, more admired, and more followed—and feel neither uneasiness in our own bosom nor anything of ill-will toward them. It is virtue rarely found on earth. For on the contrary, what distress and dislike are produced on some minds, by the talents and the success of those of fellow ministers, who are but a little more esteemed than themselves! Are there no arts of detraction employed, to diminish, if not their popularity, yet their claims to the coveted palm? No insinuations against their motives? No searching for vices of style, errors of taste, defects of learning?

O when shall envy—that child of hell—be driven from the church of God? When shall it no longer creep in the pew—or soar in the pulpit? ([Christian Love](#))

## THE HUMILITY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

John MacDuff (from his writing entitled [JOHN THE BAPTIST](#))...

**One other trait in John's character was his  
HUMILITY.**

This outshines all the others, and indeed embraces and implies them all. If ever a man could have risen to power and position by his popularity, it was the Baptist. The great preacher of the day; the idol of the people; the first to resume and renew the long-interrupted voice of the old prophets, "The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ." (Lk 3:15) Others took a more modified view of his pretensions, but still abundantly flattering, if he had been susceptible of vain-glory. Yielding to the popular belief current at that time as to the transmigration of souls, some seemed to conjecture (from dim and shadowy intimations in the sacred writings) that the soul of Elijah, or of Jeremiah, may have reappeared in the person of John. "Are you Elijah? and he said, I am not. Are you that prophet?" (Jeremiah) "and he answered, No." (Jn 1:21)

How many would have been unduly elated by this formal mission of delegates sent from the great ecclesiastical council of the nation to interrogate him as to his claims to the Messiahship—for "the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who are you?" (Jn 1:19, 20, 21, 22, 23) What a grand opportunity was here for an ambitious impostor, or an elated fanatic! The throne of David might have been, without difficulty, won for him by these excited crowds; or, at all events, the hermit's brow might have been encircled by the halo of homage with which they invested the name and memory of one of their greatest prophets.

**But what did this humble man say?** He repels and rejects the offered incense. "I am none of these; I am but

the feeble echo of a Greater far--the pioneer and herald of a Mightier--'the voice of one crying in the wilderness.' (Jn 1:23) I am not that Light, but am sent to bear witness of that Light. (Jn 1:6, 7, 8, 9) The latchet of His shoes (the work of the humblest menial) I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose." And when the brighter Light, the Sun of Righteousness, had arisen (Mal 4:2)--when Jesus began to baptize in the Jordan, the disciples of John, in a spirit of unworthy jealousy, came complaining of the crowds that were deserting John's teaching, and following that of Him they regarded as a rival "Rabbi," said they, "he that was with you beyond Jordan, to whom you bore witness," is unfairly superseding you, "all men come to Him!" (Jn 3:26) John calmly rebukes the unworthy spirit (Jn 3:27, 28). Under a beautiful figure, he tells those who he is only "the friend of the Bridegroom" (Jn 3:29)--not the Bridegroom Himself--that his joy is fulfilled and complete, by "standing and hearing the Bridegroom's voice"--adding, in a beautiful spirit of self-renouncing humility, the prophetic words, "He must increase, but I must decrease." (Jn 3:30)

Ah, how unwilling men generally are, thus to take the shade and make way for another. How unwilling, especially (as in John's case) when but in the dawn of aspiring manhood--when their eye is undimmed, and their natural force unabated--when, with strong arm and vigorous intellect, they have been swaying the minds of a generation--whether it be in the councils of the state, or the councils of the church, or in public citizenship, or even private society--how unwilling all at once to be set aside and superseded. But so it was with this great and good man. As spring melts into the tints of full-blown summer--as the morning star melts into the sky before the brighter radiance of the sun--so this lesser light--the morning star of the gospel dispensation--after shedding his mellowed radiance, is content to be "swallowed up in the glory that excels." This is his comfort under the thought of his extinguished luster, but he needs no more--"HE must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less."

**Let us close the chapter with one or two PRACTICAL LESSONS from this review of the character of the Baptist.**

**1st, Learn from his example, what is THE GREAT THEME AND OBJECT OF THE MINISTRY.**

It is the exaltation of Christ! When men, like the people in John's time, are "thinking in their hearts"--when the soul is open to conviction, sighing to have its great unsated longings met--**with what are we to fill that heart, and meet these aspirations?**

**It is not by discourses on philosophy--or by homilies on virtue--but by telling of ONE mightier, Who "baptizes with the Holy Spirit and with fire."**

Let the faithful servants of a 'Greater than John' have **one ambition, one cause of joy**--that

**Christ their Lord be exalted.**

Let them take as their motto and watchword the ever-memorable words with which the Baptist pointed his disciples to the great Being approaching them--

**"BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD!"**

--words probably suggested by the scene and circumstances of the spot--the sheep and lambs passing by the fords of the Jordan to the impending Passover (Jn 1:29, 35, 36, 2:13). As such, the reference is interesting and impressive.

"Look no longer," says John, at these bleating types--look no longer on ME. I am myself, like these dumb animals, only appointed to prepare the world for a grander Advent. That advent so fondly waited for is now accomplished. The types may now vanish away. These flocks need no more be driven to the city of solemnities. See Him to Whom they have for four thousand years pointed--

**"Behold the Lamb of God,  
that takes away the sin of the world!"**

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**Oswald Chambers...**

If you become a necessity to a soul, you are out of God's order. As a worker, your great responsibility is to be a friend of the Bridegroom (Jn 3:29). When once you see a soul in sight of the claims of Jesus Christ, you know that your influence has been in the right direction, and instead of putting out a hand to prevent the throes (hard or painful struggle), pray that they grow ten times stronger until there is no power on earth or in hell that can hold that soul away from Jesus Christ. Over and over again, we become amateur providences (those who

prepare [in context] others for future use, but here not in a positive sense for... ), we come in and prevent God; and say - "This and that must not be." Instead of proving friends of the Bridegroom, we put our sympathy in the way, and the soul will one day say - "That one was a thief, he stole my affections from Jesus, and I lost my vision of Him."

Beware of rejoicing with a soul in the wrong thing, but see that you do rejoice in the right thing.

**"The friend of the Bridegroom...rejoices greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease."** (Jn 3:29, 30)

This is spoken with joy and not with sadness - at last they are to see the Bride groom! And John says this is his joy. It is the absolute effacement of the worker, he is never thought of again.

Watch for all you are worth until you hear the Bridegroom's voice in the life of another. Never mind what havoc it brings, what upsets, what crumbings of health, rejoice with divine hilarity when once His voice is heard. You may often see Jesus Christ wreck a life before He saves it. (cf Mt 10:34) ([Utmost for His Highest](#))

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F B Meyer has the following chapter in his book entitled **John the Baptist** ([Online](#)) ([Another source](#))...

## HE MUST INCREASE, BUT I MUST DECREASE

John 3:30

Where is the lore the Baptist taught,  
The soul unswerving and the fearless tongue?  
The much-enduring wisdom, sought  
By lonely prayer the haunted rocks among?  
Who counts it gain His light would wane,  
So the whole worm to Jesus throng?

KEBLE

FROM the Jordan Valley our Lord returned to Galilee and Nazareth. The marriage feast of Cana, his return to Jerusalem, the cleansing of the Temple, and the interview with Nicodemus, followed in rapid succession. And when the crowds of Passover pilgrims were dispersing homewards, He also left the city with his disciples, and began a missionary tour throughout the land of Judea. (cp Jn 3:23)

This tour is not much dwelt upon in Scripture. We only catch a glimpse of it here in the 22nd verse (Jn 3:22), and again in the address of the apostle Peter to Cornelius, where he speaks of Christ preaching good tidings of peace throughout all Judea (Acts 10:36, 37). How long it lasted we cannot tell; but it must have occupied some months, for He tarried from time to time at different points.

It is not likely that our Lord unfolded his Messianic character, or taught with the same clearness as in after days. For the most part, He would adopt the cry of the Baptist. Of the commencement of his ministry it is recorded:

"Jesus came,..., preaching the Gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe in the Gospel'" (Mark 1:14, 15).

But his deeds declared his royalty.

Wherever He went He was welcomed with vast enthusiasm. The scenes which had occurred a few months before to inaugurate the Baptist's ministry were re-enacted. The progress of the heaven-sent Teacher (John 3:2) was accompanied by immense throngs of people, who, wearied with the tiresome exactions of Pharisee and scribe, turned with eagerness to the humanness and holiness of the True Shepherd. It is said that cattle, sick and harried with the voyage across the Atlantic, will show signs of revival as they sniff the first land breezes laden with the breath of the clover fields.

During all this time the Baptist was continuing his preparatory work in the Jordan Valley, though now driven by persecution to leave the western bank for Aenon and Salim on the eastern side, where a handful of followers still clung to him. "John was not yet cast into prison," (Jn 3:24) but the shadow of his impending fate was already gathering over him; and so he was baptizing in Aenon, near to Salim, where the Jordan sweeps out into broad sheets of water, eminently suitable for his purpose. Thither they came and were baptized. The morning star lingers in the same heavens with the sun, whom it has announced; but its luster has paled, and its glories are shorn.

It would appear from (Jn 3:25) that a Jew, probably an emissary of the Sanhedrin, brought tidings to that little circle of true-hearted disciples of the work that Jesus was doing in Judea, and drew them into a discussion as to the comparative value of the two baptisms. It was acknowledged that Jesus did not, with His own hands, perform the rite of baptism, probably for reasons afterwards cited by his great apostle (John 4:2; cp 1Co 1:14, 15, 16, 17): but it would be administered by His disciples, at His direction, and with His countenance; and therefore it could be reported to the Baptist by his disciples, who came to him with eyes flashing with indignation, and faces heated with the excitement of the discussion:

"Rabbi, He that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou hast borne witness, the same baptizeth, and all men come to Him" (John 3:26).

It was as though they said,

"Master, is it not too bad? See how thy generous testimony has been requited (repaid)! In the day of thy glory thou wert too profuse in thy acknowledgments, too prodigal in thy testimonials. Now this new Teacher has taken a leaf out of thy program; He too is preaching, baptizing, and gathering a school of disciples."

But there was no tinder in that noble breast which these jealous sparks could kindle. Nothing but love dwelt there. He had been plunged into the baptism of a holy love, which had burnt out the selfishness and jealousy, which were as natural to him as to us all. It was as when a spark falls into an ocean and is instantly extinguished. **Thus his reply will ever rank among the greatest utterances of mortal man.** The Lord said that of those born of woman none was greater than John (Mt 11:11); and, if by nothing else, by these words his moral stature and superlative excellence were vindicated. He seemed great when his voice rang like a clarion through Palestine, attracting and thrilling the mighty throngs; great, when he dared to tell Herod that it was unlawful for him to have his brother's wife, uttering words which those palace walls must have been startled to hear (Mk 6:17, 18); great, when he baptized Him for Whom the world was waiting (Mt 3:13, 14, 15, 16, 17), and Who was declared to be the Son of God with power (Ro 1:4): but he never seemed so great as when he refused to enter into those acrimonious altercations and discussions, and said simply,

**"A man can receive nothing,  
except it be given him from heaven."**

(Jn 3:27)

## **I. JOHN COUNTED INFLUENCE AND POSITION AS DIVINE GIFTS.**

What startling differences obtain among men, Peter and John, Calvin and Melancthon, John Knox and Samuel Rutherford, Kingsley and Keble! Each of these has left his imprint on human history; each so needful to do his own special work, but each so diverse from all others. We are sometimes tempted to attribute their special powers and success to their circumstances, their times, their parents and teachers; but there is a deeper and more satisfactory explanation. Adopting the words of the Forerunner, we may say, They had nothing that they had not received from heaven, by the direct appointment and decree of God.

It was thus that the Baptist reasoned: "Whatever success and blessing I had are due to the appointment of Him who sent me to preach his Gospel and announce the advent of his Son. Every man has his work and sphere appointed him of God. If this new Teacher meet with such success, we have no right to be jealous of Him, lest we sin against God, who has made Him what He is. And if we have not the same crowds as once, let us be content to take this, too, as the appointment of Heaven, glad to do whatever is assigned to us, and to leave all results with God."

This is a golden sentence, indeed!

**"A man can receive nothing,  
except it be given him from heaven."**

(Jn 3:27)

Hast thou great success in thy life-work? Do crowds gather around thy steps and throng thy audience-chamber? Do not attribute them to thyself. They are all the gifts of God's grace. He raiseth up one and setteth down another. Thou hast nothing that thou hast not received; and if thou hast received it, see to it that thou exercise perpetually the faculty of receptiveness, so that thou mayest receive more and more, grace on grace. The river in its flow should hollow out the channel-bed through which it flows. Be thankful, but never vain. He who gave may take. Great talents bestowed imply great responsibility in the day of reckoning. Be not high-minded, but fear. Much success can only be enjoyed without injury to the inner life by being considered as the dear gift of Christ, to be used for Him.

Hast thou but one talent, and little success? yet this is as God has willed it. He might have given more had He willed it so; be thankful that He has given any. Use what thou hast. The five barley loaves and two small fishes will so increase, as they are

distributed, that they will supply the want of thousands. Do not dare to envy one more successful and used than thyself, lest thou be convicted of murmuring against the appointment of thy Lord.

Here, too, is the cure of jealousy, which more than anything else blights the soul of the servant of God. To an older minister, who has passed the zenith of his popularity and power, it is often a severe trial to see younger men stepping into positions which he once held and has been compelled to renounce. He is mightily tempted to disparage their power, and condemn them by faint praise; or, if he praise, to add one biting comment which undoes the generosity and frankness of the eulogium. Why should this younger man, who was not born when his own ministry was at full tide, now carry all before him, while the waves are quietly withdrawing from the margin of seaweed they once cast up! Thoughts like these corrode and canker (decay, corrupt, consume, eat away at) the soul; and there is no arrest to them, unless, by a definite effort of the Spirit-energized will (Php 2:13-note), the soul turns to God with the words:

"A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. I had my glad hours of meridian glory, and have still the mellow light of a summer sunset. It was God's gift to me, as rest is now; and I will rejoice that He raises up others to do his work. I will rejoice that the Kingdom is coming, that Christ is satisfied, that men are being saved; this shall be my joy, and it shall be fulfilled."

How much misery, heart-burning, and disappointment would be saved if, at the beginning of life, each of us inquired seriously what that special work in the world might be to which he was called, and for which he is fitted. Then, instead of being poor imitations, we might be good originals. Instead of spending our time in going off on side issues, we might bend all our strength to the main purpose of our existence. God has meant each of us for something; incarnating in us one of his own great thoughts, and equipping us with all material that is necessary for its realization. We may probably discover its meaning by the peculiarities of our mental endowments or the advice of friends; by the necessity of our circumstances or the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Otherwise we must be content to go on making each day according to the pattern shown us, not as a whole, but in detail, sure that some day each bit and scrap, each veil and hanging, will find its place, and the tabernacle of our life stand complete.

Every name is historic in God's estimate. The obscurest among us has his place in the Divine plan, his lesson to learn, his work to do. The century opening before us can no more dispense with us than an orchestra with the piccolo. A pawn on God's chessboard may take a knight, or give check to a king. "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God has before prepared (R.V.), that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10-note).

## **II. JOHN CAUGHT SIGHT OF A FULLER AND RICHER IDEAL THAN HIS OWN.**

Tidings had, without doubt, been brought to him of our Lord's first miracle in Cana of Galilee. We know that it had made a great impression on the little group of ardent souls, who had been called to share the village festivities with their newly-found Master; and we know that some of them were still deeply attached to their old friend and leader. From these he would learn the full details of that remarkable inauguration of this long-expected ministry. How startled he must have been at the first hearing! He had announced the Husbandman with his fan to thoroughly winnow his floor; the Baptist with his fire; the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29), holy, harmless, and separate from sinners. But the Messiah opens his ministry among men by mingling with the simple villagers in their wedding joy, and actually ministers to their innocent mirth, as He turns the water into wine! ([see Merrill Tenney's article on meaning of signs in John](#)) The Son of Man has come "eating and drinking"! What a contrast was here to the austerity of the desert, the coarse raiment, the hard fare! "John the Baptist came neither eating nor drinking." Could this be He? And yet there was no doubt that the heaven had been opened above Him, that the Dove had descended, and that God's voice had declared Him to be the "Beloved Son." But what a contrast to all that he had looked for!

Further reflection, however, on that incident, in which Jesus manifested forth his glory, and the cleansing of the Temple which immediately followed, must have convinced the Baptist that this conception of holiness was the true one. His own type could never be universal or popular. It was not to be expected that the mass of men could be spared from the ordinary demands of daily life to spend their days in the wilderness as he had done; and it would not have been for their well-being, or that of the world, if his practice had become the rule. It would have been a practical admission that ordinary life was common and unclean; and that there was no possibility of infusing it with the high principles of the Kingdom of Heaven. Consecration to God would have become synonymous with the exclusion of wife and child, of home and business, of music and poetry, from the soul of the saint; whereas its true conception demands that nothing which God has created can be accounted common or unclean, but all may be included within the encircling precincts of the Redeemer's Kingdom. The motto of Christian consecration is, therefore, given in that remarkable assertion of the apostle:

"Every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified through the Word of God and prayer" (1Ti 4:4, 5).

John saw, beneath the illuminating ray of the Holy Spirit, that this was the Divine Ideal; that the Redeemer could not contradict the



Creator; that the Kingdom was consistent with the home; and the presence of the King with the caress of woman and the laughter of the child, and the innocent mirth of the village feast. This he saw, and cried in effect:

"That village scene is the key to the Messiah's ministry to Israel. He is not only Guest at a bridegroom's table, but the Bridegroom Himself. He has come to woo and win the chosen race. Of old they were called Hephzibah and Beulah; and now those ancient words come back to mind with newly-minted meaning, with the scent of spring. Our land, long Bereaved and desolate, is to be married. Joy, joy to her! The bridegroom is here. He that hath the bride is the Bridegroom. As for me, I am the Bridegroom's friend, sent to negotiate the match, privileged to know and bring together the two parties in the blessed nuptials, blessed with the unspeakable gladness of hearing the Bridegroom's manly speech. Do you tell me that He is preaching, and that all come to Him? That is what I have wanted most of all. This my joy, therefore, is fulfilled. 'He must increase, but I must decrease.'"

### III. JOHN HAD ENLARGED PERCEPTION OF THE TRUE NATURE OF CHRIST.

It has been questioned whether the paragraph which follows (John 3:31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36) was spoken by the Baptist, or is the comment of the Evangelist. With many eminent commentators, I incline strongly to the former view. The phraseology employed in this paragraph is closely similar to the words addressed by Christ to Nicodemus, and often used by Himself, as in John 5., and they may well have filtered through to the Baptist, by the lips of Andrew, Peter, and John, who would often retail to their venerated earliest teacher what they heard from Jesus.

Consider, then, the Baptist's creed at this point of his career. He believed in the heavenly origin and divinity of the Son of Man, that He was from heaven and above all. He believed in the unique and divine source of his teaching, that He did not communicate what He had learnt at second-hand, but stood forth as one speaking what He knows, and testifying what He has seen, "For He whom God has sent, speaketh the words of God." He believed in his copious endowment with the Holy Spirit. Knowing that human teachers, at the best, could only receive the Spirit in a limited degree, he recognised that when God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit there was no limit, no measuring metre, no stint. It was copious, rich, unmeasured, so much so that it ran down from his head, as Hermon's dew descended to the lonely heights of Zion. He believed in his near relationship to God, using the well-known Jewish phrase of sonship to describe his possession of the Divine nature in a unique sense, and recalling the utterance of the hour of baptism, to give weight to his assurance that the Father loved Him as Son. Lastly, he believed in the mediatorial function of the Man of Nazareth, that the Father had already given all things into his hand; and that the day was coming when He would sit on the throne of David, yea, on the mediatorial throne itself, King of kings, and Lord of lords, the keys of Death and Hades, of the realms of invisible existence and spiritual power, hanging at his girdle.

To that creed the Baptist added a testimony, which has been the means of light and blessing to myriads. Being dead, he yet has spoken through the ages, assuring us that to believe on Jesus is to have, as a present fact, eternal life, the life which fills the Being of God and defies time and change. Faith is the act by which we open our heart to receive the gift of God; as earth bares her breast to sun and rain, and as the good wife flings wide her doors and windows to let in the spring sunshine and the summer air. Ah, reader, I would that thou hadst this faith! The open heart towards Christ! The yielded will! Thou needst only will to have Him, and He has already entered, though thou canst not detect his footfall, or the chime of the bells around his garment's hem. And to shut thy heart against Him not only excludes the life which might be thine, but incurs the wrath of God.

**There are two concluding thoughts.**

**First:**

**The only hope of a decreasing self  
is an increasing Christ.**

There is too much of the self-life in us all; chafing against God's will, refusing God's gifts, instigating the very services we render to God, simulating humility and meekness for the praise of men. But how can we be rid of this accursed self-consciousness and pride? Ah! we must turn our back on our shadow, and our face towards Christ. We must look at all things from his standpoint, trying to realize always how they affect Him, and then entering into his emotions. It has been said that "the woman who loves thinks with the brain of the man she loves"; and surely if we love Christ with a constraining passion, we shall think his thoughts and feel his joys, and no longer live unto ourselves, but unto Him.

"Love took up the Harp of Life  
And smote on all its chord with might;  
Smote the chord of self, that trembling,  
Passed in music out of sight."

## Second:

We must view our relationship to Christ as the betrothal and marriage of our soul to our Maker and Redeemer, who is also our Husband.

"Wherefore, my brethren," says the apostle, "ye also were made dead to the law through the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to Him who was raised from the dead that we should bring forth fruit unto God" (Ro. 7:4-note).

The Son of God is not content to love us. He cannot rest till He has all our love in return. "He looketh in at the windows" of the soul, "and showeth Himself through the lattice." Our Beloved speaks, and says unto us,

"Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away."

And, as our response, He waits to hear us say:

My Beloved is mine, and I am his;

He feedeth his flock among the lilies.

Until the day break, and the shadows flee away,

Turn, my Beloved!

Song 2:16, 17a

It is interesting to read **F B Meyer's** comments in his preface of his book "**John the Baptist**"...

THE LIFE and character of John the Baptist have always had a great fascination for me; and I am thankful to have been permitted to write this book. But I am more thankful for the hours of absorbing interest spent in the study of his portraiture as given in the Gospels. I know of nothing that makes so pleasant a respite from the pressure of life's fret and strain, as to bathe mind and spirit in the translucent waters of Scripture biography.

As the clasp between the Old Testament and the New, the close of the one and the beginning of the other; as among the greatest of those born of women; as the porter who opened the door to the True Shepherd; as the fearless rebuker of royal and shameless sin, the Baptist must ever compel the homage and admiration of mankind.

In many respects, such a life cannot be repeated. But the spirit of humility and courage; of devotion to God, and uncompromising loyalty to truth, which was so conspicuous in him, may animate us. We, also, may be filled with the spirit and power of Elijah, as he was; and may point, with lip and life, to the Saviour of the world, crying, "Behold the Lamb of God." **F. B. MEYER.**