

He Must Increase, I Must Decrease
John 3:22-36
October 19th, 2025

Four convictions for a life that exalts Christ

1. Everything we have comes from _____. (3:27)
2. Our _____ is helping people find Jesus. (3:28-30)
3. His _____ is what matters. (3:31-34)
4. The context of redemption is the _____ of the Father for the Son. (3:35-36)
5. Applying the Word
 - a. We are _____-centered,
_____ -focused,
and _____-exalting.

Questions for Discussion/Reflection on John 3:22-36

1. Why do you think historic Christian institutions, churches, and denominations can drift away from the priority of the gospel and exalting Christ?
2. Put yourself in the shoes of John's disciples in vv. 25-26. What did they seem concerned about? Why? How does John's response provide insight into their concerns?
3. What are some other ways we can apply the truism of v. 27 to other areas of life? (See also 1 Cor. 4:7) How does it apply to John's particular situation?
4. What's the role of the best-man at a wedding today? How does that parallel John's role? (v. 29)
5. How do the following passages use marriage and bride/groom language to describe God's relationship with His people?
 - a. Isaiah 62:4-5; Hosea 2:19-20; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-27
 - b. How does that further reinforce John's point?
6. How can v. 30 serve as a motto for the Christian's life?
7. Work through the details of the argument in 3:31-34. How does it support the authority of Jesus' message?
8. Review the high priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17:6-10, 22-24. Who gives what to whom? What role does the Father's love for the Son play? How should it affect the believer to know that they are a love gift from the Father to the Son?

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Big idea: True ministry is joyfully pointing people to Jesus rather than building our own brand.

Intro

One of our convictions as a church is that we want to be Christ-exalting. To exalt something or someone is to hold them in high regard, to think highly of. We want to exalt Christ as a church. We want Him to be the focus. We want people to see Jesus as great, not our building, not our pastors, not our worship leaders, not our kids' program – although we want all those things to be used to point people to Jesus.

It's easy over time for Christian organizations to drift from their mission to point people to the greatness of Christ.

The YMCA –

The first YMCA was started in London in 1844 in response to the working and living conditions in London at that time. It was a rough place to live, and many of the young men who came there for work were living in awful conditions. A farmer-turned-shopkeeper named George Williams saw the need, and he along with eleven friends founded the YMCA. The acronym stands for Young Men's Christian Association. The YMCA was to be a place for spiritual refuge—Bible studies and prayer times—to help the young men who had moved to London for work. (Carter)

Now it is a gym and a catchy wedding reception song.

Harvard was founded in 1636 to train pastors for gospel ministry.

Their mission statement was: Everyone shall consider as the main end of his life and studies, to know God and Jesus Christ, which is eternal life.

Now it is an elite educational institution but their “divinity school” describes their program this way:

To provide an intellectual home where scholars and professionals from around the globe research and teach the varieties of religion, in service of a just world at peace across religious and cultural divides.

Both the YMCA and Harvard, while valuable institutions, have drifted away from their founding purposes to exalt Jesus.

Four convictions for a life that exalts Christ

These convictions can help us avoid drifting away from exalting Christ as individuals and as a church.

The context of this is a complaint from John's disciples about the crowds that were going to Jesus instead of John. (3:22-26)

Some time after the conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus left Jerusalem and went into the countryside of Judea (Jerusalem is the city, Judea is like the state). He was spending time with his disciples and baptizing, although chapter 4 clarifies that it was His disciples who were actually doing the baptizing.

John was also outside Jerusalem by the Jordan river and people were coming to him also to be baptized.

The text includes a historical note that it was before John was imprisoned. Mark records John's imprisonment in chapter 1, Matthew in chapter 4, so that means that what takes place here is earlier than most of what is in the other gospel records.

There arose a discussion. One author said this is used in the same way as a married couple when they say they had a “discussion” but really they mean they had an “argument.”

I'm not totally sure why the discussion with someone else about ritual purification (probably stirred on by the baptism) led to this complaint to John about Jesus, but perhaps its because they were linked in John's disciples' minds with concerns about the durability of John's ministry.

They complain that "all are coming to Him" – it seems like more than an observation based on John's response.

They want to know, "John, what do you think about this? Everyone is going to Jesus! What's that going to do to you (us)?"

And that's where we get these four convictions, modeled and taught by John, that can shape our lives to be focused on exalting Christ.

1. Everything we have comes from **God**. (3:27)

- a. This is a general truism that John is applying to this situation.
- b. A human being does not have anything other than what he has received from God, so God's sovereignty stands behind every human success.
- c. Paul was dealing with a similar issue in Corinth.
 - i. People were lining up behind certain teachers – I'm off Apollos, I'm of Paul, I'm of Cephas.
 - ii. **1 Corinthians 3:6-7** I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. ⁷ So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.
 - iii. **1 Corinthians 4:6-7** Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other. ⁷ For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?
- d. It wasn't John the Baptists fashionable camel-hair clothing or his edgy message about repentance that drew the crowds. And it wasn't Paul's intelligence and rhetorical skills either. It was God.
- e. And if people were drawn to things about John and Paul and Apollos and if they are drawn to certain speakers and authors today, God is the one who gave those skills, gifts, and opportunities, so it is with any church growth or success today.

2. Our **joy** is helping people find Jesus. (3:28-30)

- a. John reiterated his message – I'm not the Messiah but I'm sent to prepare the way for him.
 - i. We saw this in chapter 1. "I'm a voice crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord" quoting from Isaiah. "Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."
- b. Used an analogy that works today also.
 - i. "I'm the best man at the wedding, not the groom"
 - ii. There are 3-4 weddings in the works right now that are connected to UBC. The happy couples are making plans. One of those decisions will be about who will be in their best man and maid of honor.
 - iii. Think of a best man standing beside the groom on stage at the wedding. Maybe they have been friends since childhood. They grew up together. They played sports and watched movies and talked about life. He was there when his friend first met the girl and now he stands beside him while she walks down the aisle. There's a joy in that moment.

- iv. How inappropriate would it be for the best man to make that moment about himself? How scandalous if you pushed the groom aside and tried to marry the girl?
 - v. Imagine if as he was watching the bride walk down the aisle, he said, "She looks so pretty I think I'll marry her myself."
 - vi. In the cultural context, the job of the friend of the bridegroom was to help with the wedding celebration, to make sure the bride and groom are there and the wedding could begin. At that point his job is done.
- c. "This joy of mine has been made full"
- i. Telling his disciples, "You misunderstood. I'm not just trying to gather a crowd of disciples. I'm preparing people for the Messiah. And He's here! Why wouldn't I rejoice that people are going to Him? That was my job!"
- d. "He must increase, I must decrease"
- i. "Must" – determined will of God
 - ii. Carson - Not grudging loss to a superior opponent, but wholehearted embrace of God's will and the supremacy it assigns to Jesus.
 - iii. What does increase/decrease refer to?
 - 1. Popularity
 - 2. Influence
 - 3. significance
- e. One cause of church conflict is infighting as one ministry or person grows in prominence and others decline.
- i. That just happens in the life cycle of different ministries. The overall mission of the church does not change. The core facets of church life don't change.
 - ii. But the pieces serving and different roles change over time and the sub-ministries that meet a valuable need for a season sometimes change. When that happens, people can get territorial on their behalf or their friends.
 - iii. One day, every person who has played a public role in this gathering today will be replaced, including myself. Every beloved Sunday school teacher. Every treasured Bible study leader. Will we long for "the good old days" and complain and compare?
 - iv. The solution is to be more concerned with exalting Christ than exalting our own efforts to exalt Christ.

3. His **message** is what matters. (3:31-34)

- a. "I'm from the earth – I'm just a guy. I was born of a human father and mother."
- b. "But Jesus is from heaven and is above all so his message is true and reliable and authoritative."
- c. Notice the parallels with Proverbs 30
 - i. **Proverbs 30:1-6** The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, the oracle. The man declares to Ithiel, to Ithiel and Ucal: ² Surely I am more stupid than any man, And I do not have the understanding of a man. ³ Neither have I learned wisdom, Nor do I have the knowledge of the Holy One. ⁴ Who has ascended into heaven and descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has wrapped the waters in His garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name or His son's name? Surely you know! ⁵ Every word of God is tested; He is a shield

to those who take refuge in Him. ⁶ Do not add to His words Or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar.

- ii. Contrary to the patterns of “wise men” of the time, Agur doesn’t start by proclaiming his own wisdom but his own stupidity.
 - iii. He recognized that he didn’t come down from heaven. He isn’t the creator who gathers the wind in his fists. Who has done that? Imagine if someone like that, or his son, were to come down!
- d. The one then who believes the words of Jesus who has come down from heaven is putting his seal on the statement that God is truth (truthful)
- i. “Seal” was an emblem placed in hot wax on the back of an scroll or envelope as a sign of authenticity and reliability.
 - ii. Jesus speaks the words of God and, unlike the OT prophets who had a measure of God’s Spirit, Jesus has the Spirit without measure.

4. The context of redemption is the **love** of the Father for the Son. (3:35-36)

- a. Carson – even the unfolding of redemptive history finds its ultimate source in the loving relationships in the Godhead.
- b. Not mechanical outworking of a plan. Not grudging. Certainly not cosmic child abuse. Not partners in business.
- c. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand.
 - i. On the night before His arrest and crucifixion, Jesus pulled aside to pray. We’ll get to this eventually in John 17. I want you to see a few of the words now.
 - ii. John 17:6-10
 - 1. The original disciples and then by extension in v. 20 all believers in future generations, are loving gifts from the Father to the Son.
 - iii. John 17:22-24
 - 1. That there may be unity, so the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them even as you have loved Me.
 - 2. The love of the Father for the Son is extended to us, even the love of the Father for the Son before the foundation of the world.
- d. We are folded into an ongoing relationship that has existed for all eternity – a relationship of love – is it any wonder that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son? Is there any question about whether the Father will continue to love us?
- e. The chapter ends with the pressing issue that is the repeating thematic chorus throughout the book
 - i. Belief in the Son → eternal life
 - ii. Not obeying the Son → wrath of God remains
 - 1. To obey is to believe, we obey by believing
 - 2. Acts 6:7 talks about people being “obedient to the faith.”

5. Applying the Word

- a. We are **gospel**-centered, **Bible**-focused, and **Christ**-exalting.

- i. You see all of those in this text.
- ii. There is no better news than the gospel. There is no better message than the message that you can be forgiven, you can have the wrath of God removed from you, you can be brought in to relationship with a God who loves you even as He loves His own Son. And that news should shape the very culture and heart-beat of our church.
- iii. If we have the very Words of God in the Bible, the authoritative Word of the One who has come down from heaven, why would we teach anything else? Why would we counsel from any other foundation?

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Harvard University, 1636

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John 17:6-10; 22-24

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