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**APOSTOLIC VERSE BY VERSE BIBLE STUDY**

**Straightway Church of Christ, Inc.**

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**"HE MUST INCREASE, BUT I MUST DECREASE."**

**John 3:22-36**

***John 3:22, "After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judaea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized."***

Nicodemus who never told us of his response to Jesus’ message was now contrasted with John the Baptist, the bold witness. Only John’s gospel mentions that Jesus was baptizing. However, this does not mean that Jesus actually personally baptized. Jesus preached and his disciples baptized. These country folk seemed to be more acceptable of Jesus than those of the temple.

***John 4:1-2***

***1 When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John,***

***2 (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,)***

***John 3:23-24,***

***23 "And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized."***

***24, "For John was not yet cast into prison."***

The exact locations of Aenon and Salim are not known, despite the clue that there was much water there. They may have been located on the Jordan River forming the eastern boundary of Samaria. It is possible that Jesus’ effective ministry in John 4 in Sychar, a Samaritan city, may be because of the precursory work of John in the same vicinity. John the Baptist was still preaching repentance and pointing them to the Saviour. Possibly thousands of people were baptized by John, and the fact that abundant water was there would be important. Christian baptism is distinct from John’s baptism since it was not given until after the resurrection.

***Matthew 3:11 “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance. but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:”***

***Matthew 28:19-20***

***19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:***

***20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.***

***Acts 19:3-5***

***3 And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism.***

***4 Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.***

***5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.***

Christian water baptism is designed to be a symbolic representation of what God has done for the believer in uniting him with Christ, but John’s baptism is a symbol indicating repentance and spiritual cleansing in preparation for the coming of the kingdom of God. John did not go and join Jesus' group because that was not what God called him to do. He was to proclaim the coming of Messiah and tell those who didn't know that He was here. The time reference, after these things, is nonspecific, but the events took place before John’s imprisonment. John was imprisoned before Jesus began His public (Galilean) ministry. Part of making disciples is spending time with them, as Jesus did. Jesus and the forerunner carried on parallel baptizing ministries, giving rise to the issue. John had spoken boldly about Herod taking his brother's wife, Herodias, as his wife. He went so far as to tell them that they were living in adultery. John would be cast into prison and lose his head for this accusation.

***John 3:25-26,***

***25 "Then there arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying."***

***26, "And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him."***

A debate between John’s disciples and unidentified Jews regarding purification brought the group to the Baptist. Whether their motives (they came) were pure or tainted by jealousy or other sins, the resulting remark to John the Baptist was an enticement to compare his ministry with Jesus’ ministry. The town that John was in was probably pretty close to Jerusalem, since this question arose. This ceremonial cleansing with the Jews was very important and this seemed to be what the discussion was about. Jesus had taught that what went on in the heart was much more important than these washings from without. To receive Jesus, there had to be a change of heart. The spirit of man (within) was what had to be clean. The cleansed heart brought good things to surface. The Levitical law contained many ordinances to washing the outward flesh. I guess if there was one basic difference in the law and grace, it is the difference in flesh and spirit. Jesus looked on the inside of man. The law looked on the outside. Washing away your sins with baptism is the baptism of repentance and has to do with the past. The baptism of the Spirit changes man from within. Rabbi is a name of great importance. Jesus was called by this name by those who had great respect for Him. The strange thing to understand here is that John's disciples knew that John spoke of Jesus as Messiah. Why did they not follow Jesus? Perhaps it was loyalty to John, but John's mission was to open up the way for Jesus the Christ (Messiah). These disciples are disappointed that more people are being baptized by Jesus' disciples. John’s disciples had become concerned because everyone [was] going to Jesus. Thus, they essentially told their master, “Wait a minute, this Jesus fella is moving in on your ministry. Now fewer people are coming to you.”

***John 3:27, "John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven."***

The Baptizer’s answer to his disciples generalizes a truth applicable to all, particularly to ministry. Most directly, it applies to Christ’s gathering of disciples. John’s pride was not wounded like his disciples’ was. First, he acknowledged that no one can receive anything unless it has been given to him from heaven. John knew that his job had been assigned to him by God; therefore, he was content to receive no more than what God wanted him to have. John is telling his disciples here that he has done the job that God gave him to do. He is not supposed to do more. His mission is complete. Ministers of today should look at this. John is not jealous of Jesus. John has done the job that God gave him to do. Everyone who has ever been called to do anything for God should do exactly what they are called to do, nothing more and nothing less. We should never compare ourselves with others' calls. Their call is different. We must do what God called us to do and not someone else's job. It may be great or small. Whatever it is, it is our job.

***John 6:37-39***

***37 All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.***

***38 For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.***

***39 And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.***

***John 3:28, "Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him."***

Second, John confessed his secondary role in relationship to Jesus. John was not the Messiah. Rather, he had been sent ahead of him to prepare his way. John’s own disciples could testify to his avowal that he was only the predecessor to the Messiah. John, half-reprimanding his disciples, says, "I told you that I was preparing you for the Messiah (Christ)". John quickly tells them, "I told you from the beginning that I am not Messiah. I was sent as a messenger to tell of Him and to make the road open for everyone to receive Him when He came. You know that is what I said, you are my witness that is all that I said."

***John 3:29, "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled."***

We see here, John giving them an earthly example so that they will understand. He wasn’t the groom but the groom’s friend. The groom gets the bride, and the groom’s friend is glad for him. The friend here is like the best man at the wedding. He helps prepare for the wedding and gets everything ready for the wedding, but the groom and bride are the main participants. The friend must step aside when the wedding actually begins. We know that this Scripture has a deeper meaning than just the surface. The bride is the church, those who receive Jesus as Saviour are the bride. Jesus is the bridegroom. John rejoiced because his message was true.

***John 3:30, "He must increase, but I must decrease."***

Third, John said, He must increase, but I must decrease. John was simply the opening act, expected to warm up the crowd and then get off the stage. Jesus was the main event, the star attraction. John’s job was to point to and glorify the Messiah. And that’s our job too. John was content with and grateful for his role. Are you? John is saying, "This is the one that I prepared the way for. Now that He is here, I must step aside and let Him take over". John is saying the messenger is not as important as the message. When the message arrives, the messenger's job is done.

***John 3:31, "He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all."***

Jesus has superiority. He comes from above (heaven). He is no mere man speaking from an earthly viewpoint. He is the Son of God speaking from a heavenly perspective. Because Jesus comes from above, He is therefore above all other teachers of truth. Other religious leaders are of the earth and are earthly (imperfect, limited) in their teaching. John says here, "I am an earthly body, and all I can tell you about is the earth, but Jesus is the Word who took on flesh. This Jesus can tell you all about heaven because He has been living in heaven. He (Jesus) is above me. He is my God."

***John 3:32, "And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony."***

Since He has been in the presence of the Father, Christ can testify of what He has seen and heard. Jesus has firsthand knowledge of heaven, the heavenly beings, and the throne of God. He was there. Jesus does not tell you of things He believes. He tells you of things He knows. He has seen these things with His own eyes and heard the things He tells you with His own ears. Men do not believe Him, because they do not know who He is, the Son of God. Even though the Scriptures have prophesied His coming for so many years, now that He is here, they do not believe Him.

***John 3:33, "He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true."***

Those who have received Him, have received the Truth of God. God's promises always come about. Those who believe Jesus Christ of Nazareth is Messiah the Saviour have their names written in the Lamb's book of life. The words “hath set his seal” to this means “has confirmed clearly” that God is true. His testimony is true, whether someone accepts it or not.

***John 3:34, "For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him."***

Jesus was completely filled with the Spirit. Every gift of the Spirit was active in Jesus. Jesus is God the Word, who was manifested as God’s only begotten Son. We call Him Jesus because His purpose on the earth was to be our Jehovah Saviour

***Colossians 2:9, "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."***

***1 Timothy 3:16 “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.”***

***1 John 3:8 “He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.”***

***John 3:35, "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand."***

To reject the Son’s testimony is to call God a liar since the Son speaks the very words of God and the Father has given all things into his hands. He will one day rule the world as King. In Matthew 11:27, the Lord Jesus says that all things were given unto Him. John the Baptist heard the voice from heaven say, "This is my beloved Son". John has heard of the miracles that Jesus has done which are not part of John's ministry, also. He knows well who this is.

***John 3:36, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."***

Since God gives the Spirit without measure to the Son, Jesus will fulfill all of God’s intentions for the Messiah. The Father’s love-gift of all things to the Son gives Christ the right to grant eternal life. Eternal life begins now, as is evident in the present tense, has eternal life. Does not obey the Son contrasts with “believe,” and refers to disobeying the command to believe in Christ. The wrath of God is presently on the unbeliever and abides on (remains on) him as long as he refuses to believe. The matter is simple. Believe in the Son to receive eternal life. Reject him and experience divine wrath. Believeth has a much deeper meaning than what we see on the surface here. Believeth means continues to believe in the face of all kinds of hardships. Jesus expresses Himself later in this book of John by saying, "I am the Way, the Truth, the Life". We have discussed how the breath of life within us was placed there by God. Believing has to do with being willing to be obedient to God. If we believe, then we will follow in the footsteps of Jesus. He is Truth, Happiness, Joy, Knowledge, Love, and a million other really good things. How could we be such a fool to turn down all of that by saying we do not believe. It is so simple to truly believe way down deep in our heart and then confess that belief to others. Adam and Eve were in the garden where the Tree of life was. The Tree of life (Jesus) was available to them. It was in the center of the garden. Had they eaten of the Tree of life (Jesus), they would have lived forever. They ate around the edge of the garden. They didn't take the trouble to go to the center of the garden. Christians (so called) stop nibbling at the edge of the garden. Make Jesus (the Tree of life) the center of your life and you, too, will acquire everlasting life.

**QUESTIONS**

1. What were Jesus and His men doing in the land of Judaea?
2. Did Jesus actually baptize?
3. Who was baptizing at Aenon?
4. Why did they choose that spot?
5. In verse 24, we know that what awaits John?
6. Jesus taught that the purifying that was necessary was what?
7. What is the difference between the law and Jesus' teaching?
8. What honorable name did John's disciples call him?
9. What slight exaggeration did John's disciple make?
10. What was John's mission God gave him?
11. Where are the orders given for anyone who is called to the ministry?
12. What did John remind his disciples of in verse 28?
13. Who is the bridegroom symbolic of in verse 29?
14. Who is the bridegroom's friend?
15. Why was John rejoicing that Jesus had the greater number of followers?
16. In verse 30, what does John say about himself and Jesus?
17. Which is more important, the message or the messenger?
18. Who is above all?
19. Why can Jesus tell so well about heavenly things?
20. What have those done who received Jesus' testimony?
21. Who gave all things into Jesus' hands?
22. How did John know that God the Father loved Jesus?
23. He that believeth on the Son hath \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
24. What abideth on him that believes not?
25. Where was the Tree of Life located in the garden of Eden?