

Stage III. The Early Judean Ministry

D. Jesus Continues to Make Disciples in Judea

2. John the Immerser's Final Witness About Jesus

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25 It happened that a dispute developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the issue of ceremonial washing. 26 They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan--the one you gave your conclusive testimony about--look, he keeps immersing, and everyone is going to him."

27 To this John replied, "A person can only have as much ministry as God has already determined for them in heaven. 28 You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Messiah, but am sent ahead of him.'

29 The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. This joy is mine, and it has now been made fully complete. 30 It is necessary that he constantly become greater; I must continue to decrease."

31 The one who comes from above is above all; a person who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. 32 He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one fully accepts his testimony. 33 Whoever has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. 34 For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for the Messiah gives the Spirit without limit.

35 The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. 36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not receive eternal life, for God's wrath remains on them.

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NOTE: We use superscript identification of the source gospel in "blended texts" as follows: Matthew = ^{MT}, Mark = ^M, Luke = ^L, John = ^J, Acts = ^A. This "superscript ID" is inserted at the beginning of the quoted text, identifying that Bible book until a different superscript appears. In addition, *the words of Jesus are italicized in red*. Old Testament quotations are CAPITALIZED.

	CONTEXT DIGEST
Location	Aenon, on the Jordan River
Timeline	July, 30 AD (Month Six)
Jesus' Life Context	Stage III: The Early Judean Ministry
	D. Jesus Continues to Make Disciples in Judea
Title	2. John the Immerser's Final Witness About Jesus

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COMMENT:

This is John the Immerser's final witness about recorded in Scripture. John had been preaching at this point for just over a year. Over the last six months he had been directing a non-stop flow of prepared seekers to Jesus. As these were added to the people that Jesus was evangelizing on his own initiative, the Lord's ministry was growing faster than John's. Little did John know that in a short time Herod Antipas would throw him in jail for continuing to insist that Herod's marriage to Herodias was adulterous before God.

We saw in the "Preparation" Stage of Jesus' life, that the synoptic gospels record the early content and manner of John's preaching ministry to the people. He called for repentance in preparation for believing in the soon-coming Messiah, and immersion in water for those who confessed their sins, as a symbol of their cleansing. We noted the primary characteristics of John's personality and ministry in the earlier readings.

This passage focuses on John's attitude toward himself, and toward Jesus at the end of his ministry time. Had the Immerser changed over time? Had the popularity and impact of his ministry influenced him? This text shows us that his most important attitude had not changed, but it had become deeper and stronger.

The best way to describe John's attitude toward himself was profound *humility* (3.25-30). The context of John's testimony was the disturbing comment of some of his disciples: "*Look! He (Jesus) is baptizing, and everyone is going over to him.*" (3.26) These words express a competitive, prideful attitude that compared results between ministries, and disappointment when Jesus' results were better than John's. John repudiated that kind of pride.

John's humility was rooted in the knowledge that his ministry was only as effective as God made it to be (3.27). It all depended on God—not him—therefore he could take no credit for his success. Furthermore, John was not the Messiah: his ministry was to point people to JESUS so that they would believe in HIM as their Messiah. Thus, John was filled with joy, not frustration, every time one of his own disciples went to Jesus and began to follow him, leaving John behind forever. This was success in John's thinking, not something to be disappointed about. This shows us John's deep humility.

John used the imagery of the friend of the bridegroom in a 1st century wedding in these verses. This reference to Jesus as the bridegroom implies that the church is his bride. This key element of Johannine theology ties Jesus' later parables of a wedding banquet (in the synoptic gospels) with the vision of the "marriage supper of the Lamb" in the book of Revelation. This rich imagery and meaningfulness of seeing Jesus as the bridegroom and the church as his bride in the New Testament goes back to John the Immerser.

John wanted Jesus to become everything to every person he pointed the Messiah's way, so his goal was to decrease his influence in the hearts and minds of everyone that left him to follow Jesus, until he became nothing. "*His influence must increase. Mine must decrease.*" This humble attitude toward himself and his own ministry is a great example for each of us.

Then, verses 31 to 36 describe John's humble attitude toward Jesus. John saw the utterly unique, Divine glory of Jesus. His attitude was pure humility before the transcendent greatness of God's only Son. Consider the way John described his Lord here:

First, the prophet echoed the earlier words of Jesus to Nicodemus (3.11-13) about the unique authority the Lord possessed as a witness to the things of heaven (3.31-33). Furthermore, Jesus' words imparted the Holy Spirit without limit (3.34). His Father loved him and shared all of the Divine fullness with His Son (3.35). Therefore, Jesus is the only source of eternal life, and rejection of him in unbelief results in eternal judgement (3.36).

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These were stupendous things to say about the greatness of Jesus, especially at this early point in Jesus' ministry. Such claims cannot be made for anyone other than Jesus Christ. The Immerser's final testimony about Jesus was the pinnacle of his ministry--some of the greatest things ever spoken about Jesus, with a totally Christ-exalting, humble heart. Contrast the Immerser's attitude here with the 12 apostles themselves, who will waste time arguing--several times-- about who was the greatest among them.

Thank God for the faithful, humble-hearted ministry of John. His preparation and support contributed greatly to the growth and effectiveness of the beginning of Jesus' ministry in this Early Judean period.

No wonder Jesus loved and appreciated John the Immerser!

APPLICATION:

John modeled the attitude of a true disciple, and witness about Jesus. "Ever more of Jesus; less of me." This was the Immerser's heart desire. This is humility.

Does John's attitude describe you accurately? Is it your passion for Jesus to be everything, and you to be nothing?

Is there something that rivals Jesus' importance in your life? If so, what practical steps will you take to change that today?