

**John 3:22-36**  
**John the Witness!**

**Preamble:**

**Prayer for illumination:** Please join me in prayer....

**Sermon introduction:**

In the 1967 film “The gospel Blimp,” George and Ethel are concerned about the salvation of their next-door neighbors, but don't know how to reach them with the good news of Jesus Christ. During an evening get-together with some of George and Ethel's Christian friends, everyone is captivated by the sight of a blimp flying overhead. Then one of them gets a bright idea: why not use a blimp to proclaim the Christian message to the unchurched citizens of Middletown? The group incorporates, buys a used blimp, hires a pilot, then commences to evangelize their hometown by towing Bible-verse banners, “firebombing” folks below with gospel tracts, and broadcasting Christian music and programs over loudspeakers.

As you can imagine, the gospel blimp strategy was not a very effective strategy of witnessing to the non-Christians of Middletown. Maybe you can relate? Many of us are painfully aware of the fact that our witnessing is not as effective as we hoped it would be.

This raises an important question; how can we be more effective at witnessing to others about Jesus Christ? This is one of the most important questions the Western church currently faces. Churches seem to be closing their doors left and right.

This brings us to the end of John chapter 3 and John the Baptist. John the Baptist is frequently described as a “witness” in John’s gospel. He is described as a witness so frequently that some argue that it is more appropriate to call him “John the Witness” instead of “John the Baptist.” The end of John 3 puts him forward as an effective witness for Christ. But the end of John 3 describes another witness who is even more effective.

Both witnesses help us in different ways. We are called to imitate the first witness and we are called to believe the second witness.

Two points this morning....

*Imitating John’s witness*  
*Believing Jesus’s witness*

**First, imitating John’s witness!**

*John was a very effective witness. Why?*

**John was a dependent witness!**

**John 3:22–27 (ESV) — 22** After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. **23** John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized **24** (for John had not yet been put in prison).

Until John's ministry was abruptly ended by the sword of Herod Antipas, his ministry overlapped with Christ's ministry. In fact, they ministered in the same region—only a few miles apart. Jesus and his disciples baptized in the Judean countryside and John and his disciples baptized near Salim.

**25** Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. **26** And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him."

We learn in verse 26, that John disciples are greatly distressed. Why? All of John's disciples are leaving John and going to Jesus. They see the need to point this out to John, so they do.

They say, "John, aren't you concerned? Your star is falling, and Jesus' star is rising."

Or...

"John, Jesus has more twitter followers than you."

"John, Jesus is selling way more books than you."

"John, all of our members are leaving our church, the First Baptist Church of Salim, and they are heading to Christ church of Judea, just down the road."

Don't forget that John was a very gifted preacher. All kinds of people from all over the region walked through the hot, dry, and dusty dessert for days just to hear him preach. He was the talk of the region. He was the first celebrity preacher. He knew fame and success.

How does John respond to his disciple's concerns/jealousy?

**27** John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven."

This is a remarkable attitude. John reminds his disciples that he is totally dependent on God for everything, including ministry success. He says, "a person can't receive anything unless it is from heaven (i.e., God)." John knew that his brief season of ministry success was not ultimately rooted in his gifting, his piety, or his personality—it was rooted in God sovereignty. He was totally dependent on God for ministry success.

### **Application:**

We too are totally dependent on God for ministry success (i.e., ministering to our kids, neighbors, and coworkers). We can't do anything apart from the grace of God. This mentality kept John very dependent on God.

I often wonder why some of the best preachers I know have small churches and some of the worst preachers I know have large churches. God is sovereign over ministry success.

Awareness of our dependence on God also keeps us from discouragement. I don't know about you, but I often get discouraged with my anemic attempts at witnessing. My witnessing is about as successful as the Seahawks offensive line. But we must remember that God controls the results. It does not ultimately depend on us. All we can do is be faithful to love, witness, and pray.

But this principle of dependence does not just apply to ministry success it applies to all success. Back to verse 27.

**27** John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven."

Paul says the same thing...

**1 Corinthians 4:7 (ESV) — 7** For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

In **John 15:5**, Jesus said, “**Apart from me you can do nothing!**”

But I worked really hard to build this business.

But I worked really hard to get good grades.

But I worked really hard to be a successful athlete.

But I took lots of risks.

But I did all the right things with my kids.

All those abilities, opportunities, and gifts came from God. Success is not earned; it is given by a gracious God.

When someone else is successful we attribute it to their “golden spoon,” their luck, their parents, or their amazing opportunities. But when we are successful, we attribute it to our intelligence, prowess, and hard work. But John is saying that all success, every good thing we have (everything) comes from God.

It is easy to be jealous when others experience success. But God is the one who gives the results. Isn't he? If you are struggling with jealousy over someone else's success, consider the words of William Law.

“It is impossible to harbor animosity and jealousy toward one for whom we are praying. If . . . someone is leaving you behind, and you are becoming jealous and embittered, keep praying that he may have success in the very matter where he is awakening your envy; and whether he is helped or not, one thing is sure, that your own soul will be cleansed and ennobled, and you will grow a little nearer to the stature of John the Baptist.”

(William Law)

*John was a dependent witness! In addition...*

**John was a joyful witness!**

**John 3:28–29 (ESV) — 28** You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’ **29** The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete.

John employ's a parable to communicate the joy he experiences in his specific role in redemptive history. He says that he plays the role of the best man (i.e., the friend of the bridegroom).

In the first century, the “friend of the bridegroom” (i.e., the best man) had a unique role to play at Jewish weddings. He acted as the liaison between the bride and the bridegroom; he arranged the wedding; he took out the invitations; he presided at the wedding feast. He brought the bride and the bridegroom together. And he had one special duty. It was his duty to guard the bridal chamber and to let no false lover in. He would only open the door when in the dark he heard the bridegroom's voice and recognized it. When he heard the bridegroom's voice, he was glad and he let him in, and he went away rejoicing, for his task was completed. (Hughes)

John was filled with tremendous joy when he was able to finally deliver the bride to the bride groom. In other words, he was filled with tremendous joy when he brought people to Jesus.

As a student of the OT, John knew that the bride was lost Israel, and the bridegroom was Jesus Christ (e.g., Is. 62:4-5; Je. 2:2; Ho. 2:16-20). Jesus is the perfect bridegroom who came from heaven to make a very unworthy bride, the church, his wife.

## **Application:**

John was an effective witness because he experienced tremendous joy in bringing people to Jesus, the ultimate bridegroom.

Have you ever experienced this joy? There is nothing quite like it!!! Once you experience this joy, you will want more of it.

Many people think that material possessions bring great joy.  
Others think that fame or career success brings great joy.  
Others think that perfect health or the perfect body bring great joy.  
Still others think acceptance by their peers brings great joy.

None of these joys compares to the joy of bringing someone to the bridegroom—Jesus Christ.

We often think of witnessing as something we must do, but we really don't want to do it. It is a duty more than a delight. But John reminds us that there is tremendous joy in telling people about Jesus.

God wants to help you experience this joy. Who can bring to Jesus Christ?

*John was a dependent witness!*  
*John was a joyful witness! In addition...*

## **John was a humble witness!**

**John 3:29–30 (ESV) — 29** The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. **30** He must increase, but I must decrease."

The words of verse 30 are staggering. They are staggering because they are so contrary to human nature. We all want to increase in the eyes of others. Don't we? We want everyone around us to think we are funny, nice, generous, good at our jobs, good parents, and good looking. We basically want people to think we are amazing. Don't we???

We have all met a "me monster." The "me monster" is that person who is constantly looking for ways to subtly or not so subtly draw attention to their accomplishments. We all have a little "me monsters" inside of us, don't we?

John the Baptist was the opposite. He wanted to decrease, so that Jesus Christ would increase. Here is the thing we must realize; we can't have it both ways. In other words, we can't increase if we want Christ to increase. Christ will only increase in our lives if we make a decision to decrease. And we decrease by asking God to help us grow in humility.

## **Illustration:**

William Carey had a passion to take the gospel to India. In 1793, he finally managed to scrape together enough resources to set sail.

When he and his wife finally arrived in India, Hindus tried to kill them.  
A little later, the East India company denied him access to the interior of India.  
Then, his five-year-old son died.

Then, his first wife totally lost her mind.

When she died, he remarried. Then his second wife died.

To make matters worse, William labored seven years before he saw a single convert.

After 20 years, all he had to show for his labors was a small handful of converts.

But he persevered through faith....

**By age 73, he had translated the Bible into 34 languages, founded India's first college, established 45 teaching centers, helped alleviate famine, and freed oppressed Indian women.**

Today he is known as the father of modern missions and there are over 25 million Christians in India, which is currently five times as many Christians as there are in England.

William Carey had a lot to boast in. No matter what career field God has called you to, it is easy to see that Carey had some serious missionary game!!! He wasn't a big deal, he was a huge deal!!!

Yet, as William Carey lay dying, he turned to a friend and said,

"When I am gone, don't talk about William Carey; talk about William Carey's Savior. I desire that Christ alone might be magnified." (Hughes)

### **Application:**

Is this our heart's desire???

Are we more eager to talk to people about our portfolio's, our companies, our positions, our athletic prowess, our intelligence, our children, our golf score, our hobbies, or Jesus Christ?

How do we decrease, so that Jesus will increase? It starts by talking more about Jesus than our own accomplishments.

*John was a dependent witness!*

*John was a joyful witness!*

*John was a humble witness!*

*None of us measure up to the witnessing standard of John the Baptist, do we? Yet there is another witness in our passage who brings hope. The next witness brought forward is not an example to be imitated, but as a savior to be believed.*

*This brings us to the second point.*

*First, Imitating John's witness!*

### **Second, believing Jesus's witness!**

*But why should we believe Jesus's witness? A few reasons...*

**Jesus was a truthful witness!**

**John 3:31–33 (ESV) — 31** He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all. **32** He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony.

John tells us that Jesus comes from above all. In other words, he comes from heaven. Furthermore, we are told that he is above all, which means that he rules over all. If he comes from heaven, and he rules over all, then he must be divine.

If he is divine, he surely speaks the truth.

Let's keep reading...

**John 3:33–34 (ESV) — 33** Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. **34** For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.

John is saying that whoever receives Jesus' testimony is affirming that God speaks truth. Furthermore, God the father gave Jesus the Holy Spirit without measure. Why? The OT prophets were filled with the Spirit to proclaim God's truth. Jesus was filled with the Spirit without measure because he is the final prophet. No one speaks truth like Jesus speaks truth.

There is no mixture of error and truth in Jesus's words. Jesus only speaks the truth because he had a divine nature and a human nature filled with the Spirit without measure.

#### **Illustration:**

When I worked for SF insurance, I had to figure out who was at fault in auto accidents. This meant that I had to routinely call eyewitnesses on the phone.

One eyewitness would say, "I swear I saw your client run a red light." The other witness would say, "I swear the person went through the light when it was green."

One witness said, "I swear I saw him turn on his blinker." The next witness said, "I swear he did not turn on his blinker."

It was so hard to know which witness was telling the truth. There always seemed to be a mixture of truth and error.

Not so with Jesus. He is the divine witness. He is the witness who has been given the spirit without measure. Therefore, he is a truthful witness. He can always be counted on to tell the truth.

#### **Application:**

Jesus is a truthful witness!

But, what did he say?

He said that he was the only way to God!

He said that he was the source of eternal life!

He said that he would provide rest for our weary souls!

He said that we must repent of our sins and trust him!

He said that he would come again someday to judge the world in righteousness!

The question is do we believe this witness? Do we really believe? Do we believe what we believe? If we really believe this truthful witness our lives will never ever be the same.

If I said to you, that this building was going to blow up in three minutes, what would you do? If you really believed me, you would run!!! True belief leads to action.

Believing what Jesus says, really believing it, will cause you to live a very different life and a very exciting life!

*Jesus is a truthful witness. But he is more...*

**Jesus is a saving witness!**

**John 3:35–36 (ESV) — 35** The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. **36** Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

Verse 36 says, “Whoever believes in the son has eternal life...”

This is amazing. John is saying that whoever believes in Jesus Christ has eternal life. What does it mean to believe in Jesus Christ? It is more than head knowledge. Expand...

But what is eternal life? Eternal life is both a present reality and future reality. Notice that John says, “whoever believes in the son *has* (present tense) eternal life.” This means that Christians start to experience eternal life, that is the life of the age to come, as soon as they believe.

One scholar writes,

“Pardon, peace, and a complete title to heaven, are an immediate possession. They are the believer’s own, from the very moment he puts faith in Christ.” (J.C. Ryle)

Verse 36 goes on to say, “Whoever does not obey the son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”

Notice that the wrath of God, like eternal life, is also a present reality. John writes, “the wrath of God remains on him.” The wrath of God is experienced whenever God allows non-Christians to experience the joy killing and life sucking consequences of sin. Furthermore, the wrath of God “remains” on people when God gives them over to their sinful desires by searing their consciences (This is described in Romans 1). This is the last thing you ever want to experience.

God is a God of wrath because he is a God of love. What do I mean? God hates sin because he loves his creation. When he sees his beautiful creation, which includes the human race, ruined by sin, he is angered. His anger is expressed in his righteous wrath.

**Application:**

John 3:36 makes it very clear that there can be no neutrality when it comes to Jesus. We either believe him with every fiber of our being or we don’t.

Those who believe Jesus, experience eternal life.

Those who don't believe Jesus, experience God's wrath.

The stakes are incredibly high!!!

Do you believe in Jesus this morning? You can't rely on the faith of your parents, friends, siblings, or private Christian school. You must personally believe in Jesus Christ.

**Conclusion:**

Our text contains two witnesses.

One must be imitated.

One must be believed.

When we fail to imitate the first one, believing in the second one brings forgiveness. let's pray...