

Date: September 30th, 2025

John Section: John 3:1-36

Key Text: John 3:16-17

Main Idea: Jesus Came to Save, Not Condemn

Genre: Theological Narrative

Author: John

Audience: Primarily second-generation believers, Jews, and Gentiles, needing encouragement and clarity about Jesus' identity.

Setting: Likely written from Ephesus, AD 85-95, in a context of synagogue opposition and emerging false teachings.

Quote of the Week: "He must increase, but I must decrease." - JTB

3:30

John Preview:

Highlight:

The Gospel of John is a unique New Testament account of Jesus' life, written by the Apostle John, the beloved disciple. John's Gospel is not merely a biography but a theological portrait, revealing Jesus as the eternal Son of God who became flesh to bring life and light to the world. Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, John emphasizes signs and discourses that unveil Jesus' divine identity and mission. From the opening words—"In the beginning was the Word"—to the climactic resurrection appearances, John presents Jesus as the one in whom God's glory is revealed, calling all to believe in Him for eternal life. This Gospel is rich with imagery (light, life, bread, water, shepherd, vine) and repeatedly centers on the theme of belief.

Focus of John:

- **Purpose of John:**
 - John tells us his purpose plainly: "But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:31).
 - **Themes in John:**
 - Jesus is the Word made flesh
 - Jesus reveals God's glory
 - Eternal life is found in Him alone
 - Belief is the way to life
 - Life flows only from union with Christ
 - **Our Response to this Truth:**
 - Believe in Him – Abide in Him – Live by His Word – Trust in His promises – Love as He loved
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Recap:

John 3:1:21: Son of Man Lifted Up

- As we move into verse 1 and following, we land in what is one of my favorite interactions in the New Testament. Jesus was fresh off one of His miracles, and His table-turning, and now He finds Himself interacting with one of the religious leaders after dark.
 - Nicodemus came to Jesus with a very different posture than most of the other religious leaders of his day. He came at night, and he addressed Jesus with respect by calling Him “Rabbi” and “teacher from God”, and Jesus responded with an incredibly important response. Nicodemus doesn’t even ask a question, yet Jesus, who knows what is in the hearts of men, addresses what needs to be addressed.
 - He says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”
 - Nicodemus, who has no idea what to say, other than what we would all be asking:
 - “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?”
- This really might be one of the most important questions ever asked in the history of mankind.
 - **Essentially, Nicodemus asks, how can someone be born again?** As he is thinking physically, Jesus is clearly speaking spiritually (for obvious reasons, that I don’t need to further explain).
- But Jesus replies to this logical question from Nicodemus and says,
 - “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. **6** That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. **7** Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ **8** The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”
- First off, there is a lot going on here. But I want us to focus here specifically on what Jesus has to say about being born again:
 - Verse 3 – “Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”
 - Verse 5 – “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”
 - **Ezekiel 36:25-27** → God promises to sprinkle clean water on His people, remove the heart of stone, and give a new heart and a new Spirit.
 - This echoes Jesus’ teaching: spiritual cleansing and transformation are the work of the Spirit.
 - **Ezekiel 37** → Valley of Dry Bones God brings life to the lifeless. The “Son of Man” breathes life into the dry bones so they may live and know the Lord.
 - This is a vivid Old Testament picture of what Jesus describes in John 3: the Spirit gives new birth to those who are spiritually dead, enabling them to enter the kingdom of God.
 - Verse 6 – “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”
 - Verse 8 – “The Spirit is like the wind... we can’t see it and we can’t control it.”
- I want us to see very clearly that Jesus is making the distinction between flesh and spirit here; he is pitting what is dead versus what is alive.

- Verse 3, before even diving into the conversation, Jesus “predicts” Nicodemus' response without even saying it. Knowing that Nicodemus isn't born again, Jesus knows he will fail to understand this teaching. So it is with any of us. Without the new birth, we simply cannot see or understand the kingdom of God.
 - If you're tracking that means “Regeneration”, the “New Birth” proceeds faith. This isn't like one day you are regenerated and then 3 weeks later you profess Christ, but more of a simultaneous: being born of the **Spirit** is what **enables** and **produces** our **faith** in God.
 - We can not understand the things of God, we cannot believe in God, unless we have been born of God. Likewise, in verse 5, we cannot enter the Kingdom of God unless we've been born of God.
 - Verse 6, the flesh can only produce flesh, but the Spirit is the one who gives life.
- Jesus is drawing the sharpest contrast here: **flesh is dead, Spirit is life**. As Romans 8:5-8 reminds us:
 - “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”
- Again, as we move into verse 9, we see this point is abundantly clear, as Nicodemus once again asks, “How can these things be?”
 - Jesus tells him, essentially, you of all people should know this. Nicodemus, being a teacher of the law, knows the scriptures like the back of His hand, and yet He missed who the scriptures have pointed to.
 - Jesus then proceeds further into teaching, using language of Daniel 7:13-14 (a connection Nicodemus should know), Jesus speaks of the Son of Man (Himself) being divine in authority, and therefore He can say something that would seem blasphemous to the Jewish audience.
- **What seemingly blasphemous connection is Jesus making in verses 14-15, and what might this be signifying (and also what event is He referring to)?**

- We then enter into the most well-known passage in all of scripture, and for good reason. John 3:16-17.
 - Here we see very clearly:
 - God's love for us is shown through His Son, Jesus, who died so that those who believe may have life.
- **What does he mean when He says, "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already?"**

John 3:22-36: He Must Increase

- We now move to the Judean countryside, near Aenon by Salim, where Jesus was spending time with His disciples, baptizing people.
 - We are given both the location and the cast of characters: on one side, Jesus and His disciples, and on the other, John and his disciples, each carrying out the work of baptism in their respective ministry contexts.
- This sets the stage for a discussion between an unnamed Jew and John's disciples, which is then followed by a conversation between the disciples and John himself.
 - "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him."
- **Why do you think there was a discussion, or even an argument, about Jesus and His disciples baptizing? What might have caused John's disciples to feel upset or concerned?**

- Instead of adding fuel to the fire, John shows a posture that will be consistent throughout his ministry.
 - Amidst his disciples' confusion and resentment, John reacts in the complete opposite way; he responds with humility.
 - Verses 27-28: "John answered, A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.'"
- John reminds his disciples in verse 27 that "a person can receive only what is given them from heaven."
 - His ministry, then, is a gift from God, not something earned or achieved. In the same way, salvation is entirely God's work, and John knows his role is simply to point people to Jesus. He recognizes Jesus' superiority (John 1:30), so rather than being threatened by Christ's growing ministry, he rejoices in it.
- John, in verse 29, describes his role with the image of a wedding:
 - "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."
- This is the context to set up our verse as a group... in light of John deferring His ministry to that of Christ's ministry, we too shall as well.
 - 'He must increase, but I must decrease.' - John 3:30
- **How do John the Baptist's words in verses 31-35 explain why Jesus must increase?**

- In these final verses, John lays out two clear responses to the testimony of Jesus: belief or rejection. After presenting a brief summary of who Jesus is, he makes it clear that we have a choice. We either hear this testimony of the Son of God and believe, or we reject it.
 - When people hear this message, they must either believe or reject Jesus. Belief brings life and transforms everything, while rejection leaves one under God's just wrath. John emphasizes this in John 20:31, he wrote so that we may believe in the Son of God and have life in His name.
- John understands the magnitude of this testimony.
 - **To reject Jesus is not merely to ignore a message; it is to remain under the same wrath that humanity has carried since Adam, a wrath from which no one is exempt. None of us is neutral.**
- The choice is stark: **we either receive Jesus' payment for our sins or attempt to pay the cost ourselves.** To try to pay it on our own is to remain under God's judgment, which, for mortal, broken human beings, is the most terrifying reality imaginable. The path of belief leads to eternal life and reconciliation with God. The path of rejection leads to the unrelenting weight of God's wrath.
 - John's point is urgent and clear: the stakes are eternal, and the response is personal.

Other Helpful Resources:

- He Must Increase Podcast by Connor Shady & Adam Tredeau (Official Podcast of 3:30!)
- Waukesha Bible Church John 3 Sermons (Find on YouTube)

Other Reminders:

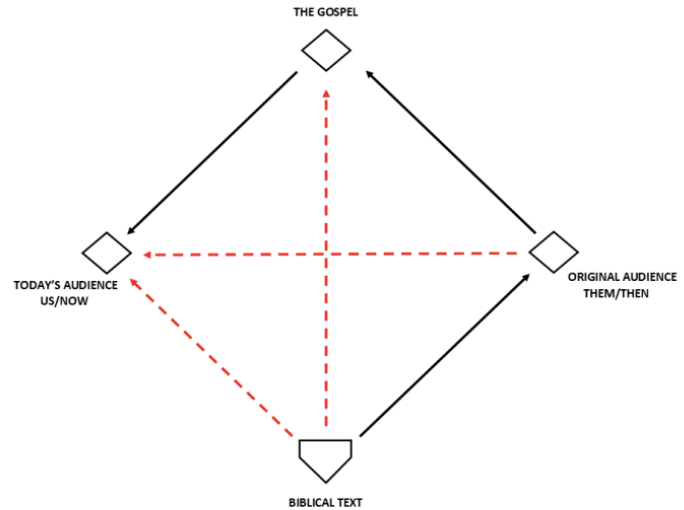
- Get involved with a church - **Specifically WBC!**
- Also check us out on Instagram: @three.thirty.ministries and @three.thirty.mens.ministry

Implication/Application:

- We must hold the same standard; we should want no part in anything that steals focus from Christ and puts it on man.
- If any ministry or group claiming His name promotes anything other than Jesus as the ultimate focus, it's best to step away. No pastor, teacher, or leader stands above Him.
- To make Christianity about anyone other than Christ strips it of its truth.
- If we are not humbled by the person and work of Christ, we have forgotten who He is.
- If we see Jesus as a coach with a game plan rather than the Savior who already won, we are lost.
- If salvation becomes about having our best life now instead of being rescued from God's judgment by His love, we've gone astray.
- The moment the Spirit is reduced to an outlet for our potential, we've missed the mark again.
 - **The moment that Christianity ceases to be about anything other than Christ, is the moment it ceases to be Christianity at all.**

ANOTHER WAY TO GO ABOUT THIS IDEA: THINK BASEBALL

- When preparing and studying scripture, our focus is to always stay true to the scripture.
- In order to best do this, we use a method called the Simeon Trust method, which simply lays out a process to faithfully discern the Bible.
- FIRST:
 - Understanding who the text was written to. (The Audience)
 - Understanding why the text was written. (The Purpose)
 - Understanding the structure, genre, context, emphasis, and melodic line of the text.
 - In a nutshell, the first step focuses on understanding what the text meant to its original audience.
- SECOND:
 - Once we have done this, we must filter it through the Gospel.
 - This means understanding when and why this text was written in reference to the cross. → Is it pointing to the coming of Christ (OT), is it pointing to Christ and what Christ has already done (NT), is the text speaking of law, is it speaking of the Gospel, etc?
- THIRD:
 - Once we've understood the text's original meaning/audience and have filtered it through the Gospel lens, we are able to determine what it means to us now. Without this process, the proper application of the Bible is essentially impossible.
- COMING HOME: Once we understand the appropriate application of the text, our legwork essentially stops, and we become fully reliant on the Holy Spirit to work in us.



The Gospel: *We Can't, God Can, Jesus Did!*

- **Sin.** None of us can escape it. Because of it, we are spiritually dead and in need of life. Our debt before God is insurmountable. It is the biggest problem any of us has, since there is nothing we can do ourselves to pay that debt. God's standard is perfection, so no amount of good works or religious activities is enough.
 - 1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience - 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (Ephesians 2:1-3)
- **But God...** These two words are some of the most powerful words in the Bible. God is merciful and loving. He did what we could never do in and of ourselves. He saved us by grace alone and gave us new life in Christ.
 - 4 **But God**, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved - 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4-7)
- **Jesus saves.** He is God's gift to us. He paid our debt before the Father. And through his death and resurrection, we are raised to eternal life. There is nothing we can do to earn it. It is only through Christ that we live a life pleasing to God.
 - 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. **2** This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." **3** Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." **4** Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" **5** Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. **6** That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. **7** Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' **8** The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." **9** Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" **10** Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? **11** Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. **12** If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? **13** No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. **14** And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, **15** that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." **16** "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. **17** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. **18** Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. **19** And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. **20** For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. **21** But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God." **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). **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." **27** John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. **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. **30** He must increase, but I must decrease." **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. **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. **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.

