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WE PRAISE WHAT WE LOVE (John 3:22-36)

THE POTENTIAL CONFLICT

*John 3:22-26 —After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing. John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and people were coming and were being baptized—for John had not yet been thrown into prison. Therefore there arose a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purification. And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, **He is baptizing and all are coming to Him.**"*

Power. We all feel we need it. Our world tells us we must be self-determining, self-defining, self-guided people to truly be free and happy. John the Baptist was presented with a classic case of a potential power struggle. Jesus, the One to whom he had been introducing others through his ministry, had a competing baptizing ministry operating within eye shot of John and his disciples.

What an opportunity for jealousy. You and I face multiple chances to get caught up in jealousy each day. In the capitol community, stop and think of how often this ugly viewpoint manifests itself. In politics, getting credit equals significance and increased influence. When ideas or alliances are stolen for political expediency, how will you respond?

THE JEALOUS ARE TROUBLESOME TO OTHERS, BUT A
TORMENT TO THEMSELVES.

WILLIAM PENN

Envy eats away at our hearts and destroys relationships. John the Baptist knew his followers' eyes were on him and he had a crucial moment in which to teach them. With his next statements, he could foment envy or shift the focus away from himself.

THE PRAISE OF CHRIST

*John 3:27-31—John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven. You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent ahead of Him.' He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice so this joy of mine has been made full. **He must increase, but I must decrease. He who comes from above is above all, he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all.***

What a remarkable worldview. This wasn't John the Baptist's attitude in this situation only. You can see in his response that this is the way he thinks. All he does flows from this obedient, submissive lifestyle. How did he get this worldview?

I would suggest he learned it in his home. Remember his father, Zechariah? The angel Gabriel came to this priest who was serving in the temple and announced that he and his wife, Elizabeth, would have a son. Zechariah, who was old with a barren wife, questioned the angel. Because of his unbelief, his ability to speak was taken away until his baby was born. When that day came, Zechariah spoke and blessed God for His plan.

His words are often referred to as "The Benedictus" (since he begins with the word "blessed"), or Song of Zechariah, and are recorded in Luke 1:68-79. What does this father say on the day of his son's birth? First, he praises God for **His** Son who would be born later (Mary, Elizabeth's cousin, was already pregnant), then prophesizes about John's ministry and significance.

As John the Baptist grew up in this home, surely he was immersed in Zechariah's priority of seeing Jesus as the Redeemer, the Supreme One sent to reconcile man to God. This view guided John through his entire life. For him to say of Jesus, "He must increase, but I must decrease" was as natural as breathing in and out. He praised what he held in the highest esteem.

I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise... The world rings with praise – lovers praising their mistresses, readers their favorite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favorite game... My whole, more general difficulty about the praise of God depended on my absurdly denying to us, as regards the supremely Valuable, what we delight to do, what indeed we can't help doing, about everything else we value. I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation.
C. S. Lewis, Reflections on the Psalms

John the Baptist clearly says that he is a friend of the bridegroom, not the center of attention on the wedding day. His joy is complete when the groom is heard and praised. Any follower of Jesus will rejoice in the same thing and will not try to take His place as the One to be obeyed and praised.

THE PERSONAL CHOICE

*John 3:32-36—What He has seen and heard, of that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. He who has received His testimony has set his seal to this, that God is true. For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand. **He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.**"*

This choice is presented over and over in the book of John – acceptance or rejection of Jesus, the Son of God. Here, John the Baptist lays the same choice before his

hearers. Christ clearly is said to be from God, speaking the words of God. We saw this same dichotomy in chapter one:

*John 1:10-12— He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and **His own people did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.***

The consequences of these two choices are also plainly seen – life or wrath. God's grace is much easier to believe than His judgment of unrepentant sin, yet both are taught in Scripture and both should be included in our understanding of the gospel.

"Everlasting life" does not simply mean eternity in heaven. The believer possesses that life right now! It is the life of God in the believer. The opposite of eternal life is eternal death, the wrath of God. A person does not have to die and go to hell to be under the wrath of God. "He that believeth not is condemned already" (John 3:18). The verdict has already been given, but the sentence has not yet been executed. Why? Because God is patient and long-suffering, and continues to call sinners to repentance
W. Wiersbe, Bible Exposition Commentary

The choice is ours. What will we love? Our own person? Pleasure? Power? People? Prestige? Jesus? Our answer to that question will determine what we praise and what gives us satisfaction. Choose your treasure wisely in this world. Your destination in the next world depends on it.

BIBLE STUDY

Legislators and Staff (During Session)
Thursdays, 8:00 a.m.
Room 153, House Office Building