

“The transition from John the Baptist’s ministry to that of Jesus symbolized the transition from the old covenant to the new. John the Baptist was the last prophet under the old covenant; Jesus came as the mediator of the new covenant. The new covenant is something brand-new & completely different.”

In these verses, we see the last appearance of John the Baptist as a witness to Jesus (this was before John’s arrest and imprisonment and death). John was famous throughout the land. Yet his testimony regarding Jesus was rejected, especially by the leaders of Israel. What is your response when you hear first-hand testimony of Jesus: who He is, what He’s done and said?

Read 3:22-30. :22 After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, & there He was spending time with them & baptizing (Jn. 4:2 says it was actually Jesus’ disciples who were doing the baptizing). The water points to the need of repentance and spiritual cleansing (see Ezek. 36:25-27).

:23-24 John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and *people* were coming and were being baptized—:24 for John had not yet been thrown into prison. In Matthew/Mark/Luke, Jesus began His public ministry in Galilee when John went to prison. Therefore **1:35-4:54** (the first year of Jesus’ public ministry) took place earlier.

:23 Centrally located, within easy reach for people of 4 provinces (Judea, Perea, Samaria, Galilee). Both the Baptist and Jesus’ disciples were baptizing.

:24 John the Baptist always declared God’s truth. So when Herod Antipas seduced Herod Philip’s wife (Herodias) and lured her away from his step-brother, the Baptist spoke up, **“It’s not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife!” (Mk. 6:17-29)**. “Herod was the name of the ruling dynasty in Jewish Palestine during the time of Roman domination (Herod the Great 47-4 B.C.; Herod Antipas 4 B.C. to A.D. 39).” Herodias was Antipas’ niece and also his sister-in-law. Because John preached against their sin, he was arrested, jailed, and finally beheaded. But in **3:23-30**, he hadn’t been arrested yet.

Read :25-30. :25-26 Therefore there arose a discussion on the part of John’s disciples with a Jew about purification. :26 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.”

:25-26 It was a question about purifying by the disciples of John. If both Jesus and John were baptizing, whose baptism was valid, the real thing? Troubled by their master’s waning popularity, John’s disciples also missed the purpose of John’s ministry! They saw John and Jesus as rivals, competitors. And Jesus was apparently being more successful than the Baptist! “Rabbi, look what your testimony concerning Jesus is doing! All are going to Him.”

:27-30 John answered & said, “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven. :28 You yourselves are my witnesses (lit. testify for me) that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent ahead of Him’. :29 He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands & hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. So this joy of mine has been made full. :30 He must increase but I must decrease.”

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:27 We must realize whatever anyone has, he/she has been given those things by God. Paul asks the Corinthians, “**What do you have that you didn’t receive (1 Cor. 4:7)?**” John had been given a certain role, but it was not the role of the Jewish Christ. That belonged to Jesus alone. John understood this so there was no reason for envy/competition/pride/false humility.

What is your spiritual gift-mix? How are you using those Spirit-given gifts? What is your heart for ministry? How are you carrying out your Jesus-given role? In what ways is it obvious that you are trusting the Father with the results and the strengthening as you are carrying out your role? John the Baptist carried out his role perfectly! Can the same be said of you?

:28 “I am a witness for the Christ; you are my witnesses of my message about the Christ. I am not the Christ, but, I’ve been sent ahead of Him.” John witnessed about the Light: “He existed before me. He has a higher rank than I. I’m just a voice crying, ‘Make straight the way of the LORD’! I’m not worthy to untie His sandal. Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is the One who will baptize in the Holy Spirit. I have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God!” (**1:6-8,15,19-23,25-27,29-36**).

John saw Jesus’ increasing popularity as the fulfillment of his ministry.

:29 John knew there was a difference between the voice and the Word, the friend of the bridegroom and the Bridegroom Himself. In the OT we have Israel pictured as the bride of God and God as the bridegroom (**Is. 54:5, Hos. 3:19-20**). Also see the Marriage Supper of the Lamb in **Rev. 19:7-9**. “I’m not the Christ nor am I the Bridegroom. I’m just here to point to and help the Bridegroom.” Best men don’t try to steal the show from the groom! “Jesus is my message; He can do for you what I could never do. I rejoice with great joy.” John’s joy was to hear of Jesus’ success.

Notice the difference between the Bridegroom and the best man. There’s only one Bridegroom. Jesus is not one among many other religious leaders. He, & He alone, is the true Husband. The measure of success for any ministry is not how many people follow the minister, but how many people follow Jesus through the message of the minister. John’s ministry was a success!

:30 “Why should crowds continue to follow my voice, the best man, the forerunner, after my task has been accomplished? He must increase, not me.” See **Rom. 12:3**.

As we see in the other Gospels, soon God removed John from his ministry. The Baptist had prepared the way for Jesus. He had one year of ministry, and then God took him home! John **must**: it was God’s will for John to give way to Jesus. John was the last of the OT prophets. He was sent, not as the Christ, but to prepare the way for Him. Jesus said of the Baptist in **Mt. 11:11**: “**Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.**” What an impact John’s testimony/witness had. He is a great example to believers, that we should seek Jesus’ glory rather than our own. Well done, John! Are we speaking God’s truth and testifying about Jesus?

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Read :31-36. :31 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. Whether the Baptist or the apostle John is speaking in **:31-36**, his role is to point people to the One from above who is above all! This is the same radical distinction between ‘from above’ and ‘from the earth’ (or flesh) which Jesus dealt with when talking with Nicodemus. Since Jesus has come from the Father, obviously He’s above all. “Listen to Him” (**read Mk. 9:7**).

:32 What He [Jesus] has seen and heard, of that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. As the Man totally dependent on His Father, Jesus can tell us what He has seen and heard. The fact that Jesus is the Word become flesh means He can state the mind and thoughts and purpose of the God-head! Jesus is the ultimate testimony, and yet as we saw in **1:9-11**, the majority of people did not know Him or receive Him. If we want information about God, we get it from the Son of God, whose name is Jesus! And since Jesus reveals to us the mind of God, His words should “set a boundary on our mental excursions!” Jesus spoke of what He had seen and heard; He spoke from observation and experience, not from speculation. His words are eternal facts.

If you’re of the earth, as John the Baptist, speak what you’ve been given; do what the One from heaven has given you to do. Receive His testimony, then testify of the One who is from above. Be like a best man!

:33 He who has received His testimony has set his seal to *this*, that God is true. Who will you receive? What testimony will you believe? Be careful who you follow, who you choose to believe, who you choose to receive. If you reject Jesus’ testimony about the Father, you are calling God Himself untrue, that God doesn’t line up with fact, reality! Those who profess to believe in God yet reject Jesus are deceived! Those who have received Jesus’ testimony have set their seal to this fact: GOD is true! By receiving His testimony, we’ve stamped with approval, like with a signet ring, that God is true, real, the One we receive.

:34-36 For He [Jesus] whom God [the Father] has sent speaks the words (rhēma) of God; for He [the Father] gives the Spirit without measure (lit. because He does not give the Spirit by measure).

:34 The Word whom the Father has sent speaks the words of God. Because He’s sent by the Father, whatever He says, He’s speaking the mind/thoughts of the Father. Let everyone believe in and receive (**1:12-13**) the Son of God, who speaks the words of God. His words are confirmed by the witness of the Spirit, the One who was given in His fullness, with no limits.

If human nature as it is cannot receive the testimony, how can there be those who receive it? Only by the work of the Spirit (**read 16:8-11**). The Spirit dwelt in Jesus fully and without limit. Jesus infallibly spoke the words of God because God gave the Spirit to Him without measure. We can believe what Jesus says, because He’s seen and heard God and because on Jesus the Father poured out the Spirit in full measure. First, the Spirit revealed God’s truth to mankind. Second, the Spirit enabled them to recognize and understand that truth when He came to them; He’s the Spirit of truth.

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:35 The Father loves (agapē) the Son and has given all things into His hand.

The Son is agapē loved by the Father, and He's been given supreme authority. Accept Him by faith! The loved Son was sent; the Holy Spirit was given; the Son spoke God's words. He has all authority (see **Mt. 28:18**). A love which is without limits. Newbigin: "If we turn our backs upon universal life and love, where shall we go but into death? If we turn our backs upon light, where shall we go but into darkness?" We could add: If we turn our backs upon truth, where shall we go but into error and falsehood.

:36a He who believes in the Son has [present active] eternal life..." There are only two choices available to lost sinners. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. Eternal life becomes a personal, present possession as soon as one believes. Eternal life is best explained in **Jn. 17:3**: "**This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, & Jesus Christ whom You have sent.**"

:36b He who does not obey/believe/is not persuaded, will not see life, but the wrath of God abides [present active] on him. If when you hear God's truth (notice, you do hear it, like in **Mk. 4:14,15,16,18,20**), you don't receive it—you don't believe it, you aren't persuaded by it but reject God's truth—you won't see/experience Life. Instead the wrath of God abides on you! The wrath of God is His settled displeasure against sin. **See Rom. 1:18**: His continuing wrath on a person because he/she has heard God's truth but suppressed it. Judgment/perishing is the present condition of unbelievers (**3:16-21**). A warning to unbelievers, that they repent and follow Jesus. Jesus alone is able to save sinful men from the consequences of their disobedience, their unbelief, their not being persuaded by the Word.

What will you do with Jesus, the Bread of Life, the Light of the world, the Door of the sheepfold, the Good Shepherd, the Resurrection and the Life, the Way, the Truth, the Life, the true Vine? Are you persuaded by the Baptist's witness and this Lord Jesus who not only speaks the words of God but is the Word of God? What impact does this passage have on your daily walk with Jesus?

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