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JOHN 3:22-36

John Series: Get a Life in Jesus

[PRAYER] Lord, we ask that you would do miracles in our hearts now as we open your word and look at it and we read it. I pray that you do what you do regularly, and that is touch us. Lord, I ask that you would touch us all in the way that we need to be touched today. Move us to the next level in our personal growth, development. Encourage us, convict us in our hearts about sin that needs to be addressed, each person's here and you know what's going on in their hearts. I just ask that you would use your word now to speak in a powerful way. So we open it now and ask for your grace. Father, we do remember those who are under pressure right now with the hurricane. Pray for the mission groups that are forming now to help with the flood victims. Pray for the churches that are down there reaching out to other people, that you'd bless them. Lord, we pray that your grace would reign, that your love would be shown to many, and that through this experience people would come to know you. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

In our study right now, we're going through the book of John. If you're just new to the faith, as I know some of you are, I'd encourage you to just read through the whole book of John. You can read it a little bit at a time, but it's a great story and it has personal application for your life that's really valuable.

It's written by John the apostle. So we're going to call him John A today, John the apostle. But he's writing in our story today about another guy who's John the Baptist. We'll call him John B. So we've got John A and John B. Don't get them confused now. Okay? I'm going to say that again so you've got it in your mind. John A is the apostle who is writing the whole book. But he's writing about John the Baptist. This great little parenthesis in the middle of the story now he comes to and there's a tremendous lesson learned about John the Baptist that John the apostle has chosen to put in his writing for us to read and understand.

We're going to learn today about success. Last week we learned about failure. It's kind of interesting. If you were here last week, we talked about self-condemnation, we talked about fear of being exposed, we talked about the challenges that happen when you make mistakes. How do you handle those? That was last week's sermon. You can hear it online if you want or watch it via Facebook Live, thanks to Paulette. Today though we're going to talk about success and we're going to see what does that look like? We're going to try to understand that in some personal ways.

So in order to do that, stand with me, would you, and we're going to read a passage of scripture from John 3. Our whole study now is about "Get a Life." That's really what it is. So we all need to get a life in Jesus Christ.

Two weeks ago we talked about Nicodemus and this new life and calvarychapel.com asked me to write an article for them. So I did. Calvarychapel.com is a place where all the 1500 Calvary Chapels come together. So I wrote this article that appeared yesterday: “Why Complaining is Self-Inflicting.” And I used this story about Nicodemus further down in the article to further help us understand that. So you can check that article online if you’d like. Calvarychapel.com. It’s not our website; it’s the master website for Calvary Chapel.

Today we’re going to look at John 3:26-30. This is the middle portion of our passage today, but I want to zero in on this. Get these words that they said.

They came to John (this is John the Baptist) and said to him, “Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about (that’s Jesus Christ)—look, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him.”

To this John replied, “A person can receive only what is given them from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, ‘I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him.’ 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. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less.”

Those are the words of John the Baptist recorded by John the Apostle. You may be seated. Let’s look at those a little bit more.

But this, as I said, is the middle part of our passage today. In order to get a grasp of what John the Baptist is saying here, we have to get the bigger picture. So I’m going to take you into the context by looking at the verses before and the verses after. Let’s look at the verses before because they’re going to take us back to verse 22. This is where we left off last week. So we’ll pick it up at 22.

It starts this way: *After this*. Let’s stop right here because some of you weren’t here last week. Jesus is in Jerusalem for the Passover and during that time He talked to Nicodemus. That’s where we’ve been talking about Nicodemus and John 3:16, that famous Bible verse, was all part of a dialogue going on before this.

So now John A is writing – *After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized.*

I really love the geography because it helps tell the story a little bit. So let me give you some indication of the map of what’s going on. This is a map of Israel, a map of the Holy Land, especially toward the center of it. And you see Judea in the middle of it. If you were to draw lines across between Judea and Samaria, you’d have a line. The line going up and down is the Jordan River, a body of water that separates this side from the other side. Now this is kind of a relief map, so you can see it’s very mountainous or hilly. Probably the word mountainous is an exaggeration. It’s very hilly. It’s over 2500 feet up there by Jerusalem itself. You can see where

Jerusalem is. Bethlehem is down there. Those are cities that you are familiar with. Jericho is down there as you're getting down. But when I say down, it's down toward the water.

So in order to get an idea of what we mean when he says going to the Judean countryside, this is a picture of the Judean countryside. Notice it's after the rain. If it hadn't rained before this picture, it would be brown, which it is most of the time. But the water then goes into these little passageways called wadis. Wadis are little rivers and they go flowing down these rivers down toward the Jordan River. That's kind of the setting of where we are. They're going down where the water is because they're baptizing people down there.

Here's another map that takes us to the actual place. See the Sea of Galilee at the top? The Jordan River is flowing this windy river down to the lowest place on earth down below our map, the Dead Sea. So it's winding all the way down here, and right toward the middle here you can see where the water would run off down into these places. So there was water there. You're going to hear those names Salim and Aenon in our story today. I just want you to recognize that they're there. That's the geography where it says – *they went out into the Judean countryside*.

What were they doing there? It tells us. *He spent some time with them, and baptized*. I just was captivated by those words this week. *He spent some time with them*. I wonder what that looked like? Can you imagine just hanging out with Jesus? He spent some time with them. As I pondered that this week, I realized that time is a tool. It's a tool for building relationship. When we build relationship, it is how values are passed on to other people. *He spent time with them*.

I teach parents to work with their children and often I'm telling parents just hang out with your kids. No agenda. Just sit there and dialogue with them. Sometimes I say to parents when you get in the van tell everybody no electronics. That's hard sometimes for young people. One mom said it this way: "You know, this is what I do. I say, 'Okay electronics off,' and the first thing I get is bad attitudes. I don't give in. I just say, 'You need to turn those electronics off.' For the first five minutes people are kind of grumbling or whatever, and I'm just quiet. And then we're waiting. And pretty soon someone makes a comment about something they see out the window or asks me a question about something going on and then I know that the dialogue is starting to happen."

It's in the midst of that dialogue that values get passed. Not every time. Not every time we get together with our kids do we have a moral we want to tell them. But it's when we hang out with them that we're able to pass on the convictions, able to share the values. We have to hang out with them. That's what He is doing here. He's hanging out with them and values are being passed on. It's fun to think about how God uses time like this for passing on values.

In Deuteronomy 6 there's what I think is just a beautiful story of how God passes on the law. You know the Ten Commandments and all the rules and these different things about how we're going to operate as the Jewish people. He says then to the people, "*You need to impress these upon your hearts,*" and then He starts talking about the next generation. "*And teach them to your children as you walk along the way.*" As you get up, as you lie down, as you sit. Sometimes we just have to sit and do nothing. When we're doing nothing, relationships start to take place. It's through relationship then that these laws, these convictions are passed on to the next generation.

I just want to encourage you, spend time. If you've got kids, just spend time doing nothing. I'm a to-do list kind of person. I'm always on an agenda, but when I can just sit and spend time with someone, that's when relationship is built.

The other thing I was thinking is notice who they spend time with. They spend time with Jesus. If you want to get the values of Jesus, the convictions into your own heart, what are you going to do? You're going to spend time with Jesus. I know sometimes when we go to the Bible we have an agenda and the agenda goes something like this: "Oh I've got to figure out what the Bible has to say about money or about my body or about sex or about something. What does the Bible say about those things?" That's okay. We can use the Bible with an agenda to go find... But sometimes we need to just hang out with God.

We just need to hang out with Jesus and say, "Jesus, what do you want to teach me?" We start reading through the gospel of John and we come to a passage like this that I spent time this week, the Lord just used in my own heart to ponder time. How do I spend my time? Just spending time with people is a way that values and convictions are passed. So I parked there for just a moment because that was what was meaningful to me this week as I studied this passage. But notice what are they doing? They spend time with him, and baptized.

Baptism is a special ceremony celebrating the fact that you've come to Jesus. If you're a Christian and you haven't been baptized yet, you want to get baptized. You might say, "Well, I don't know if I'd want to do that. I don't really understand baptism. It doesn't really make sense to me." Look. We don't have to understand it in order to do it. If you say to yourself, "Oh I have to understand what the Bible says, it has to make sense, I have to agree with it before I obey it," you end up with a problem. That's putting scripture down here. What we do is we put scripture up here. It's the authority of God's word. So when God says it, you do it. If you haven't been baptized, you want to get baptized. Why? Just because that's what God says to do.

Now I was looking at baptism pictures this week just to get one for you to see. This is somebody getting baptized in the Jordan River. There's a place there in Israel where people often go there and "I haven't been baptized. I want to get baptized in the same river where Jesus was baptized, in the Jordan River." So this is an example of a gentleman who got baptized, someone who has accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.

So I encourage you, if you haven't been baptized. You're wondering well where do we baptize people? I'll just tell you how it happens here. We set up this jacuzzi in the back there. We all stand up and go around it and we baptize a person there. So if you haven't been baptized, talk to me. We'll set it up and we'll make it happen. We'd love to have you experience that idea of baptism.

Well let's go back to our passage here. We're now at verse 23. *Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were coming and being baptized. (This was before John was put in prison.) An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing.*

I just want to pause for a moment. I already told you that one way that values are passed on is through time. I just want you to know another way that values are passed on is through arguments. I'm not suggesting you go get into one, but when disagreements happen in our lives, it's an opportunity for us to share values. Now we have that happening here. A Jew comes to John's disciples and he has these questions. He doesn't understand.

If you were with us a few weeks ago, you remember when Jesus turned water into wine there were these six stone water pots that were dedicated to ceremonial washing. So people would go by, whether it was at a house or they were at the temple area or they were at the synagogue, they would go and they would dip their hands in and they would wash them ceremonially. "I just want to be a clean person," is what they're saying.

And so this Jew is coming to John's disciples and saying, "What is this? I don't get this thing you're doing. I don't see how that fits into our religious practices." So there was this dialogue going about that and an opportunity for John's disciples to share that what we're doing here is something new. This is a baptism of repentance that you're identifying with this movement called the way or Christianity (at the time it wasn't called Christianity, but that's what we know of it now). It's just this new movement of repentance that's taking place. You want to get baptized.

So this guy is arguing with them trying to understand it. Out of that discussion then John's disciples are going to go back to John. When they go back to John, notice what happens. Now we're into our passage that we read just a moment ago. *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 testified about (that's Jesus)—look, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him."*

Now we have the crux of what I think is such a practical application from this passage. It has to do with success or lack of it. It has to do with notice what he's doing. These disciples are comparing this other guy that they don't know real well yet. "But he's baptizing more people than...more people are going over to him. Is this a concern? How are you going to respond to this, boss?" the disciples are saying to John the Baptist.

This is a challenge that we face sometimes. Someone else gets a promotion and you go, "Man, how come that guy got a promotion and I didn't get a promotion?" That person gets a job, that person gets a nice car. You're going, "Man, I wish I could have a nice car." That person has different health challenges than you. "Man, I wish I had their health challenges and not mine." And we start comparing ourselves to someone else. It's especially true if you're really getting engrossed into Facebook because Facebook is always about putting your best foot forward. We don't get to hear people's problems on Facebook. We only get to hear their best. And you're going, "Man, I wish I had life like that person. Well that's cool. I wish I could do that." So there's this comparison that we often make that forms our identity.

Many people form their identity through comparison. It's a dangerous thing. It's in the midst of that that even spiritually we make that mistake. This person says, "The Lord answered my prayer and this is what happened," and you're going, "Wow. God didn't answer my prayer. I'm suffering through some trials here and I wish God would rescue me from this." So we find

ourselves in this mode that I think is challenging. It's either our own success or we see someone else's success and we're looking at that.

John's going to respond to it. Let's see what John says because I believe that as we look at John's answers, we get some insight about how we can handle that. So the challenge with comparing ourselves to someone else like this, you're either going to feel superior "I'm better than this person" or you're going to feel inferior, "Oh I'm not as good as this person" and bad things start to happen. Let's see what John has to say as he's responding to them.

Notice it says in verse 27 – *To this John replied, "A person can receive only what is given them from heaven."* Success principle number one. That is if we're going to look at another person's success, we have to realize that what we've been given is God's grace to us. You can't compare your grace to someone else. God's given you a particular kind of grace. He's given me grace. A person can only receive what he's given from heaven. God is the one who gives those gifts. God is the one who makes us grateful people. If we can become more grateful then we'll be able to overcome this jealousy when we look at someone else and we wish we had what they had.

But now what we're doing is we're looking at God's grace and we're saying thank you for what we have. If you're having a tendency to look at what other people have and go, "Boy, I wish I had what they had," you're looking at their success, then I think one of the keys is gratefulness. God has given me certain things.

Now if you look at the success that's experienced in this passage, it's not like somebody has a different kind of success of a different category. It's in the same category. What I mean by that, this other guy (Jesus) is baptizing more people than John. It's the same category. It's like being on the same job, you're working on a team, and someone gets promoted out of there, someone gets some kind of praise or reward or some award for that. You're going, "Wait a minute. I did a lot of the work on this! How come..." It's that kind of an experience. It's the same category.

Now it says that Jesus was baptizing, but if you look at chapter 4:2 (that's the very next chapter) it says that Jesus wasn't actually the one doing the baptizing. It was His disciples doing the baptizing. But it was all under the authority of Jesus Christ, which is the same for any of us who baptize today. We do it under the authority of Jesus Christ that we come and we baptize other people.

A person can receive only what is given them from heaven. We have to look at what we have and be grateful for what we have instead of looking at others and saying, "I wish I had the success that they had," or "oh no, they're getting ahead of me in such and such." We need to look at what God has given to us and be grateful because it's come from heaven what we have now. That is the first thing I would suggest is a success principle, other people's success, that we need to keep in mind as we're looking at this passage.

The second one comes in verse 28. He says – *"You yourselves can test that I said, 'I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him.'"* John knew his identity. He knew what his job was. He was sent ahead to point to Jesus Christ. I like that statement. He says, *"I am not the Messiah."* I need that. I don't know about you, I mean some of you are like me. I'm a problem solver. I like to

rescue people. I particularly like to work in the area of relationships and help people with their relationships, help young people be successful. I always have a to-do list. It's on my phone right now. Many of those things have to do with other people and I'm going to fix them and I'm going to solve them. I can sometimes view myself as the Messiah or get a Messiah complex because I'm going to rescue, I'm going to solve this problem, and I can become self-focused, that it's all about me. It's not about me. I am not the Messiah.

John has such a clear picture of this it's admirable. He comes into this and he says, "Okay, *I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him.*" He knew his identity and he knew he wasn't God. That's a real important revelation for any of us to know that we're not God.

I know that may sound really harsh of a statement, but some of us are really into control, aren't we? If you're a controlling person that means you like to have everything in order and pretty soon it kind of looks like you're being the Messiah. It looks like you're trying to be God in your life. Something really important happens in our lives when we recognize that we must hold things loosely. God is the one who's in control. He's the Messiah. We're the ones just pointing to Him. We're looking for opportunities to fulfill what He wants. That we can't be the Messiah. John knew that. What a great statement that he's able to make that help us deal especially with success of other people as we look at those. He says – "*I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him.*"

Now he's going to give us a story, an illustration. We call these windows when we're preaching a sermon. We say here is windows into the material that we're teaching because windows are illustrations that help people experience that and it comes to life. That's going to happen to you now when we look at John's window that he's sharing here with his disciples. It's a window about a wedding.

He says in verse 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. That joy is mine, and it is now complete.*"

In our modern day, the person in the limelight at the wedding is the bride. It's all about the bride. In the early century here, where we are, the featured person is the bridegroom. We're waiting for the bridegroom to arrive is the idea. So John is going to use this example as he's explaining to his disciples about this idea that Jesus is baptizing more people than he is. Some of my people are going over there and that kind of thing. Now he's looking at this and he's saying I'm not the bridegroom. I'm just the friend of the bride. I'm like the best man is what he's saying. The best man's job isn't to get the bride. The best man's job is to be delighted with the bridegroom. So that's why he says – *the friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice.*

This is another example of who's in the limelight. You see if we have a problem with other people's success, then what is that we want? We want to be in the limelight. We want to get the glory that we deserve. After all, we did this and we did that and we deserve more than we're getting. Frankly, life is unfair and I should be getting more than I'm getting. And really if I can step back and realize it's not all about me. I need to realize it's about the Messiah. It's about God.

It's about He's the bridegroom. Of course the bride pictured in scriptures is the people who are coming to Jesus and there's that relationship there. But I need to view myself as the friend of the bridegroom. This wedding isn't about me. This life isn't about me. This is about me learning to be a servant. That's what it's about so that I can serve the bridegroom.

And now we come to the summary. The summary statement that's probably on plaques all over the place where you can buy this, download it. If you google these words, you'll see them with beautiful artwork. It's this statement that says – *He must become greater; I must become less. Or he must increase; I must decrease.* It's a summary of this idea of it's all about God.

When I conform my identity around the fact that Jesus is the one who needs to be glorified, I don't need to worry about having the glory for even the things that I should receive the glory from. If I don't get promoted, if I don't get what I deserve, I don't have to be miserable about it. I don't have to be all upset about it. What I need to do is recognize my identity. That my identity isn't about self-glory. My identity is about fitting in with God's plan and what He has for me, and that's really the picture that John the Baptist is sharing with his disciples.

What a great lesson that we need when we see success in other people. How do we handle that when someone else has something that we wish we might have.

Let me read the rest of the verse in this passage just so you see as he amplifies it what he says. *The one who comes from above is above all (that's Jesus); the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth (that's like me, John the Baptist), and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all (that's Jesus). He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. Whoever has accepted it has certified that God is truthful.*

See, if you accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you're certifying that's where truth is. It's a personal certification of personal testimony that says yes, this is what I want. This is what I know is true and this is what God has done for me. It's a certification.

For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands.

Notice verse 36, which takes us back to this idea of life, this idea taught all through John about life. Verse 36 says – *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.*

We talked more about that in our last time together as we looked at John 3:16 and following about condemnation and the wrath of God. Very important for us to understand that. But notice the idea of life here. You can have life, and it's not just start when you die. It's start right now and it starts with a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Well that's our passage today, but I'm going to give you an observation that I made this week as I was pondering this myself about John A. John A is the apostle. We haven't talked much about him, but he's the one who wrote this gospel. I was just thinking about his life because he was quite a competitive guy. He's writing the gospel of John and at the end of the book (Jesus was

risen from the dead) he says – *John and Peter* (he doesn't use his name, he says *the disciple whom Christ loved*) ran to the tomb and he says *I got there first*. That's what he says. Like we care. But he wants to point it out to us that he got there first. But Peter comes in and boy, like Peter, just bursts right into the room.

John was this competitive guy. In fact the disciples, the Bible tells us, were on their way to Capernaum at one time and they were arguing on the way which one of us is the greatest. Jesus doesn't say anything. But they get all the way to Capernaum and He says, "*What were you guys discussing on the road?*" They didn't want to say. So Jesus took a little child and put the child in their midst and stood the child there and said, "The person who takes care of this child, that's the person who's great. You need to learn how to be a servant." Whoa. What a rebuke to John and the other disciples as they're having this dialogue.

One time John the apostle comes to Jesus and says, "Jesus there was a guy who cast out demons in your name. We told him to stop because he's not one of us." That's what it says. Jesus says, "Look, let him go. If he's doing it in my name, let him go." Wow. Do you see John had this kind of competitive streak that he had in his life.

At one point John and his brother, James, came to Jesus and said, "Hey Jesus, we got an idea. Could one of us sit on your right and the one of us sit on your left when we come into your kingdom?" Can you believe he's asking a question like that? Do you see how competitive this guy is? The funny thing in that story is when the other ones heard that they'd ask the question, they were indignant, the Bible says. Why? Because they wanted to have the best seat. These disciples had a problem, I just got to tell you. They were looking for greatness, but looking for it in the wrong place.

So now John A, John the apostle, is picking and choosing what he wants to write in his gospel that he writes and he gives a tribute to John the Baptist. I think John A needed this. I think he's saying look guys, I got to tell you this. I needed this in my life. Look at John the Baptist. He's the kind of guy who could not focus on himself; he could focus on being a servant to the bridegroom. He could focus on exalting God in his life.

I would suggest when we start demanding control, we start yelling at each other, or we start getting ourselves all riled up about things, we need to ask a question about who we're serving. It's not all about me. It's about God as the Messiah, it's about God as the heavenly Father as it is about having this relationship with Christ that moves us into this position, I think, that's just strategic. John A needed that and so he's telling us about John B who's giving a tribute to John the Baptist, John B. And John B is giving a testimony to Jesus Christ. In all of that, I think we can learn some valuable lessons about who's most important around here. It's not me. Right? It's Jesus Christ.

I would encourage you, if you haven't accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior what a great day to do that, to ask Jesus to come into your life and to entrust your life to Him. It changes a lot of stuff inside. It changes the way you think, it changes the way you live, it changes the way you act. It's just a powerful statement that we each make in our own lives.

Would you stand with me and let's pray together?

[PRAYER] Our heavenly Father, we do thank you for the testimony of John the Baptist. We thank you for the ministry he had of exalting and being the forerunner for Christ. Lord, help us all to know how to do that in our personal lives and our families, our workplaces, our neighborhoods, to know how to exalt you in a way that brings attention to you and not to ourselves. Lord, I pray that you'd use your Spirit in each one of our lives to speak to us now as we just ponder these words from your word. In Jesus' name, amen.