

HEAVEN TO EARTH

CORE PASSAGE: JOHN 3:25-36

CONTEXT

Jesus began to attract a crowd after His first miracle and driving out the money changers in the temple. Not long after meeting with Nicodemus, Jesus and His disciples went out to preach the message of the kingdom. Jesus and John the Baptist found themselves baptizing in the same vicinity with crowds flocking to each. John the Baptist's disciples questioned Jesus's rise in prominence, and John took that moment to explain that true joy comes from glorifying Jesus, the Son of God.

KEY CONCEPT

Belief involves acknowledging the supremacy of Jesus.

As you examine John 3:25-36:

- Note that John understood that he was the messenger, not the Messiah.
- Recognize that believers lift up Jesus and humble themselves so that He gets the glory.



TIMELINE

John the Baptist Calls People to Repentance in Preparation for Jesus and Baptizes Jesus (Matthew 3:1-17)

Jesus Cleanses the Temple (John 2:13-22)

SESSION STUDY:
John the Baptist Scales Back His Ministry (John 3:22-36)

Jesus Performs His First Miracle at the Wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11)

Nicodemus Visits Jesus at Night (John 3:1-21)

Jesus Speaks with a Samaritan Woman (John 4:1-42)

Daily Readings

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 1: John 3:22-24 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 4: John 3:31-34 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 2: John 3:25-26 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 5: John 3:35-36 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 3: John 3:27-30 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 6: Psalm 45 |



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

BELIEF IN CHRIST INVOLVES HUMBLING OURSELVES BEFORE HIM (JOHN 3:25-30).

Underline words and phrases that indicate how John's disciples felt about Jesus. Highlight words and phrases that show how John felt about Jesus. Note the contrast between John's feelings and those of his disciples.

25 Then a dispute arose between John's disciples and a Jew about purification. **26** So they came to John and told him, "Rabbi, the one you testified about, and who was with you across the Jordan, is baptizing—and everyone is going to him." **27** John responded, "No one can receive anything unless it has been given to him from heaven. **28** You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Messiah, but I've been sent ahead of him.' **29** He who has the bride is the groom. But the groom's friend, who stands by and listens for him, rejoices greatly at the groom's voice. So this joy of mine is complete. **30** He must increase, but I must decrease."

We are not given much information about the dispute between John's disciples and an unnamed Jew over Jewish purification rites. But somehow that discussion drew John's disciples to the topic of baptism. They noted that Jesus was baptizing "across the Jordan" on the eastern shore, though John 4:2 explains Jesus's disciples did the baptizing. The envy of John's disciples was palpable in their exaggerated statement, "Everyone is going to him" (3:26). John's crowds were smaller than Jesus's crowds, and John's disciples didn't like it.

John made two key points in response. First, he said everything is from God—our gifts, callings, positions, and even the results of the ministry God assigns each person. People have resources at their disposal only as God permits. Desiring greater prominence is like telling the Lord He erred in the calling He assigned us. Second, John acknowledged he was a messenger, not the Messiah. He was the one prophesied to "prepare the way of the LORD" (Isa. 40:3).

LEADER NOTE: In our day and age, with social media and the need to find fame and popularity, the temptation to put ourselves above Christ and His will is great for anyone who has a cell phone. We all want to be heard and to be seen as skilled, eloquent, beautiful, thought-provoking, or right. Even with ministry intent, we always need to make sure our hearts are truly in the right place when we share on social media or by word of mouth, uplifting Christ in all things, not our personal agenda or desires. Our actions should aim for God's glory, not our own.

How can you find contentment with the circumstances God assigned you rather than desiring greater prominence?

John the Baptist used a parable to explain his attitude toward Jesus. John was like “the groom’s friend” at a first-century Judean wedding (John 3:29), roughly equivalent to what we would call the best man. He assisted the groom with every detail of the wedding, organizing and presiding over the festivities. If he drew the spotlight away from the groom, then he failed in his role. If the groom drew focus and experienced joy, he succeeded.

In this regard, John the Baptist is a model for all followers of Jesus. As believers, we lift up Christ and humble ourselves before Him. John’s statement that “He must increase, but I must decrease” (v. 30) was not a statement merely of what John should do. Rather, it was a statement of the Lord’s plan. True joy comes not when the spotlight shines brightest on us; it comes when we shine the spotlight on Jesus.

LEADER NOTE: Living to glorify Jesus rather than ourselves is not an optional add-on to the Christian life. It is the essence of the Christian life. In the parable of the sower, Jesus taught that those who focus on their own worries, wealth, and desires lack true faith, even if they claim for a time to believe in Jesus. Those who receive Christ’s Word and honor Him by bearing spiritual fruit possess saving faith (Mark 4:18-20). Paul wrote that eventually “every knee will bow” and “every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil. 2:10-11). Some humble themselves now before Jesus voluntarily. All others will humble themselves before Him involuntarily as they bear eternal judgment.

What does glorifying Jesus rather than yourself mean practically in your current season of life?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Jesus is the Messiah and God the Son, coming from above to give eternal life to those who believe in Him, so He is worthy to be put first in our lives.

WE HUMBLE OURSELVES BECAUSE CHRIST IS SUPREME

(JOHN 3:31-36).

Highlight phrases describing the supremacy of Jesus, denoting either His attributes or His actions.

31 The one who comes from above is above all. The one who is from the earth is earthly and speaks in earthly terms. The one who comes from heaven is above all. **32** He testifies to what he has seen and heard, and yet no one accepts his testimony. **33** The one who has accepted his testimony has affirmed that God is true. **34** For the one whom God sent speaks God's words, since he gives the Spirit without measure. **35** The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hands. **36** The one who believes in the Son has eternal life, but the one who rejects the Son will not see life; instead, the wrath of God remains on him.

After John the Baptist fulfilled his mission of exalting Jesus, he faded from the narrative, mostly because Herod arrested him (cf. v. 24). Verse 31 begins an extended commentary on the supremacy of Jesus over all things and all people.

Jesus is above all for various reasons. Among them, He “comes from heaven” (v. 31); He is God, but God come in human form. So Jesus is fully God and fully man. And He came to “[testify] to what he has seen and heard” (v. 32), to the reality of God and the truth of God’s plan, but His testimony is often rejected. Yet those who do accept it know that “God is true” (v. 33) because Jesus fulfilled the promises of old that the Messiah would bring God’s salvation.

LEADER NOTE: John’s Gospel emphasizes Jesus’s deity throughout: “In the beginning,” Jesus “was with God” and “was God” (1:1). His submission to the Father’s instructions did not make Him any less divine than God the Father (5:19). Jesus possesses “life in himself” (5:26); no other person brought Him into existence, and He needs no one to sustain His existence. Jesus’s repeated “I am” statements in John (“I am the gate” [10:9]; “I am the true vine” [15:1]) highlight that Jesus is the great “I AM” of the Old Testament (Ex. 3:14).

What do you think is the most compelling reason to believe Jesus is God and supreme over all things?

Verse 34 adds another reason to humble ourselves before Jesus: His authority to speak God's Word. The Old Testament prophets received the measure of God's Spirit needed to fulfill their missions. Jesus, in contrast, was given the Spirit's power without limit (v. 34). The Father "has given all things into his hands" (v. 35) so that Jesus can announce to us the Word of God. This far exceeded the ministry of any Old Testament prophet. On occasion, the Lord would reveal to a prophet a message, which he would announce by saying, "Thus says the LORD." With Jesus, every single word that came from His mouth was the Lord speaking.

The appropriate response to Jesus's supremacy is faith. Indeed, believing in Jesus results in eternal life. The type of belief in view is not mere mental ascent to the facts about Jesus, though that is included. Saving faith in Jesus entails trusting Him alone as the Master of our lives. People who do not place Jesus on the throne of their lives will not experience eternal life in God's kingdom. Instead, they will experience the eternal, just punishment their sin deserves.

LEADER NOTE: Skeptics have questioned the notion that God could be wrathful toward anyone. They recoil even more strongly at the notion God could be wrathful toward anyone for eternity. But that is precisely what Scripture teaches will befall everyone who lives for self rather than receiving the offer of mercy available through Jesus. Sinning against an infinitely holy and awesome God deserves infinite punishment. That is why Jesus referred to hell, in eternal terms, as a place where the "worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:48).

What are some common reasons people reject Jesus's offer of eternal life?

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

FAITH: Biblical faith is the resting or trusting in Christ alone for salvation (John 3:16-21). More than being simply a mental agreement of historical facts, genuine faith begins with a recognition and confession of the truth of the gospel (1 John 4:13-16), followed by a receiving of Christ as Lord and Savior of one's life (John 1:10-13). Biblical faith is not blind faith, for it rests on the historical life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

ARRIVAL

INTERACT: Invite the group to share jobs or roles they have accepted with an understanding that they would not be the lead person, boss, or supervisor. Ask: “How did it make you feel not to be considered as the lead? By show of hands, which of these words best describes your experience or perception of being the one who supports a leader rather than being the one in charge: satisfied, relieved, or frustrated?”

CONTEXT

SAY: John the Baptist, a unique character who clothed himself in animal skins and ate locusts and wild honey, had a unique mind-set regarding his ministry. As Jesus's relative, John successfully waded into ministry ahead of Jesus, preaching in the wilderness, prophesying about the coming Messiah, calling people to repentance of sin, and baptizing them in the Jordan River. In the process, he amassed a group of followers who supported his ministry. By the time of this account, Jesus had been baptized by John, which served as the public launch of Christ's personal ministry. Soon after, in addition to John the Baptist, Jesus's disciples were also baptizing new believers.

TRANSITION: In the landscape of multiple ministry sites and prophetic voices that were now taking place and being heard, John's disciples realized they needed to try to reconcile their part in this new paradigm taking shape. In this passage, they received a powerful lesson from John the Baptist on why and how to support the rightful leader and heir to God's throne.

RECAP

SUMMARIZE: On a board, write two words to help the group recall the story: “problem” and “resolution.” Call on a volunteer to summarize in one sentence the problem recorded in the passage and another to summarize John's response. Write the synopses on the board. Avoid adding more details as they will be discussed through the group activity.

TRANSITION: John the Baptist's response was not just an explanation on the doctrine of the supremacy of Jesus but a lesson on how to be a servant who recognizes that the Messiah is and always will be greater than the messenger.



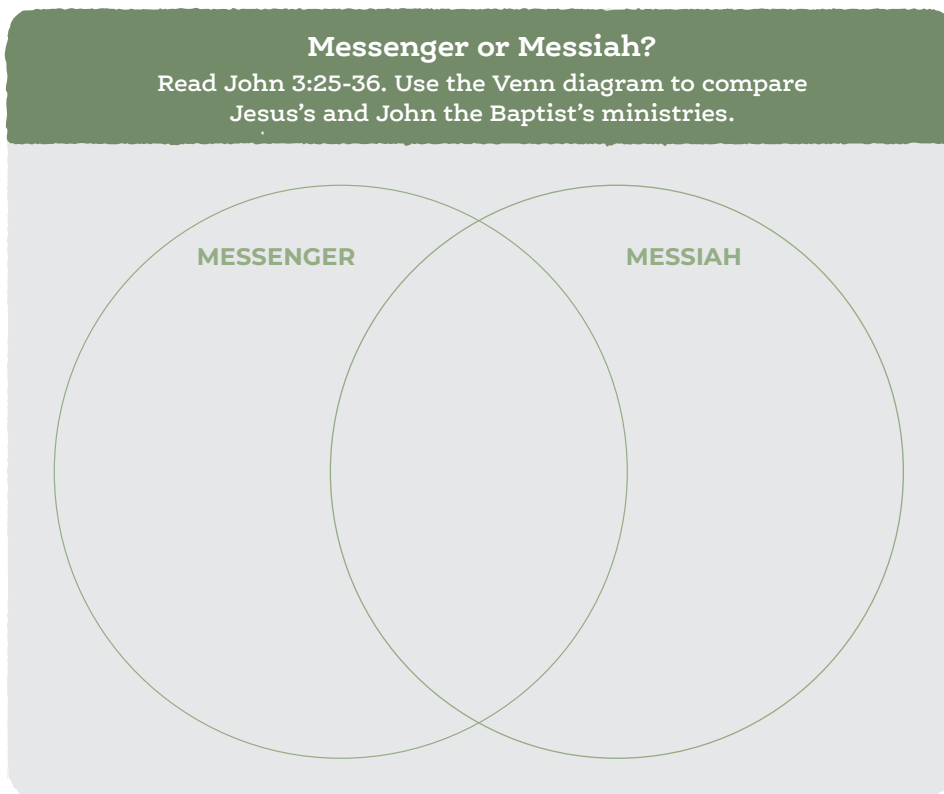
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GROUP ACTIVITY

DIAGRAM: Point out the “Messenger or Messiah?” diagram on page 118 in the Personal Study Guide (PSG). Replicate the Venn diagram on the board to write down notes as the group discusses the Scripture passage.



CONTEXT: Mention that both Jesus and John the Baptist had acquired a considerable following. Even the religious leaders questioned whether John the Baptist was the Messiah. Though John repeatedly asserted that he was not the Messiah but the messenger, his own disciples were concerned with Jesus’s popularity among the people.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read John 3:25-36.

DISCUSS: Guide the group to compare and contrast Jesus’s and John the Baptist’s ministries. Ask: “In what ways were they similar?” (*both were sent by God; both were prophesied about in the Old Testament; both were Spirit-filled; both called people to repent of their sins*) “What traits were exclusive to John the Baptist?” (*he was born of earthly parents; he did not claim to be the Messiah; his ministry ended as Jesus’s began*) “What traits were exclusive to Jesus?” (*He came from heaven; He is the Son of God; He brings eternal life to those who believe in Him*) Encourage your group to write down their answers

in the PSG as you write them on the board, along with Scripture references that affirm their points. Highlight the implied sense of rivalry John's disciples felt and John the Baptist's response of deference to Jesus along with an attitude of joy and humility.

APPLY: As believers, have there been times when you've felt jealousy over how God was using someone else to grow His kingdom? When John the Baptist said Jesus must increase but he must decrease, he exhibited great humility as well as wisdom. Ask: "Why is it important for us to keep our attitudes and pride in check as we support a spiritual leader, ministry, or mission?"

DEBRIEF

What can we do to remind ourselves to adopt humility when it does not come easily?

What might have been the outcome if John the Baptist had chosen not to humble himself and elevate Jesus?

SUMMARIZE

Far beyond an exercise in humility or a lesson in leadership, John the Baptist shared that Christ deserves our total and complete allegiance and submission because He is supreme. In Christ alone, we have the opportunity for eternal life. As significant as his ministry was, John had limited resources to offer on his own. Yet his role was to point the way. John did it well because he understood Christ is supreme and through Him alone can we have eternal life.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 119). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Head** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.



HEAD: Acknowledging the supremacy of Jesus requires knowing the facts about Him. That means reading what the Bible teaches about Him, plugging into Bible studies with fellow believers, and utilizing other sound spiritual resources. Just as we cannot have relationships with people we know little about, our ignorance of Jesus limits our ability to walk with Him.

How might a lack of knowledge about Jesus limit your ability to believe in Him?



HEART: For John the Baptist, humbling himself meant pointing to Jesus as the Messiah and rejoicing when crowds went to Jesus. Humility before Christ takes different forms for us. For example, it means spending more time in prayer and Scripture and less time promoting ourselves on social media. It means praying for Jesus's will to materialize rather than asking Him to bless our selfish aspirations.

In what ways should you commit to humble yourself before Jesus?



HANDS: Exalting Christ as supreme is difficult in a culture that focuses on self. That's one reason followers of Jesus must encourage one another to be humble before Him. Praying for other believers, commending them for unseen acts of service, and worshiping Jesus alongside them are ways we can encourage others to acknowledge Christ's supremacy.

How will you encourage someone this week to have a humble attitude before Christ?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Prayerfully consider your own role and responsibilities in ministry, and assess your attitude toward the ministries of others. Pray John 3:30 as an affirmation or correction for your attitude toward Jesus and others.
- Re-examine your personal role as a messenger in sharing that Christ is supreme and the sole resource for eternal life. Recommit to your responsibility to share the gospel with others.
- Spend a few minutes meditating on the sober reminder that the wrath of God falls on those who reject Christ, and identify those who may need a fresh invitation to receive Him.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 119 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 45:6-7 with your group, praising God that His throne is forever because He is supreme in all things.