

## THE LAST TESTIMONY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

John 3:22-36

Key verse 3:30

"He must become greater; I must become less."

Last week we learned the necessity of rebirth. Through rebirth we can see the Kingdom of God and live as His blessed children. The rebirth happens through repentance and faith in Jesus, namely through one Word of God. Through one Word of God we may be born anew and live a new life. Above all we were allowed to get to know God's unique love, which gives eternal life to all who believe in Him. May God give each one of you the grace of being born again and help you to come to Jesus with God's promise at any time and to walk in the light of Jesus. (Ezekiel 37:10; 1 Peter 2:9)

Today's text is about the last testimony of John the Baptist. John the Baptist, in his time, had great reputation and influence through his preaching of repentance. He fulfilled his mission as the forerunner of the Messiah by denying himself until the last moment and testifying of Jesus, who is above all, and who gives eternal life to those who believe in him. His philosophy of life, his perseverance, his zeal for his mission, and even his martyrdom to prepare the work of Jesus and make Jesus great, even as his own work and spiritual influence diminished, touched his disciples deeply that they could be true pioneers of Jesus. John the Baptist encouraged us to renew our spirit and attitude as pioneers of Jesus. Let us make John's final testimony our own testimony and be used as influential pioneers for Jesus in our time.

### 1. He must become greater, I must become less (22-30)

John the Baptist was the son of a pious old priestly couple, Zacharias and Elizabeth. According to God's promise, John was born 6 months before Jesus to precede the Messiah and prepare his way. John accepted this calling of God. He lived in the desert and led an as-

cetic life there, feeding on locusts and wild honey. As he lived such a holy life before God and preached the baptism of repentance, the whole Jewish country came out to him in the desert. They heard his message, repented of their sins and were baptized by him in the Jordan River. In this way, John became very famous and even 30 years after his death, Paul found disciples in Ephesus who only knew John's baptism. (Acts 19:1.2) John's sermon was so influential that many people thought that he might be the promised Messiah.

After John had fulfilled his mission and clearly revealed Jesus as the Lamb of God (1:29), the time had come for the work of God to pass from John to Jesus.

Let us look at verses 22 to 24: "After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized. Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized. (This was before John was put in prison.)" The time of preparation by the forerunner of the Messiah, John the Baptist, was slowly coming to an end. The time of fulfillment through Christ had now come. The work of God was in a transitional phase. Jesus stayed with his disciples for a while in Judea and baptized there, while John the Baptist was still baptizing in Aenon. More and more people came to Jesus, but John the Baptist was thrown into prison some time later because of his clear penitential preaching by Herod, finally beheaded in prison through envy and the intrigue of Herodia.

Let us look at verse 25: "An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing." Then the disciples came to John and

said, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan--the one you testified about--well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him." (26) Here the disciples' concern becomes clear. They worked diligently with John, but they learned that more people came to Jesus and some of John's disciples went to him. Pessimistic concerns and questions arose in their hearts. They were envious of the work of Jesus, which was growing great. They indirectly asked John to do something. John then gave them a clear testimony of faith to serve God's work. Many believers serve the work of God by seeking their own advantage or success. But if they do not experience the hoped-for result, e.g. they do not get much recognition, or if someone else would get more success or God's blessing, then they will quickly become bitter and a bitter root will grow in their hearts.

Let us look at verses 27 and 28: "To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.'" John taught them here that no one may exalt himself, but must remain in the task and position given to him from heaven. Because of God's sovereign plan of salvation, John, despite his popularity, remained the forerunner of the Messiah, the pioneer and the voice in the desert. He repeatedly stressed that he is not the Christ. John testified that his time of preparation was coming to an end, that the time of fulfillment through Jesus would come.

Let us look again at 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." Here John refers to Jesus as the Bridegroom and to himself as the Friend of the Bridegroom. This is what the relationship between Jesus and him teaches us. Jesus is the heavenly Bridegroom and he is the Bridegroom's friend, like the waiter, servant or table master who prepares the beautiful wedding feast in Cana. The groom's friends are very happy to invite the guests, order the best buffet and take care of the preparation and pick up of the bride. How our missionaries cheerfully prepared the wedding celebration of our next generation. All their joy is to see the happiness of the groom. In the same way, John prepared the way for the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and rejoiced greatly that the time of Jesus, the time of fulfillment, has come.

He rejoiced greatly that everyone came to Jesus, followed Him, and received eternal life by believing in Him. Here we can and may seriously ask ourselves whether it is our true joy that a person comes to Jesus, whether through me or through others, is reborn in him and is mobilized to give his new life as a disciple of Jesus. John did not seek his joy in seeing his own work or in seeing his own benefits or human recognition. John even went so far as to say, "He must become greater, I must become less." (30) It was John's philosophy of life with which he lived. It was the same as Paul's philosophy of life: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." That meant for him, Jesus was everything. His mission and his joy was that Jesus' work became bigger and more influential.

John the Baptist was really popular in his time and many people came to him. He was a great personality with great influence and reputation. Jesus even said of John: "I tell you that among those who are born of a woman, there is none greater than John..." (Luke 7:28a) It would have been easy for John to share a little bit of honour and recognition with Jesus and to enjoy respect among the people. But he was determined to be a pioneer for Jesus with all his strength and dedication. He remained in his philosophy of life until the end: "He (Jesus) must become greater, I must become less." (30) And in this he had his joy!

Monika was the mother of Augustine. When her only son, who loved her very much, led a successful life as a lawyer, she could have been satisfied. But she was deeply grieved because Jesus was not in his life and he led a hedonistic life. So she prayed for him with a broken heart for 30 years in the background until he accepted Jesus into his life, converted and was changed into one of the important church fathers.

Mother Sarah Barry accepted God's call and came as a missionary to post-war Korea. She had the opportunity to live in a mission house with American standards. But she decided to get to know Jesus by sleeping on the floor like the Koreans and eating spicy kimchi. She was happy to lose her own life so that Jesus could grow. Many Korean students got to know Jesus through their Bible studies and decided to follow Jesus, even to be sent out as missionaries for world mission.

At this time we can also see how dedicated and selflessly some missionaries are helping the teenagers from the Gideon and Ezekiel team to receive baptism. They serve them each week through spiritual fellowship, listening to their testimonies and helping them to live practically with the Word of God. Although they have various duties in their families and also carry the Cross of work or are restricted because of illness, they dedicate themselves to preparing them for baptism. They have prepared 8 lessons with the questionnaires and messages. They pray for the baptised children to lay a firm foundation in their faith in Jesus, so that God's work may grow in the baptised children and they may be able to celebrate heavenly marriage with Jesus in their lives!

For a long time I also sought my own glory through working together in the work of God. But Jesus' humility, servanthood and devotion moved my heart so that I was allowed to submit to him and find my position as a pioneer for Jesus. I loved Jesus the most and made him the center of my life. I repent that I still have not retreated into the background because of my own honor and imagination. But here I may decide anew to actively leave my comfort zone, to get to know Jesus more deeply and to lose my life, so that Jesus may grow and enter the hearts of many young people.

We are very grateful to God for the early morning prayer, in which our next generation is also diligently participating. I think it is not easy for them not to think about themselves or their sweet sleep in the early morning and instead get up, contemplate God's word and build the altar of prayer for the campus mission. But they deny their own ego to make Jesus great and pray for the spiritual revival work.

We are also very encouraged by S. Joyce's faith struggle. During the therapy time she should think a lot about herself and her health. But especially during this time she has become a source of encouragement to us by serving the work of God in the background through prayer. Although she herself is becoming less, Jesus is becoming greater in her life.

## 2. Jesus is above all (31-36)

In this passage John testifies who Jesus is.

First: Jesus is sent by God and speaks God's words.

Let us look at verses 31 and 32: "The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony." We, humans are made of earth, that's why we talk about earth. But Jesus is from heaven, so that everything comes from him from above. What he testifies is from heaven and the word of God. Nevertheless, people do not accept his testimony, the Word of God.

Let us consider verses 33 and 34: "The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit." Whoever accepts Jesus' testimony will gain confidence through the Spirit of God that Jesus and the Word are true, namely that Jesus is sent by God and speaks God's Word. Humanism in our time makes people's lives the center of the universe and relativizes the work of God through the Word. But John here clearly testifies that the one who accepts God's word and obeys it receives the Spirit of God. God gives His Spirit abundantly without measure to those who obey His Word. Spiritual authority comes to those who accept God's word, that is, who live in obedience to the Word of God. The authority of John the Baptist came to him who was filled with the Spirit of God.

We have also seen that missionaries with spiritual authority have been serving campus mission for the past 40 years, setting up young students as shepherds, Bible teachers and spiritual leaders because they obey God's Word and are filled with the Spirit of God. God's Word is not an empty word, but gives authority to those who obey Him. A servant of God helped a young student with the word from Mk 11:22 "Have faith in God!" He served him with God's vision that he would be used as a responsible leader for the work of God. After 30 years, God appointed him as a responsible spiritual leader. Those who believe and obey God's Word seal that God is omnipotent and confidently give a living testimony of God's work.

Second: Jesus is above all

Verse 35 says, "The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands." This God

has put everything in Jesus' hand and made him the giver of life. (Mt 28:18) This God made Jesus' name above all names, to whom all knees must bow (Phil 2:9, 10).

John's last testimony of Jesus is in verse 36, let us read this verse together: "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." John says quite clearly that whoever believes in Jesus has eternal life already now and here! At the same time, the one who does not believe in Jesus Christ remains under God's wrath. Let us read verse 36 again: "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." Here faith in Jesus is equated with obedience to Jesus. Whoever submits to Jesus in faith receives eternal life and the kingdom of God in his life. Faith without obedience is dead faith. James 2 says that Satan also believes in God, but he does not obey God's word. (James 2:17-20)

Noah's faith was not a dead faith. He honored God by obeying the divine Word that he received and diligently built the Ark of Salvation even though he could not see. But through this obedience of faith he pronounced judgment to the world, and through his practical obedience, he and the families of his sons were saved! (Heb 11:7)

Abraham is a great patriarch of the faith. Through faith Abraham became obedient when God called him to go to a land he was to inherit; and he went out and did not know where he was going. God blessed Abraham's obedience of faith abundantly. Abraham was obedient to God at the decisive moment and went to sacrifice his son Isaac. God saw this beautiful faith of Abraham and therefore gave him back Isaac. (Heb 11:8, 17)

By faith Moses also obeyed the Word of God and made Israel keep the Passover before the Exodus from Egypt. When the Israelites obeyed, the angel of death passed by their front doors and they were saved. (Heb 11:28) By faith, Moses obeyed the Word of God and parted the Red Sea, so that Israel passed through as if over dry land and was saved from the enemies. (Heb 11:29)

Many men and women of faith throughout history have dedicated and given their lives, obeying

God and His Word beyond their limits. They suffered mockery and scourging, bondage and imprisonment, they were stoned, sawed up, killed by the sword. They all obeyed the Word of God more and gained eternal life. (Hebr 11:36-40)

Faith in Jesus is a conscious decision to accept Jesus as the Lord and to obey His Word. We live in a godless time where people's lives are at the centre, while God's Word is relativised or even made to fit. The message of John is: without faith in Jesus, there is no eternal life and no salvation. We learn that the world apparently promises different ways of salvation: for one, it is measures to protect the climate, for another, success in studies and in business. In public, God's word is relativized or presented as outdated. Humanism and the spirit of the times teach us to obey ourselves and our own feelings, and to act according to human calculation instead of obeying the Word of God. Many call themselves Christians because they go to church on Sunday. But when it comes to practically obeying the Word of God, they back down or have many excuses. But without faith and obedience there is no salvation!

There is much talk about how to lead people to Jesus or how to really help a Bible student. Should one adapt the method to the times or adapt to the new generation? Or should one walk or seek new ways to be worthy of the new generation? In the end, only the Word of God is decisive. It is a matter of proclaiming the Word of God and establishing obedience of faith so that a soul may personally accept Jesus and be filled with the Spirit of God who receives eternal life.

God has given us His Word from Ezekiel 37:10 to prophesy God's Word, so that dead bones may come to life and be raised up into an exceedingly great army. Let us be pioneers of Jesus for our time, who tirelessly obey Ezekiel 37:10 and diligently prophesy the Word of God in every faculty and pioneering work. Let us also actively help our next generation with the Word of God and establish the obedience of faith among them. Then they will seal that God is true. They will be seized by the Word of God that they will be raised as pioneers, like John the Baptist, in their school, college or faculty.

In today's lesson, we learned how John fulfilled his mission as a pioneer of Jesus Christ. He dedicated his entire life tirelessly to the end to

make Jesus great and to encourage pioneers that they can fulfill their mission with this philosophy of life. Let us live in faith in Jesus and in obedience to his word and be used preciously as Jesus' pioneers for our time. May God give each one of you his authority and bring about spiritual revival.