

26. The Gospel of John—3:22-28

“A Life of Joyful Fulfillment” Pt.1

(4/15/18)

John 3:22-24 (NKJV)

²² After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized. ²³ Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized. ²⁴ For John had not yet been thrown into prison.

I think you'd be hard-pressed to find a more interesting person in the Bible than John the Baptist.

What fascinates me most about John was the simplicity with which he lived his life (he lived out in the wilderness, sleeping under the stars, and ate a diet of locusts and wild honey)—and yet his life was joyful and fulfilled.

What was the secret to John's life? What can we learn from his life that will help us live a life of joyful fulfillment?

I. John had Purpose in Life

Study after study has shown that a person who has purpose in their life will live a longer and more fulfilling life.

I believe this has been corroborated by the number of people who die not long after they retire—those without any other interests, hobbies, friends (their only friends were co-workers) or reasons for getting out of bed in the morning except to go to work.

God has made us with the need to be productive and that comes from having purpose in life—no purpose means no productiveness and no productiveness means we really have no reason to go living.

This can lead to increased alcohol consumption, drug usage and in the worst-case scenario—suicide.

We absolutely need a sense of purpose to survive—without it life becomes a meaningless, mind numbing exercise in futility and despair—and often a job or even a career is not enough.

The Bible says that God has put “*eternity in our hearts*” (Eccl.3:11)—in other words God has put into the heart of man a sense that we exist for more than just this life.

That there is an ultimate purpose in life beyond simply surviving or living to make money to buy more and more things and experience more and more pleasure—something that God ‘hard-wired’ into our DNA.

When we talk about the necessity of a person’s life having meaning and purpose understand that it all begins with you knowing and believing that God created you on purpose for a purpose—in other words you are no accident!

Ephesians 2:8-10 (NLT)

⁸ God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ⁹ Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. ¹⁰ For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Paul is saying that God created you on purpose for a purpose—and this was especially true of John the Baptist.

Even before John was conceived—hundreds of years before his parents were even born, God had a purpose for John and even prophesied of his coming—

Isaiah 40:3 (NKJV)

³ The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the LORD..."

Malachi 3:1 (NKJV)

¹ "Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me..."

And then, many centuries later, God sent the angel Gabriel to a godly priest named Zacharias, whose wife Elizabeth had been barren for many years, and gave them a remarkable promise in their old age—

Luke 1:13-16 (NLT)

¹³ ...the angel said, "...Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John...He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth. ¹⁶ ...He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord..."

And so even from the womb, before he was ever born, God had a purpose for John's life—even as He has a purpose for your life and started calling you to that purpose from *your* mother's womb.

The apostle Paul mentions this in Galatians 1:15 how that it pleased God, "*Who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace...*"

And the same is true for you as well—God has been preparing you for His divine purpose even from the womb—you are no accident!

I mean, who you would be (your race and gender); where you would be born, the family and economic status you would be born into, the talents and abilities you were born with—all of these were God's way of preparing you for the purpose He had for your life.

And ever since you were born God has been further preparing you through the experiences of your life (good and bad) for this work, shaping and molding you into who you are today all for His divine purposes

God has your future all mapped out—He knows exactly the work that He wants you to accomplish for His glory and His kingdom.

The question is, will you submit to Him and fulfill the plans and purposes He has ordained for your life?

John was the kind of man who knew what he was supposed to do with his life—and he didn't let anything distract him from it—

Mark 1:4-6 (NLT)

⁴ ...John the Baptist...was in the wilderness and preached that people should be baptized to show that they had turned to God to receive forgiveness for their sins. ⁵ All of Judea, including all the people of Jerusalem, went out to see and hear John. And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River. ⁶ His clothes were woven from coarse camel hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food he ate locusts and wild honey.

John stayed separate from the world when he could have been supported by the wealthiest people in Jerusalem, conducted his ministry in the biggest and most luxurious houses, and been supplied with the best food and clothing that money (other people's) could buy.

John could have been a true celebrity (if he allowed others to treat him that way) in that he was the first prophet in Israel in over 400 years.

But John stayed separate from the world to reach the world—this is a fundamental principle in reaching the lost and one of the main reasons John was so effective in his ministry and filled with joy.

He kept the main thing the main thing—and didn't let anything this world had to offer distract him from his calling—Jesus and leading others to Jesus!

Say what you will about John—he was focused!

John 3:22-25 (NKJV)

²² After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized. ²³ Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized. ²⁴ For John had not yet been thrown into prison.

So here the ministries of Jesus and John ‘overlap’ as Jesus’ disciples and John and his disciples are baptizing at the same time—but in different locations.

John was baptizing in Aenon (“springs”) near Salim (“peace”)—but I personally don’t see any *spiritual* reason why he was baptizing in that area—it was simply for a couple of practical reasons.

First it was because there was a lot of water there which meant more people could be baptized at the same time (apparently large crowds were still coming to John to be baptized).

And secondly, John chose to be up in Aenon (scholars believe that Aenon was up in the area of Shechem in Samaria outside of Judea) so as to give Jesus preeminence to conduct His ministry in Judea since that was the area where Jerusalem was located—ground zero for Jesus’ ministry and John refused to compete with Jesus!

Let me stop and talk briefly about the baptism of John one more time.

Understand, that John’s baptism was not Christian baptism.

The Jews practiced a form of baptism *before* Christianity.

Before they would go into the Temple to worship they would undergo a ritual purification in a special cleansing pool or bath known as a ‘mikveh.’

They would immerse ('baptize') themselves in this cleansing pool, washing off the dirt from their bodies which would symbolize a purification from sin and all outward defilements—and then they were considered *ceremonially clean* and could go in and worship the Lord in the Temple.

In New Testament times, if people wanted to convert (proselytize) to Judaism, they went through a ceremonial washing referred to as *baptism*.

In Christian baptism we identify with Jesus in His death, burial and resurrection which comes after we have received Him into our hearts as Savior and Lord—John's baptism preceded the receiving of the Messiah.

John's baptism was more on the order of ritual purification using the Jordan River as a mikveh—the Jewish way of repenting of their sins and purifying themselves in preparation for receiving Messiah when He came.

So, the first point in our outline is that—**John had purpose in life**—he knew he was a man sent by God to announce to Israel the coming of Messiah, and that greatly contributed to the fulfillment and joy he experienced in his life.

II. John Maintained the Proper Perspective in Life

A. He rested in God's sovereignty—v.27

John 3:25-27 (NKJV)

²⁵ Then there arose a dispute between *some* of John's disciples and the Jews 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!" ²⁷ John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven...(a statement of divine sovereignty)

It's always sad when a spirit of competition arises between those who are serving the Lord—but John refused to fall into that trap.

John rested in the fact that his whole life was under the sovereign control of God.

And even though John still enjoyed a great deal of popularity, and multitudes were still coming to him to be baptized—

He rightly understood that his ministry was a gift from God for a certain length of time (until Messiah came)—and now that the Christ had come, he was happy to fade into the background to let Jesus take center stage.

In this, John was a true example of humility. He didn't try to hang on to his ministry and to his 'celebrity'—and he didn't become bitter when the crowds started going to Jesus.

He knew his ministry had been given to him from above and now it was finished (fulfilled) and he needed to accept that and rest in God's sovereign will—which he did.

➔ Story of older pastor who saw his church moving over to the church of a younger pastor

The sovereignty of God means that He is all-powerful and in total control of everything and everyone and can do whatever He chooses to do.

Because God is sovereign, it means that nothing happens in my life except what God allows for His purposes—

Romans 8:28 (NKJV)

²⁸ And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose.

It doesn't say "*we see all things working together for our good...*", it says "*we know it by faith*" because of what God has told us in His word.

If you trust the character of God (that He is a good and loving God)—you will trust Him to lead every area of your life and rest in His sovereign plan for your life—which brings us to the second way John maintained a proper perspective in life.

B. He remembered his humanity—v.28

John 3:28 (NKJV)

²⁸ You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ' [i.e. "I'm not God"],' but, 'I have been sent before Him.'

The second ingredient to joyful and fulfilling life is remembering that you are not the Christ!

“That’s obvious”—maybe in principle, but how many times do we violate that in the daily practice of our lives?

We say to ourselves, *“My career, my money, my ministry, my marriage, my kids—my life. I don’t need to pray about it. I can handle it. I know what’s best for my life...”*

First of all, all those things belong to God; and secondly, you don’t know what’s best for your life—only God knows that.

But if we take it upon ourselves to handle and control our lives—in effect we’re saying, *“I’m the Christ. I’m the Master. I’m the sovereign Lord—the one in total control.”*

And that’s the main reason why so many Christians go thru crisis after crisis and are full of anxiety and stress—it’s because they’re trying to run their lives in their own strength and wisdom.

They make decisions apart from prayer. They don’t seek the mind of God on important issues or do the things He tells them to do in His Word (unless it agrees with what they want to do).

And then when things “blow up” and go bad—they tend to turn around and blame God.

It’s no wonder so many Christian’s lives aren’t joyful and fulfilled.

You’re trying to do what only Jesus can do—properly control and direct your life.

And because of it, you’ve got the weight of your marriage, your kids, your career, your finances—and your whole future on your shoulders—that’s a recipe for a nervous breakdown not fulness of joy!

You’re not the Christ! You’re not the Lord and Master of your life!

And if you take that role upon yourself and basically say, “*I can handle it! I’m in charge, I can do it!*”—that’s pride, and pride goes before a fall (Prov.16:18).

It takes humility to admit that you can’t run your own life—that you need Jesus to take control.

1 Peter 5:6-7 (NKJV)

⁶ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, ⁷ casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

John was a humble man, which becomes obvious by the two statements he makes about himself and his Lord Jesus Christ—“**I am not the Christ**” (v.28) and “**He must increase, but I must decrease**” (v.30)

And because of John’s humility and willingness to trust in God’s sovereignty—he was a man who had peace, joy and fulfillment in his life.

Jacob was the ultimate example in Scripture of someone who refused to let God be in control of his life...(Explain)

Genesis 32:25 (NKJV)

²⁵ Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him.

What does God have to do in your life to get you to trust Him and obey Him?

He loves you so much and wants to bless your life so much that if He has to take something from you like a career, a relationship or even physical health in some way He will if it brings you to a place of absolute brokenness and surrender.

If you're wrestling with God over some issue—you better hope you lose because that's the only way you win!

God's will is perfect—to fight for your own will means you are wanting to settle for less than His best in your life.

“Woe to him who strives with (fights with, wrestles with) his Maker.” (Isa.45:9)

Stop fighting with God and start submitting to His sovereign will.

John knew he wasn't the Christ—how about you?

This is where a life of peace, fulfillment and joy begins—with you surrendering control of your life to Jesus and resting fully in Him.