

27. The Gospel of John—3:29-36

“A Life of Joyful Fulfillment” Pt.2

(4/22/18)

Last week in our study in John’s gospel we came to the second half of chapter 3 where we focused our attention on John the Baptist.

And as we said last week, 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.

How can I say that about a guy who lived in the wilderness with none of the comforts that most of us think are essential for life—because, John himself mentions it in v.29 (we’ll come to that in a moment).

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.

Sometimes that purpose is taking care of the children if they're small or a spouse, parent or someone else that depends upon you as a care-giver.

Some people have hobbies that keep them going or causes that they have attached themselves to which gives them purpose and meaning in life.

I think for the vast majority of Americans their job is what gets them up in the morning and gives them their sense of purpose.

So much so that when they retire or are forced out of their job—many can't handle the sense of loss and feel their purpose for living has been taken from them.

This can lead to alcoholism, drug abuse and even suicide.

A person whose job is *who they are* will have a much tougher time retiring than a person whose job is *what they do* and not who they are. (Comment)

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 2:10)

This was especially true of John the Baptist. (Explain)

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.

As we said last time—you will never know greater joy in life than in fulfilling the purpose for which God created you (hint: it's not to make money to buy things and go places).

II. John Maintained the Proper Perspective in Life

A. He rested in God's sovereignty

John 3:22-27 (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. 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."

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—as he expressed in the statement, "**A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven (God)**".

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 do belong to God who has given them to us to use for His glory.

Secondly, you don't know what's best for your life—only God knows that.

John 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.

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 (Rom.8:28).

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.

This brings us to the second way John maintained a proper perspective in life—

A. He rested in God's sovereignty

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,' but, 'I have been sent before Him.'

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

And even though that seems obvious—we often take the role of ‘the Christ’ onto ourselves more often than we would care to admit—how?.

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 of my life—the one in 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.

Proverbs 3:5-6 (NLT)

⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. ⁶ Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.

But unfortunately, many Christians don’t trust in the Lord with all their hearts—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 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 fullness 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.

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.

II. John Maintained the Proper Perspective in Life

A. He rested in God’s sovereignty

B. He remembered his humanity

C. He recognized his ministry

John 3:28-29 (NKJV)

²⁸ You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before Him.' ²⁹ He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.

The ‘**friend of the bridegroom**’ was someone in Jewish culture that would parallel the ‘best man’ in our culture—with a few differences.

In the Jewish wedding customs of that day, the **friend of the bridegroom** arranged many of the details of the wedding and brought the bride to the groom prior to the marriage ceremony.

John saw himself, not as bridegroom (the focus), but as the friend of the bridegroom (a servant).

And because John recognized what God had called him to do—it really helped to keep him from making his ministry about himself.

Rather, he found his joy in simply bringing people to Jesus.

I have seen many men in ministry that started out humble, only wanting to exalt Jesus, but then let success and popularity cause them to make themselves the focus.

As they lifted themselves up with pride, which the Bible says goes before a fall—eventually they fell and were removed from ministry.

We must recognize our ministry isn't to draw attention to ourselves or to make ourselves the focus in any way—it is to remain in the background and to keep pointing people to Jesus.

If you commit your life to doing this, you'll discover a fantastic truth—you'll have fulness of joy!

For God to work this out He must place His people in all sorts of places and situations so that He can have a witness who will bring the Bride to the Bridegroom.

If we were always prosperous and healthy we would never be able to relate to the world around us—a world full of hurting and broken people, and the Bridegroom would be without a 'friend', a witness.

And so God allows pain in the lives of His people, suffering happens, tragedy overwhelms us—we suffer the loss of family, friends, finances and even our own health.

God allows these things to enter into His children's lives so that when the world sees you going thru the same heartache, pain, suffering and adversities they're going thru and yet—you have the peace and joy of the Lord in your heart and life—you become a powerful 'friend of the Bridegroom'!

But please don't miss this—if you recognize the purpose for which God created you (to be a witness for Christ) to bring people to Jesus—then you will embrace sickness, suffering and various trials as God's way of making you more like Jesus—a light to those in darkness to bring them to God.

John 11:3-4 (NKJV)

³ Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." ⁴ When Jesus heard *that*, He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

1 Peter 1:6-7 (NKJV)

⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ that the genuineness of your faith, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,

1 Peter 4:1 (NKJV)

¹ Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,

Acts 20:22-24 (NKJV)

²² And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, ²³ except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. ²⁴ But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

All of these things are designed by God to draw us closer to Him and to mold us into the role of 'friend of the bridegroom'—the ones who bring the Bride to Jesus.

But here's where the analogy takes an incredible turn—as New Testament Christians, we are not only friends of the Bridegroom (bringing people to Jesus)—we are also the Bride of Christ. (Elaborate)

The greatest thing you can do with your life is to offer it up to God and become a 'friend of the Bridegroom' now, and the Bride of Christ someday.

How did John accomplish this in his own life—how was it that he remained so faithful in fulfilling the purpose to which God called him?—**He remained committed to God's priority.**

And so, under the heading of how John maintained the proper perspective in life which led to a joyful and fulfilled life:

A. He rested in God's sovereignty

B. He remembered his humanity

C. He recognized his ministry

D. He remained committed to God's priority

Very simply God the Father's priority is His Son.

The exaltation of Jesus, the lifting up of Jesus, the worship of Jesus, the love and appreciation for Jesus—all of this is the priority of God the Father with regard to His Son—

John 3:35 (NKJV)

³⁵ The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand.

Paul expanded on this when he said—

Philippians 2:9-11 (NKJV)

⁹ Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹ and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This is the heart of the Father—for you to be totally sold out to His Son so that the Father can use you to bring glory and honor to the Son.

Which begs the question—is Jesus your priority, is Jesus your first love?

Until He is your life will not have the meaning, purpose, joy and fulfillment the Father desires for you.

Don't miss what John connected his joy and fulfillment in life to—**“Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled—He must increase, but I must decrease.” (v.29-30)**

One pastor put it well—

“Like John, we must get out of the way and talk to people about Jesus, focus our attention on Him, and live for the purpose of sharing Him. In other words, we must decrease. If I don't pull in a big salary, so be it. If I don't play for the Forty-Niners, so be it. If I don't have a nice house, I don't care. I must decrease so that I can be about the business of sharing Him. Jesus said, “If you die to self, you'll find life” (see Matthew 10:39). Therefore, the more we spend on our hobbies, pursuits, and pleasures, the more miserable we'll be. But the more we say, “I must decrease and He must increase,” the more clearly we'll hear His voice and the greater our joy will be.”

There are 3 ‘must’ statements that John 3 (one of the greatest chapters in the Bible) is built around—

1. The ‘must’ of the sinner—“*You must be born again.*” (v.7)

2. The ‘must’ of the Savior—“*the Son of Man must be lifted up*” (v.14)

And now the third great must statement emerges—

3. The ‘must’ of the servant—“*He must increase, but I must decrease*” (v.30)

Why is this so important? Why should people follow what Jesus says?

Well John answers that in the remainder of the chapter—

John 3:31 (NKJV)

³¹ **He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all.**

John is saying that he is just an earthly man (not from above)—a citizen of earth, who can only speak about earthly things.

Whereas, Jesus is from above; a teacher who came from the Father, who was Himself in perfect fellowship with the Father, and who alone is qualified to speak on behalf of the Father.

John 3:32 (NKJV)

³² **And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony.**

This is a sad statement with regard to the world in general and Israel in particular and their rejection of Jesus as their Messiah and Savior—

John 1:10-11 (NKJV)

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.

¹¹ He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.

John 3:11 (NKJV)

¹¹ Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. [Jesus, the Father and the Holy Spirit]

John 3:33-34 (NKJV)

³³ He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true. ³⁴ For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure.

In other words, the Father has fully poured out the Holy Spirit on His Son without limit and therefore He has been equipped to fully proclaim all that the Father has sent the Son to speak—in contrast to the previous prophets.

John 3:36 (NKJV)

³⁶ He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." (Comment)

Getting back to our original question—how could a guy like John who lived in the wilderness with none of the comforts that most of us think are essential for a life of joy and fulfillment—how could he ever attain a life like that?

Because he kept his life simple and unencumbered by worldly cares.

He made introducing people to Jesus his life's work, because it was the purpose for which God created him.

He lived his life by one simple maxim—*"He must increase, but I must decrease"*. (Finish)