

John 3:22-30 (NIV)

- 22 After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized.
- 23 Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized.
- 24 (This was before John was put in prison.)
- 25 An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing.
- 26 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—well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him."
- 27 To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven.
- 28 You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.'
- 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.
- 30 He must become greater; I must become less.

43-03-01-Religious Distractions from Jesus
 leadership, prophets, preachers, division, Christ's supremacy
 John 3:22-30

Our central focus is to be on Jesus, not on religious peripherals.

INTRODUCTION: (text as Scripture reading)

–**Title. HOM.idea.** Even *preachers* distract us through *their failures* or *successes*. [**Bad stories:** people who stopped going to church, because a minister who embezzled church funds, or had an affair, or started a cult.] *John the Baptist* had *preacher success!* Yet, inadvertently it distracted from Christ. He tried preparing people for the Messiah, but his disciples had a wrong focus both on religious peripherals and on their leader's charisma.

- I. A Wrong Focus on Peripherals— v.22-23,** *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.*
- A. *Baptism shows inner cleansing.* (But if made *central*, it can cause a *conflict over a peripheral— v.25, An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing.*)
- B. *Peripheral conflicts can be a central focus.* (Earlier the focus was on *fasting— Mark 2:18,* Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?" Areas of conflict over baptism, fasting, how to worship... can be endless!)
- C. Shifts in popularity are also a cause of *peripheral conflict— v.26,* "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." (If Jesus is the central focus, popularity doesn't matter – "Praise God if the church down the street is better attended than ours!")

TRANS: How to *baptize, whether to fast or not,* who's most *popular—* these are *peripherals.* But there was a deeper problem. *After all John's preaching, some of his disciples stayed "John's disciples," because of...*

- II. A Wrong Attachment to a Charismatic Leader— v.26,** "Rabbi, that man...—the one you testified about—...everyone is going to him.")
- A. John's disciples were allegiant to John, because...

1. John was *charismatic* (gifted in preaching)— Mat 3:5, People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan.
 2. He was *strong* (softening his message for no one)— Mat 3:7-8. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.”
 3. He was *bold* (confronting sin in high places—preaching against an adulterous king, and lost his life because of his boldness).
- B. What a strong leader! What a great preacher! They probably felt proud and privileged to say, “I’m a disciple of John the Baptist.”
1. BUT what did John preach? Mat 3:2, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” (He did not preach himself but God’s Kingdom.)
 2. AND, what was John’s identity? Mat 3:3, “A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord...’” (He wasn’t the attraction, but a loud-speaker announcing the attraction: Christ’s arrival!)
- C. Instead of Kingdom disciples, why did they stay “John’s disciples,”?
1. Their faith in John distracted them from transferring it to Jesus.
 2. Perhaps John had told them his later doubts— Mat 11:2-3. When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?”

TRANS: [E. S. Jones reports: “The disciples of John...’ movement persists to this day. In Iraq there is a survival of that revival under John the Baptist. They have a sacred book called the *Ginza*, have a trinity made up of the First, Second, and Third, are baptized at least once a year in a white garment, always toward the North, for the gate of heaven is in that direction, are called Sabeans or Disciples of John the Baptist. They never became Christians. I met some of the Disciples of John who are the silversmiths and the boat-builders of that land. They are completely ingrown and sterile, the obvious result of being converted to the converter.”] **Our central focus is to be on Jesus, not on religious peripherals.** “John’s disciples” followed the announcer, who was peripheral to the One he announced.

III. Jesus Is Always to Be Our Central Focus— v.27-29. *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.’ 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.*

- A. “John’s disciples” fretted over the growing Jesus Movement, BUT...
1. John knew his ministry (that it was “given him from heaven.”)

2. He knew his message: ‘I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.’
 3. He knew his mission was accomplished— v.30, “He must become greater; I must become less.”
- B. **Yet, knowing all this, John kept a following**, never insisting that his disciples leave him to become followers of Jesus. (Sadly, some who preach Christ gradually make their following their focus.)
- C. Even though John’s martyrdom set Jesus on center stage, evidently it also elevated him even higher in the eyes of the long-surviving sect of “John’s disciples.”

CONCLUSION:

—Jesus said in Mat 11:11, I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” **Why?** John, the last OT prophet, never learned of the incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension, and 2nd coming of Christ. He missed the Holy Spirit baptism brought by Jesus. “John’s disciples” were invited to receive all of these NT privileges, but, under the veil of OT vision, they got religiously distracted. They traded the central for the peripheral. It’s still temptation... even today.

—AND this is a lesson to us, from whom the OT veil has been lifted. We have the privilege and responsibility of NT eyes! So, with eyes wide open, our central focus is to be always and forever on Jesus, not on religious peripherals, which can distract us from Him.