

The Blessing of Ministry Failure

(John 3:22-30)

(preached 7/8/18; Pine Grove BC Sun AM)

Introduction

In May of this year, USA Today ran a story about televangelist Jesse Duplantis asking his followers to help fund a new jet for his ministry.

Duplantis lives in Louisiana and has been in ministry for over 40 years, but according to him, God told him that he needed a new jet.

What is wrong with the other 3 jets the he owns?

Well, none of those jets (which were also funded by his followers) has the ability to go anywhere in the world only stopping once for fuel.

And since Duplantis doesn't like the inconvenience of stopping for gas more than once, he has asked his followers to help pay for the \$54 million dollar jet that God told him he needs..

Duplantis and many other televangelists desire their own jet because commercial flights are according to them, irritating since people are always coming up to them asking for prayers when they are in public.

As a result, televangelists like him and Kenneth Copeland and Creflo Dollar and many others con people out of millions of dollars to purchase their own private planes for ministry..

First, let's be clear...

All of these men, Duplantis, Copeland, Dollar are not evangelists.

None of these men are even saved, much less pastors and preachers in the church.

Instead, these men are modern examples of the demonic empowered false teachers of the book of Jude.

Jude 1:16 describes false teacher as men who “speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage.”

I can think of no greater example of this than a man who is arrogant enough to say that God talks to him personally and tells him to ask people for \$54 million dollars to buy a 4th jet.

That is arrogance at its finest.

Now, you may laugh at such a request, but I assure you that others are not laughing.

Instead, they are pulling out their checkbooks and writing large checks to his ministry..

And the evidence of that is the 3 jets that he already owns,

But sadly, this is the state of modern day Christianity, where so called pastors are filled with so much pride that they feed on the people that they are supposedly there to help.

Now clearly, the people writing the checks get what they deserve since they dont know the Bible enough to know that these men are false teachers..

But much of the blame also falls on these con men who become celebrities to their followers..

Unfortunately, the celebrity pastor is now just confined to the televangelist world.

There are men in churches who also become objects of worship to the people in the church.

These men also are a stain on what should be the pure bride of Christ..

They also let their egos get the best of them as they rise above their people...

The ultimate example of this in the history of the church is the Pope..

A man just like all of us in need of forgiveness but who claims to speak for God and claims to be closer to God than the people in the Catholic church..

The sad truth about all these men is that they all claim to know the Bible, yet none of them have apparently read the parts about what is required of someone in ministry...

Because nowhere in the Scriptures is a pastor supposed to be higher than the people he serves.

Jesus washed his disciples feet, and though that is an example to every Christian in terms of humility, it is especially an example to all men who claim to be ministers of the gospel.

If anyone deserves to be elevated over his followers, it was Christ.

Yet, he stooped down to serve them...

The same was true of Paul, who saw himself as the worst of sinners and the lowest of workers in terms of preaching the gospel..

But there may be no greater example of humility in ministry than what we are going to see this morning in John 3:22-30...

Let's read this passage together, and then we will dig into it a little deeper to apply it to our hearts..

John 3:22-30..

22 After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing. 23 John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and people were coming and were being baptized — 24 for John had not yet been thrown into prison. 25 Therefore there arose a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew 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 him from heaven. 28 You yourselves [g]are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the [h]Christ,' but, 'I have been sent ahead of 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. So this joy of mine has been made full. 30 He must increase, but I must decrease.

For the last 3 weeks, we looked at John 3:1-21, which is a monumental section in the book of John..

Now remember, John was inspired by God to write every word of his gospel, and he had one purpose.

He was trying to convince his readers that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing in Him, they could find eternal life in his name..

And so every word, every phrase, every verse, every scene, every chapter is put here as proof that Jesus is in fact God in the flesh..

He is the Son of God but he is also God as well...

He was with God and He is God.

This is who Jesus is.

And John began his gospel by offering human testimonies about the identity of Christ..

John testified that Jesus was the Messiah, he recorded John the Baptist's testimony that Jesus was the Messiah.

He wrote about the first followers of Jesus and their testimony that Jesus was the Messiah..

Then in chapter 2, John offered proof that Jesus was God by showing his authority over nature in turning water into wine..

He showed his authority over the temple when Jesus was able to miraculously clear it out with just a whip.

And then that brought us to the first part of chapter 3 where John wanted us to see Jesus as God in terms of his authority over how a person is saved.

Jesus defined salvation as work of God where a person is born again by the power of God alone which leads them to believe in Christ.

And now as we come to the second part of John 3, John is going to offer additional proof that Jesus is God by more testimony from John the Baptist...

In the verses we will see today, John the Baptist is going to testify to the deity of Christ by offering his submission to Him...

And then next week, John the Baptist will testify to the deity of Christ by elevation of Christ...

So submission to Christ this week and elevation of Christ next week...

Let's jump into this by taking a closer look at verses 22-26, which we will call...

I. The Seduction of Jealousy (22-26)

In verse 22, we see that Jesus and his disciples came into the land of Judea...

If you look at the map of Israel in Jesus' day, you are reminded that Israel was similar to how we define our own state of SC.

We have the upstate, the midlands, and the low country..

Israel had Galilee in the north, Samaria in the middle, and Judea in the south..

Jesus grew for about 30 years in Nazareth which is in Galilee in the north...

Once the time had come to begin his public ministry, he traveled south along the Jordan River where he was baptized by John in a little place known as Bethany..

After that, he went back north and performed his miracle in Cana in Galilee as he turned water into wine..

But then he came back south for the Passover, and we have been reading about his actions in and around Jerusalem...

So, he has been in the region known as Judea since he arrived in Jerusalem, but now he heads out into the Judean countryside with his disciples..

His interaction with the religious leaders of Israel is over for now..

His teaching of Nicodemus under the cover of darkness is over, and he takes his disciples into the rural areas of Judea...

Now what was happening during this excursion out of the city?

Well, verse 22 simple says that Jesus was spending time with his disciples and baptizing...

Now, a couple notes here..

#1 - Jesus is a teacher at heart and his early followers had much to learn and I think it is safe to say that Jesus was teaching from the OT..

Probably continuing to prove his identity to them from the OT and also preparing them for ministry since he will be killed in a few years and the ministry of Christianity will fall to them..

But also note #2 that Jesus was baptizing.

We learn later that Jesus do the baptizing himself but left that to the disciples..

He would have simply been preaching and his disciples would have been taking care of those responding to his message..

Now, an important thing to note is this...

This is not the baptism of the NT church.

The baptisms that we practice today are symbolic pictures of what?

Well, baptism today is a picture of the death and resurrection of Christ..

A person stands in the water which is symbolic of their life before believing the gospel..

They are submerged in the water which symbolizes their death to sin, and they rise which symbolizes their new life in Christ..

But as Jesus and his disciples are baptizing, they are doing in before the death and resurrection of Jesus, so this isn't Christian baptism..

It was just like the baptism that John the Baptist had been doing in the wilderness..

It was simply a symbolic baptism of repentance as people prepared their hearts for the Messiah by ridding their lives of sin...

It wasn't so much identifying with Christ as it was preparing for Christ.

It just so happens that the Christ they were looking for it the Christ that was preaching to them...

So Jesus would preach and identify himself as that Messiah and people would be baptized as they looked forward to his sacrifice for their sins...

They were symbolically washing their sins away because they believed that He would forever wash their sins away...

Now while that is going on in the Judean countryside, we read this in verse 23 and 24...

23 John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and people were coming and were being baptized— 24 for John had not yet been thrown into prison.

Though John the Baptist has been preaching and baptizing before Jesus arrived, he continues to preach and baptize even after Jesus arrives and even after he had baptized Jesus..

Now this is nothing unusual....

Both John the Baptist and Jesus are preaching the same message..

They are both pointing to the same Messiah, so both continued to preach since there were many in Israel who needed to hear...

This is similar to churches today...

We both preach the same gospel and we both call call to repent and believe in the same Christ, so we both keep on doing what we do because there are a lot of people in the world today who need to hear...

And so Jesus' preaching and baptizing is occurring at the same time as John the Baptist's preaching and baptizing...

Now, no one is quite sure where Aenon near Salim was located.

Some see this area as the city of Shechem in the OT, which would put it in the middle area of Israel known as Samaria.

Aenon is simply a word that means springs...

So wherever it was, John the Baptist and his disciples were preaching and baptizing nears the springs of Salim..

Now all you baptists take note that John set up shop there because there was much water there..

In other words, biblical baptism requires much water since it is baptism by immersion..

On the other hand, you don't need much water if you are simply sprinkling or pouring on the head..

Biblical baptism is baptism by immersion, and that is what John the Baptist was doing along with Jesus..

Now at this point in the scene all is well.

The gospel is being preached by Jesus and by John the Baptist and people are responding...

But then we read this in verses 25-26...

25 Therefore there arose a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew 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."

Now, we aren't sure what happened in verse 25..

It seems that a Jew came to John the Baptist and his disciples with a question about purification..

Now purification in this era was equal to baptism...

In other words, a Jew came to John the Baptist and his disciples with a question about their baptism..

And though we can't be sure what the discussion was about, it is likely that someone had gone to Jesus and been baptized by his disciples and then came to John and simply asked..

What are you guys doing up here baptizing people?

Jesus' preaching and baptism is the only one that counts..

Now, we can't know for sure that is what the discussion was about but it is a safe assumption because of what we see in verse 26, where John the Baptist's disciples seem to a little jealous of what Jesus is doing...

They tell him, “Look, John everyone is going to Jesus to hear him and be baptized by him.”

Now, that was an exaggeration because John the Baptist was still preaching and baptizing, but I am sure that many more were going to Jesus since John was pointing them to him...

I can picture John the Baptist calling for people to repent and be baptized...

And then telling them that Messiah had come and he was even in Israel now preaching and baptizing...

Can you imagine how quickly folks would leave Salim and head out for Jesus?

It would be like me preaching about the glories of Christ and then ending the service by telling people that Jesus was preaching in Columbia tonight...

It would be a ghost town around here and rightfully so..

But even when John the Baptist is okay with Jesus getting all the glory and all the crowds, some of the people around John the Baptist aren't okay with it...

SO they are trying to incite John the Baptist to jealously here..

Look, John, our church is shrinking brother...

Everyone is headed down to Jesus' church.

We cant' keeping pointing people to him or we will be finished..

Isn't this how the sin of envy often works..

You may not be jealous of someone...

You may not be envious of what they have..

But then here comes one of your friends and a simple comment makes your inside turn green with envy..

This is jealousy grows..

It is in all of our hearts...

All it needs is a little water from someone's comments and before we know it, our pride has erupted and our humility and happiness for others is gone...

This is the seduction of jealousy...

It is lying in wait in our heart and all it needs is the little nudge of a friend...

So how will John the Baptist respond?

Let's turn to the....

II. Solution to Jealousy (27-28)

Verse 27...

27 John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven.

Jesus called John the Baptist the greatest man that ever lived, and that was mainly because of the job given to Him to announce the arrival of Jesus..

But we also see more evidence of John the Baptist's greatness here in verse 27...

John the Baptist realizes what we all should realize, and that is this.

Nothing we have and nothing anyone else has is due to anything that we have done..

All that we have and all that everyone else has is a result of God giving it to them...

Sometimes the rich get richer and though the money is from heaven, it is not a blessing but a curse...

Many people prosper but their prosperity is a judgment.

It actually leads their hearts away from God..

They move from depending on Him to depending on themselves, and that is a guaranteed way to miss heaven...

Look, John the Baptist understands that his ministry is all a grace of God..

Job said that the Lord and the Lord takes and it the end all he could is bless God in plenty and in want..

John the Baptist had the same mentality about ministry.

If it was God's plan for his ministry to shrink, it would shrink and he would praise God for it..

Besides, people leaving him and flocking to Jesus was the plan...

Look at what he says in verse 28..

28 You yourselves [g]are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the [h]Christ,' but, 'I have been sent ahead of Him.'

In other words, John the Baptist's mission was to point people to Christ..

So when people head for Christ, he was successful in fulfilling what God called him to do...

Look, my job is to preach the word so that the lost are saved and the saved grow to maturity..

In fact, I hope to see someone at Pine Grove grow to a point that God calls them away to a mission field, to a seminary, to a place where they can proclaim the gospel..

In fact, good churches shrink as people are trained well and called away...

One of my favorite seminary professors was fiery Hispanic man named Alex Montoya...

He would come into chapel and he would tell every student there to get busy and get to work and get out of seminary as quickly as possible...

You see seminary is a wonderful place for men training for ministry...

Yes, the papers are long.

The reading is incredible..

But for men who love the Lord, the time is such a blessing..

You can read and study and hear from Bible scholars,
and men have a tendency to take their time..

Some even stay for years just soaking up all the
incredible training...

Well, Dr. Montoya would come into chapel and in his
fiery Spanish accent he would say...

You boys need to get out of this place...

This seminary doesn't need you..

This church doesn't need your attendance...

WE are big enough...

The Lord needs you and the world needs you...

So get to work so that you can get out..

If this church keeps growing, I will throw you out
myself..

Get in, get to work, get out, and I will be glad to watch
you leave.

You see that's the mindset of John the Baptist...

He isn't jealous to keep followers...

He wants people to go to Christ, to love Christ, to obey Christ..

Ministry for John the Baptist is not about size, it is about people loving and following Christ...

SO he is happy to watch them go to Christ..

Verse 29 is a great illustration of John the Baptist's heart..

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. So this joy of mine has been made full.

At a wedding, only two people can be the bride and the groom..

Everyone else there is in a supporting role...

The pastor is there to conduct the wedding.

The photographer is there to record the wedding.

The attendants are there to witness the wedding.

The bridesmaids and matron of honor support the bride...

The groomsman and best man are there to support the groom..

John the Baptist was the best man for Jesus.

IT was his job to announce his arrival and to make sure that Jesus looked good for the world...

John the Baptist wasn't the groom, so the spotlight was never his..

He was simply happy to watch Jesus arrive and then watch some folks in Israel flock to Him..

In fact, he was happy and filled with joy that his ministry was fading in the background...

And that the groom had arrived and was getting all the attention...

And then he utters a phrase in verse 30 that should be hanging on all your refrigerator doors...

30 He must increase, but I must decrease.

Those are the words of truly humble heart...

The proud heart says this..

I must increase and everyone around me must decrease..

The proud heart wants all the attention, but the humble heart wants all the attention on Christ..

Conclusion

Is that your heart today?

Do you set out every morning to make Christ bigger and you less?

Does he own more of your life everyday, while you own less?

Do you seek to make his name bigger everyday or do you seek to make your name known everyday?

Is your day centered on taking his name to others or is it centered on making your name is gets the spotlight?

Though I am on social media, I try to warn others of the dangers of it simply because social media often become a place for our pride to be expressed.

There is nothing wrong with the proper use of social media, but we must be careful that it is not a platform for us to increase our exposure to the world...

Let me tell you something...

John the Baptist was fine that Jesus had 1000 likes on his page while John only got 25...

Because John the Baptist understood that ministry was never about him.

It was all about the glory of Christ being taken to the world..

And the same is true in ministry today..

There is no room for jealousy in the church.

My job, your job is to go and make disciples of all the nations..

If God uses you to save 4000 and me to save 4, I am content with either.

John the Baptist was content to let his ministry sink to the bottom if that meant Christ rose to the top, and that is the attitude of all true preachers of the Word.

But it should also be the attitude of all true believers as well.

This life is not about making your name great.

So repent of your jealousy of others.

Repent of your envy at what others have or possess.

Repent of your desire to see your name exalted.

And make it your goal every day to see the name of Christ elevated by something you do that day.

Someone once said that it sad to see all the effort that people put forth to make a name for themselves, and the first place that their name goes public is on their tombstone.

Don't let that be true of you..

If no one ever knows your name, make sure that they know the name of Christ..

Let us pray.