

Exegetical Notes, John 3:22-35

“I Must Become Less”

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John 3:22-35

Verse 22

After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized.

- Following Jesus’ encounter with Nicodemus, Jesus went off alone with his disciples to spend some time with them. Most likely, this was a time when he taught them and prepared them to be his disciples.
- At this time, Jesus’ disciples (see John 4:2) began to baptize. Jews practiced immersion baptism as a sign of repentance from sin and conversion to Judaism.

Verses 23-24

Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were coming and being baptized.²⁴ (This was before John was put in prison.)

- John the Baptist was in a different place (Jesus was in Judea. John was in Samaria) but, like Jesus’ disciples he was also baptizing as a sign of repentance and conversion.

Verse 25

An argument developed between some of John’s disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing.

- John’s disciples were debating the baptism which John was doing and its purpose with an unnamed Jewish man. The nature of the debate, like the man’s name, is unknown.

Verse 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—look, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him.”

- During the debate John’s disciples learned that Jesus’ disciples were also baptizing. This concerned them because they saw Jesus as being in competition with John. So they brought the information to John.

Verses 27-30

To this John replied, “A person can receive only what is given them from heaven.²⁸ You yourselves can testify that I said, ‘I am not the Messiah 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.”

- First, John responded to his disciples’ concern by reminding them of his own position. He was NOT the Messiah. He WAS the best man at the wedding whose job was to attend the bridegroom, who was Jesus. His joy was in seeing and adding to the joy of the groom.
- John said that he was not the subject of the events unfolding, Jesus was. So, as Jesus became more prominent, he must become less so.

Verses 31-35

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.³² He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony.³³ Whoever has accepted it has certified that God is truthful.³⁴ For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit.³⁵ The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands.

- Second, John tells his disciples who Jesus is. Jesus is “the one who comes from above,” the Messiah of God. Jesus is “the one to whom the earth belongs.” Jesus is “the one who comes from heaven.” Jesus is the one who “testifies” to what he, himself, has heard directly from the Father and even though “no one accepts Jesus’ testimony,” he who does accept it knows that Jesus’ words are truthful and come directly from the Father.
- John told his disciples that the Holy Spirit was with Jesus in full measure. This was because Jesus was entirely free from sinful behavior. He could know the full blessing of the Holy Spirit’s power as has no other human because there was no sin in him to fight with and block the flow of the Spirit.
- John said that the Father had placed everything in Jesus’ hands.

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