



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

John 3:22-30

“The Secret of Joy”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Well we are studying the Gospel of John and we're asking that you turn with me to John chapter 3 verse 22 through verse 30,

“After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized. And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized. For John was not yet cast into prison. Then there arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying. (Now if you have a modern version of the New Testament you probably notice that the editors of your text have preferred the reading which has singular, a Jew rather than the Jews. So this was evidently one Jewish person who provoked a discussion with some of John's disciples and in the course of the discussion pointed out to John's disciples that men were following Jesus now more than they were following John. And so the disciples of John provoked by that came to John about it, verse 26 we continue reading.) And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him. (This is incidentally one of the many places in the New Testament where the word all does not refer to everyone, but rather is probably a bit of hyperbole.) John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness that I said, I am not the

Messiah, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his word. The subject for today and the exposition of the Gospel of John is, “The secret of joy.” What is the secret of Joy? I would imagine that if we were to ask individuals in this audience “What is the secret of joy?” The great majority of you would [think of a] day that has something to do at least with our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. For probably the great majority of you in this audience are Christians, genuine believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The world thinks of the secret of joy quite differently. If you were to ask the world, “What is the secret of joy?” Some might say, well financial success, that’s the secret of joy, to have the assurance of sufficient finances to support me. To have sufficient hope with reference to the future then that’s spiritual joy. It’s striking that when you turn to the Bible, the person who probably is the greatest illustration of spiritual joy is the Lord Jesus Christ. He said, “These things have I spoken unto you that my joy remain in you and that your joy might be full.” But did the Lord Jesus have financial resources that produced this joy? Well no, the Bible says with reference to him, his own words, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head.” Evidently in the case of our Lord, his joy did not rest in the fact that he had financial success.

Perhaps personal success is the source of joy, to have a wife, to have children, to have a happy home life. That represents true joy. Well the Lord Jesus again is the person who illustrates most adequately, joy, did he have personal success? Did he have a wife? Did he have children? No, in fact, the Bible says he didn’t have. “He was taken from prison and from judgment and who shall declare his generation? For he was cut off out of the land of the living, for the transgression of my

people was he stricken.” Believers of course know why the Lord Jesus did not have a family and did not have children, but it’s obvious that the joy that he speaks about is not dependent upon that.

Well, could it be social success, to have friends? A lot of young people particularly think that to be popular is the source of success. If I could be sure that I was popular with my friends then would I not have joy? And as an adult if I had friends, and if I had the assurance of the support of those who were my peers, would I not have true joy? Well, let’s take a look at our Lord again, did he have social success? Well the Scriptures say in his own words again, “But this cometh to pass that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, they hated me without a cause.” Our Lord had very few friends, and even those that were his friends, in the moment of his greatest human need, they abandoned him. You wouldn’t say that he had social success.

Well could it be related to something religious? We read “when the chief priest therefore and the officers saw him, they cried out saying, crucify him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, take ye him and crucify him, for I find no fault in him. So evidently our Lord did not have what we would call religious success. He was a person who was crucified by the religious leaders of the day. So if we were to say the secret of joy is to have peer approval, no, it’s not that. To have financial security, no, it’s not that. To have religious success, no, it’s not that.

Well, your talking about Jesus, he’s different. Let’s take the Apostle Paul, did he have financial success? Well first, did Paul rejoice and joy in things? Oh yes, he speaks about joy. He says, “What then notwithstanding every way whether in pretense or in truth Christ is preached and in that I do rejoice, yea and will rejoice.” And to the Philippians again he says, “Fulfill ye my joy that ye be like minded having the same love being of one accord, of one mind.” He’s the man who wrote the epistle of joy, the Epistle to the Philippians. Well did he have financial success? Well, I don’t think so, I don’t really think that he had a portfolio of common stocks and bonds and a pension of which he was assured and other sources of income and he certainly was not on social security although that may not give you much security these days. He didn’t have financial success, he said, “Even under this present hour, we both hunger and thirst and are naked and are buffeted and have

no certain dwelling place.” He didn’t even have a residence to which he could come after his ministry. He couldn’t say, well I’m coming home to 13642 Ash Ridge, that’s my home after I’ve been out on the apostolic preaching trail.

Did he have personal success? Well, he said, “For I would that all men were even as I myself, but every man has his proper gift of God, one after this manner and another after that.” He was not married and he didn’t have any children, so he didn’t have that kind of success and yet he had joy.

Did he have social success? Everybody liked Paul; he was the most popular man wherever he was. Ah, Paul wasn’t like that, as a matter of fact, near the end of his days, he said in 2 Timothy chapter 4 verse 11, “Only Luke is with me, take Mark and bring him with you for he’s profitable for me for the ministry.” Why do you know that even men who were preaching Christ didn’t like Paul. He said in Philippians chapter 1 that men were preaching Christ out of envy, out of strife. He had enemies in the church that he founded. In Corinth, they were after his neck. And yet at the same time, the apostle was joyous in the things of God.

So he didn’t have, he didn’t even have religious success. We read in Acts chapter 21 verse 28, “Crying out, men of Israel help, this is the man that teaches all men everywhere against the people and the law and this place, and furthermore brought Greeks also into the temple and has polluted this holy place.” So the religious leaders were after the neck of the Apostle Paul too, and finally got him took him to Rome as a prisoner, and finally if tradition is true, he was put to death.

Evidently, these two joyous men, the Lord Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul had a source of joy that is not found in finances or in a personal relationship to his family or his relationship to his friends about him or even in relationship to the churchianity of their day. Somehow or other, joy is found in other places. I read a long time ago about George William Curtis. One of his works he had a man by the name of Mr. Tidbottom, and Mr. Tidbottom had a pair of spectacles that were most unusual. If you looked in Mr. Tidbottom’s spectacles, if you put them on and looked at people, you could see them exactly as they are the fundamental fact about that person. So, when someone put on

Mr. Tidbottom’s spectacles and looked at a man, he would see a billiard ball or a billiard cue. That man’s whole life was billiards, and so when you looked at him, you’d see the billiard cue. And then when you looked at another man Mr. Curtis said, through Mr. Tidbottom’s spectacles, you saw a ledger. Now he was evidently a man who was concerned with his finances. And then if you looked at another man you saw a wine goblet. He was a man who tiddled.

Now if you’d looked at me when I was nineteen years of age do you know what you would have seen? Golf ball, Mr. Tidbottom’s spectacles would have revealed a golf ball because my whole life from morning to night was golf. I got up in the morning, in the summertime when we could play all day. In the first place, I was in South Carolina going to college because of golf. All of my friends went north to Virginia, Yale, Harvard, Princeton, but I would not go because you couldn’t play golf the year round, so I stayed in Charleston. And I played golf every afternoon after college; after classes were over I was at the golf course at the country club. And then in the summer time I was there from the morning through to the night. I often played thirty-six holes a day, sometimes forty-five. I was a golf ball. This morning by the way I was talking with someone afterwards said, “Do you know if you looked at me do you know what you’d find?” I said, “Yes I know.” I said, “A fishing pole.” And he said, “That’s right, that’s what I told my wife when you said that in the audience, if he looked at me he’d find a fishing pole.”

Christianity claims to contain the secret of joy according to the Bible, in fact it commands it of the disciples. There is a man who’s preaching I’ve heard quite a bit who in one of his writings speaks about the miserable Christianity that is a contradiction in terms because it’s a ludicrous caricature of the real thing. And then he says, “Away with sepulcher sanctimoniousness, a religion which wears grave clothes, begs to be buried, and the sooner the funeral the better. Joy, we recognize is something that comes ultimately from the spiritual relationship that we enjoy with the Lord Jesus Christ with the Triune God. The Lord Jesus enjoyed the relationship perfectly as the Son of God. The Apostle Paul is one of the great illustrations of the secret of joy.

John the Baptist also gives us a most significant clue to spiritual joy, and it's found right in this passage here. It's striking is it not that after the description of the encounter of the Lord with Nicodemus suddenly the John the Baptist comes back on the scene, suggesting to us that these opening references to Jesus' ministry are references that relate to the ministry of John the Baptist, probably because the disciples were beginning to be gathered to the Lord Jesus and they came from John the Baptist's disciples. The time is spoken of in verse 22 we read, “After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judea and there he tarried with them and baptized.” So this is before he returned to Galilee, when he found out that John had been thrown in prison, the Lord knew of course that his public ministry as Messiah was to begin, but this is before that time. And now he's carrying on a private ministry, John the Baptist is the forerunner, he's baptizing in view of the coming one.

This incident that is referred to here happened near the juncture of Samaria, Perea and Decapolis. And one of the reasons that John was there at Aenon near Salim, the Lord Jesus in the vicinity too was because there was much water there. We know that near a place, Bison which may be in that general area, there are seven springs, and so it may be that's the place and that's of course the reason why they were there. That may give us a little hint too as to the mode of baptism that was practiced. One would think you would not need to have much water if one were simply sprinkling. But if immersion was the mode of baptism which they practiced, then the fact that there was much water there would be reason why they were gathered in that vicinity. But we don't think that's the important thing, I just comment on that as we go along.

We read that our Lord was baptizing there. Now that's a startling thing in the light of what is said in chapter 4 verse 2 when we read, “Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples.” I'm sure that if these two statements had been in different gospels, here Jesus baptized, and then Jesus didn't baptized, if that had been in another gospel, then the critics reading the Gospel of John and the other gospel would say, you see here is another one of the contradictions in the Bible. But even the critics cannot bring themselves to say this is a contradiction because the two statements are

so close together. And the author of the book would surely not contradict himself in such a short compass of writing. The reason that John puts it this way is that evidently the disciples themselves were performing the act, but Jesus Christ was taking the responsibility for it. So they were his agents in the performance of the acts of Baptism, and so it could be said that he baptized and it could be said that he did not baptize but they were baptizing because they were baptizing under his authority and direction.

Now since there were a lot of people interested in spiritual things at the time, and a strange thing was happening, John the Baptist had been extremely popular remember and he had testified to a coming one. And now people were moving away from John and were following this coming one. Now one of the Jewish men perhaps a Pharisee, we don't really know, it's just simply said to be a Jew. He went to John's disciples who were also Jews and he said to them, they got into a discussion over cleansing and they had a discussion over the significance of that, perhaps because our Lord didn't follow always the Jewish prescriptions for cleansing that were not found in Holy Scripture. All the things in Holy Scripture our Lord kept perfectly of course.

But they had this dispute over these things, and then evidently, this Jewish man goaded John's disciples by saying, look, the fellow to whom your master bore witness, he's over there baptizing, and everybody's going after him now, how do you explain that? And your master's losing disciples, your crowd is dwindling. How do you explain that? And they didn't know how to explain it so they went to John and they said, “Look, the person to whom you bore witness,” there's a great deal of emphasis in verse 26 on the word thou, “To whom thou bearest witness, behold the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.” So they're disturbed by it, they don't understand what's happening and so they go to John.

Now I want you to know, this was not an easy thing for John the Baptist. The first place, John had been a very popular preacher. When he appeared on the scene, what a strange character he was. Incidentally, he didn't have the things that made for spiritual joy either. He didn't go in his closet every morning before he left for work and say, “Now what shall I wear today? The brown, the

brown plaid, the brown stripes, the gray, the gray stripes, the blue, shall I wear my plaid sport coat, my Harris Tweed? No, every morning he went in his closet and he got out his camel’s hair, every morning. And it was not made by R. Shafton Marks either, it was just an old camel’s hair cloak. That’s all he had, and he had a leather belt that he put around himself. And he didn’t sit down and say, “I’d like scrambled eggs this morning please, poached eggs tomorrow, bacon also, fruit cup, cantaloupe.” He had locusts and wild honey, that’s all. Strange person, you can see how he was popular.

This fellow just came out of the desert, preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit, in fact Judea and all Jerusalem, in fact all the country round about went out to hear John. Soldiers, Pharisees and Sadducees, a sprinkling of all the people in Jerusalem went out to hear this strange person and he had had tremendous success because they were being baptized in the Jordan River, receiving his baptism of repentance for the confession of sin and they were confessing their sins and they were being baptized by John and a great number of people were being prepared for the coming of the King, he’d had great success, great results.

It had been a sacrifice for John, he’d left family and home and the comforts of life. Others in his family had the comforts of life but not John, he grew up in the deserts, he was a man who sought the face of God. But now he’s faced with the sadness of disciples who are leaving him and following another man. Now, I happen to be a preacher, I know how John must have felt because preachers feel very keenly at times when people leave them and go to hear someone else. And so John sees his crowd dwindling, they’re trickling off to hear someone else. So what about it they say to him, the one to whom you bear witness, he’s baptizing and all men are coming to him, everybody is going over to hear him. Now that was a hyperbole, not everybody was. I say as an illustration of the fact that “all” in the Bible doesn’t always mean “all” just as world doesn’t always mean world in the sense of every single individual without exception.

What’s John going to say to this? He’s a great man, he’s a great man filled with joy, for he’ll say in a moment, “This, my joy, therefore is fulfilled.” Now, in his reply you’ll notice there are two

emphases, and we’re just going to talk about the one emphasis today. The one emphasis in verse 27 through verse 30 is on John. But in verse 31 and following the emphasis is on he, “He that cometh from above is above all.” But we’ll leave that for next week, the Lord willing.

In what John says to this request is found it seems to me one of the significant clues to the secret of spiritual joy in our lives. Now listen to what he says again. He says first of all,

“A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. (He said) You bear witness yourself that I said I’m not the Messiah, I said, I’m one sent before him. (And now he illustrates, he says,) the person that has the bride is the bridegroom: the friend of the bridegroom, he stands by and hears him, and he rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom, this my joy therefore is fulfilled.”

He said in effect, the very thing that is vexing you is the reason I’m happy. The fact that they’re leaving me and they’re following him, that makes me happy. The very thing that makes you sad is the thing that makes me happy. Now the general principle is important. No man can receive anything except it be given him from heaven. How important that principle is, no man can receive anything except it be given to him by Heaven. He denies it’s in his power to make himself great, he denies it’s in their power to make him great because the stature of us all is precisely that which God wants us to be. Now I do not think there is a single person in this auditorium who hasn’t wanted to be something more than what you are. As a preacher I can remember when I would often to myself say, “Oh if I could just preach like Dr. Barnhouse or if I could just teach like Dr. Chafer.” But John says, a man can receive nothing except it be given him from Heaven. It’s not in our power to make us anything other than what God wanted us to be. He has something precisely for each one of us.

Now you know that’s a broad principle that pertains to a lot of the things that have to do with our most ultimate concerns. Augustine was a great man of course in so many ways. And Augustine said in one of his works on predestination, he said,

“You know I used to think that all of the blessings of life came from my faith. And he said, I thought that I was responsible for my faith and he said, I read a statement in Ciprium, (who was another father who preceded him. He said,) I read a statement in Ciprium, and Ciprium said, we couldn’t have anything that was not given us by God. (And he said,) You know that started me thinking. And my thoughts came to 1 Corinthians chapter 4 and verse 7 where the Apostle Paul writes something quite similar. For Paul there writes, ‘What do you have that you haven’t received? And if you’ve received it, why are you boasting in it as if you’re the source’ [Indistinct] What do we have that we have not received? (Then he said,) I began to see that all of my blessings came from God and even my faith which I thought was the source of all of my blessing which was mine, I really saw it as not mine but as something given me by God.”

And out of that insight, that came to Augustine, came ultimately the Protestant Reformation and its great stress upon the primacy of sovereign grace. Well John is saying much the same thing. “A man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven.” Augustine, you should have paid attention to that text too. It teaches the same thing. We do not have anything that does not come from God. In other words, as another great scholar has said, “He denies it’s in his power or theirs to make him great, because the stature of us all is that we are what God wanted us to be.” That’s one of the great and important things for us to learn. It’s one of the great and important things for us to learn so that we will be satisfied with what God has made us. He has something special for each one of us. That’s what we’re to be, not someone else, but just what God wants us to be.

Now then, the general principle has personal application, and John makes the personal application to himself. He says, “You’ll remember that I said I’m not the Messiah, all I’ve said is that I was the ambassador of the Messiah, I was sent before him.” Now he uses an illustration that’s amusing to me because it’s hard for me to think of John as a best man. Can you think of John the Baptist in the auditorium here in a wedding and here is the groom who appears who is in his tuxedo or formal dress. And the ladies are in their formal dresses and the groomsmen are in their formal

dress. And you look over at the best man and there he is in camel's hair skin and a leather belt about him. So he likens himself to that. He says, “He that hath the bride is the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom.” Now the friend of the bridegroom was the friend of the groom who kept contact between the bride and the groom during the period of the betrothal. Remember marriages were made by parents. That may be why marriages then lasted a bit longer, who knows. But at any rate, the betrothal took place before the marriage and they were regarded legally as married and then there had to be contact, but the friend of the bridegroom was the person who made contact between the groom and the bride. And in fact when the time came for the marriage feast and they were to live together, it was the friend of the bridegroom who accompanied the groom to the house of the bride or accompanied the bride to the house of the groom, introduced them and generally presided at the marriage feast. So John likens himself to the friend of the bridegroom, something like our best man.

Now what he's thinking about of course is something that is theological. He's thinking about the Lord as the Messiah, he's thinking about Israel the nation as being the bride, he's thinking about the Lord therefore as the groom. And he's in effect saying, “I'm the forerunner of the Messiah, I'm announcing that the bridegroom has come and that the bride is going to be united to the bridegroom. So John then likens himself to the one who is announcing to Israel the fact that her bridegroom has come and that she's to be united to him. And he's calling individuals to spiritual preparation for that great marriage. The Old Testament speaks quite a bit about Israel being the wife of Yahweh, and so he speaks against that background.

John is remember, one who said, “Repent for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand.” And the Lord Jesus at the same time is giving that same message. So what their talking about is the union of Israel with the Messianic King promised in the Old Testament. Remember this is John the Baptist speaking not the Apostle Paul, so the thought of the church is not yet very clear.

Now having said all of that, John, having added also, “I'm happy in this because I see what is taking place as being the fulfillment of my task.” He says in verse 30, “He must increase but I must

decrease.” Now this is the vital conclusion of all that John’s talking about and I’d like to spend just a few moments on it because these simple words, “He must increase but I must decrease,” seven little words, are extremely important for understanding the source of joy.

First of all, John knows Jesus’ place. “He must increase.” That really is the place of our Lord, he must increase. Henry Drummond has spoken of otherism as the joy of living for others. The Apostle Paul when he exhorts us to rejoice says, “Rejoice in the Lord.” If you go around the country and travel, are Christians’ homes, I’m frequently in Christians’ homes, I frequently see placards on the walls of their homes expressive of their faith. One that I’ve seen in this country more than once is a little plaque on the wall that says, “The Secret of Joy.” And then underneath, “God first, others next” and underneath that, “self last,” the secret of joy, God first, others next, that’s Drummond’s otherism, self last. I think that’s expressed here, “He must increase.” Our thoughts concerning him must take the preeminent place.

By the way, this little word must occurs three times in this chapter, and in these three instances, life is summed up. Because we are told, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness; even so must the Son of Man be lifted up,” that’s the necessity of the cross. There is no life apart from the cross. If you’re here this morning and you’ve never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ you don’t have life. The only way in which we can have spiritual life is to receive it as a gift from God by virtue of the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ who died upon that cross. “He must be lifted up,” “that whosoever believeth in him may not perish but have everlasting life.”

Now the next must is just as important. Jesus said, verse 7, “Marvel not that I said unto thee ye must be born again.” He must be lifted up for atonement to be made, you must be born again to enter and see the Kingdom of God.

And then the Christian life is simplified into three little words, “He must increase.” Those are three beautiful musts aren’t they? I know you’ve heard preachers preach on the three musts of John 3. Well that’s what they are and they do speak volumes. Paul put it another way, he said, “that

he might have the preeminence.” So, “He must increase,” John knows Jesus’ place, the secret of joy is to recognize that first.

Then secondly he says, “But I must decrease.” John knows Jesus’ place, but John also knows John’s place. “I must decrease.” James Denney once said something that I think expresses a very important truth. You’ll sometimes find this on little churches in the Highlands of Scotland. Near the pulpit there will be a sign that says, “No man can give at once the impression that he himself is clever and that Christ is mighty to save.” We don’t want to share the glory with Jesus Christ, he must increase, I must decrease.

And finally, John knows John’s disciples’ place. Now he says above in verse 28, “You yourselves bear me witness that I said I’m not the Christ but I’m sent before him.” I’m the friend of the bridegroom, I stand and hear his voice, it’s the bridegroom to which the bride is attached. And so my task is to attach you to him if I can through the preaching of the word. Now you know I think this as I say must have been rather difficult for John because he’s the older, experienced preacher now. He’s not a whole lot older than our Lord in years, but he’s had his time of popularity and now people are drifting away from him and are going to be following the Lord Jesus Christ and so it was difficult for him. It’s difficult for an older minister to give up things. When the time comes, when he must do it, it’s sometimes very difficult to do. And I can appreciate the struggles that John might have had. But we must remember in the Lord’s work, the important thing is not the worker, the important thing is the work that God is doing.

Thomas Chalmers was one of the greatest of the Scots, very prominent in the Free Church responsible for a great deal of the spiritual stamina of Scotland in the 19th Century. And Mr. Chalmers once said, “Who cares for the Free Church?” He was one of the greatest of the free churchmen himself.

“Who cares for the Free Church compared with the Christian good of Scotland? Who cares for any church or denomination or group or fellowship or party compared with Christ? Get the movement

out of sight, magnify Jesus, he must increase, the movement decrease. The movement rises, does its work, passes away into the limbo of forgotten things. The Christ to whom it points goes on, widen your horizons.”

How true, people sometimes think of Believers Chapel as something that is the significant thing. No, no Believers Chapel is not the significant thing; it's what God is doing that is the significant thing. He must increase, I must decrease. One of the greatest encouragements of the ministry of the word of God is that the Lord Jesus Christ carries on his work.

How do you think the apostles felt when Jesus left them? They would probably have said, “Look, we don't have a chance now, he's gone.” But the facts are that the Holy Spirit came and indwelt every one of them. And Jesus himself had said, “It's expedient for you that I go away, for the Comforter will not otherwise come.” The important thing is to remember the first place that Jesus Christ has. He must increase, we must decrease.

When William Carey was dying, he turned to a friend and said, “When I'm gone, don't talk about William Carey, talk about William Carey's Savior. I desire that Christ alone might be magnified.” That's a Biblical viewpoint it seems to me.

Well, what is the secret of joy? Well according to John the Baptist, it's putting Christ first, others next, self last. I have one complaint about preachers, they often don't tell us, like I think it was E. Stanley Jones who said, “They don't tell us the how.” How can we put him first? Well, you look through a passage like this and you look for some clue, what is it that enabled John to say what he said? “This my joy therefore is fulfilled.” Here is a man who has joy in the midst of very difficult circumstances, what is it? Well I suggest to you that it's found in one little clause in verse 29, “He that hath the bride is the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom.” Now here he describes himself, “The friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him.” That's how he describes himself, “I'm a person who stands and hears him.” I suggest to you that's the clue to John's securing

the relationship to the Lord that enabled him to rejoice at the crowd leaving him and following the Lord Jesus Christ. How in the midst of apparent disappointment, he found great joy in it.

A Nigerian preacher once said, “You can’t place a load on a running donkey.” Well that’s the third world’s way of saying what you need to do is to get off by yourself and be alone with the Lord for a while. That’s how John managed to accomplish what he accomplished. All that time that he spent in the desert was very important; out there he came to know the Lord God. And so he stood and heard him. As Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians chapter 3 and verse 18, “But we all with open face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image by the Spirit of the Lord from glory to glory.” Our responsibility is to look, his responsibility is to transform. And so as we look into the Scriptures and meditate upon them, he works his great transforming power.

To put it in another figure, an illustration as our Lord did, he came to Bethany one day where Mary and Martha and Lazarus lived. They met him at the door, Martha immediately went into the kitchen and you could hear the dishes and the pans and pots making their noises, for she was preparing something for the Lord and Mary went over and sat down at Jesus’ feet. And the text says, “She went on hearing his word.” Martha became disturbed, came out, she was upset. She said, “Lord, do something about Mary.” And he said, “Martha, Martha, you’re careful and troubled about many things, but just one thing is needful, and Mary has chosen that good part, and furthermore, it shall not be taken away from her.” So Mary was sitting at his feet and hearing his word, and she was growing in likeness to the Lord Jesus Christ. Something was transpiring in her while Martha’s in the kitchen serving. It’s all right to serve. Later on in the 12th chapter of the Gospel of John, Martha’s still serving but there’s no word of rebuke there. It’s perfectly all right to serve, but service must flow out of fellowship with him. So to stand and hear him, to sit at his feet and hear his word, to look into the mirror, these are the things that lead to the transformed life. Our responsibility is simply to look, simply to stand, simply to hear. And we’ll know the secret of joy in measure.

I suggest to you if it's not that, then it also is the order of those words in verse 30. Maybe it's both, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” There is a logic here because as he increases necessarily I decrease. For the more I am occupied with him, like the red oaks in the spring when the sap begins to rise in those red oaks, those dead leaves that have been hanging onto the tree all through winter finally begin to fall off. And the manifestations of the old life leave as the sap of the new life in Christ becomes predominant in the life of a Christian occupying with him.

Now, it seems to me that John is one of those magnificent individuals who has really come to know what it is to spend time with the Lord. I like what our Lord said about John, he said to the crowds, “What did you go out to see when you went out to see John? Did you go out to see a prophet? Yes I tell you he was a prophet but he was more than a prophet, he's the forerunner.” But then he said also, “I tell you, among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist. Notwithstanding he that is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he.” “He was a burning and shining light,” John says. “And you were willing for a season to rejoice in his light.” Yes they rejoiced in John's light, and he rejoiced in what happened because he stood and heard him. And if we are to know true spiritual joy, it will not be found except in the relationship that we enjoy with Jesus Christ. May God help you to make one of the aims of your life fellowship with him. You cannot enjoy that apart from the Scriptures.

Let me just give you a simple suggestion. This week, spend some time each day in the reading of the word of God, and meditation upon it, reflection upon it. Open to one of the gospel accounts, put yourself in the place of the men with whom our Lord met, be there with them, reflect upon the things. Remember that Nigerian preacher who said, “You cannot put a load on a running donkey.” Stop! I'm not calling you donkey's you understand. But stop, and give yourself to acquaintance with him. You'll be different next week.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the words of Holy Scripture, for they minister so beautifully to our needs. We are Lord running about entirely too much. We've lost the sense of the

need of meditation and reflection. The result is that we often even in the Christian Church are like Martha. We're too busy doing things that we think are for him rather than getting acquainted with him.

Help us also to remember Lord that we do not have anything that we have not received from Thee. We cannot be something other than Thou hast desired that we be. Lord, give us contentment with our condition in life, enable us in it to fellowship with Thee, and to grow into likeness to Jesus Christ and to accomplish the task that Thou has us to accomplish that one task that no one else can do but we ourselves. And give us Lord the Joy that can also say with John, “He must increase, I must decrease.”

If there is someone here who has never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, O God, point them to the must of the atoning work of Christ and the ...

[AUDIO ENDS ABRUPTLY]