

Learning More with  
**Stories of the Master**

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~ **The Humble Prophet** ~

You can learn much more about this story by doing these three things:

1. Read John 3:22-36.
2. Discover key cultural and historical insights.
3. Answer the reflective questions.

**1. Read the text of the story from the New American Standard Bible and from the Easy Read Version**

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**New Living Translation (NLT)** Holy Bible. New Living Translation copyright© 1996, 2004, 2007, 2013 by Tyndale House Foundation.

John 3:22-36 - NASB	John 3:22-36 - NLT
<p><sup>22</sup> After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing. <sup>23</sup> John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and <i>people</i> were coming and were being baptized— <sup>24</sup> for John had not yet been thrown into prison.</p> <p><sup>25</sup> Therefore there arose a discussion on the part of John’s disciples with a Jew about purification. <sup>26</sup> 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.” <sup>27</sup> John answered and said, “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven. <sup>28</sup> You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent ahead of Him.’ <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> He must increase, but I must decrease.</p> <p><sup>31</sup> “He who comes from above is above all, he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. <sup>32</sup> What He has seen and heard, of that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. <sup>33</sup> He who has received His testimony has set his seal to <i>this</i>, that God is true. <sup>34</sup> For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure. <sup>35</sup> The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand. <sup>36</sup> He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”</p>	<p><sup>22</sup> Then Jesus and his disciples left Jerusalem and went into the Judean countryside. Jesus spent some time with them there, baptizing people.</p> <p><sup>23</sup> At this time John the Baptist was baptizing at Aenon, near Salim, because there was plenty of water there; and people kept coming to him for baptism.<sup>24</sup> (This was before John was thrown into prison.) <sup>25</sup> A debate broke out between John’s disciples and a certain Jew over ceremonial cleansing. <sup>26</sup> So John’s disciples came to him and said, “Rabbi, the man you met on the other side of the Jordan River, the one you identified as the Messiah, is also baptizing people. And everybody is going to him instead of coming to us.”</p> <p><sup>27</sup> John replied, “No one can receive anything unless God gives it from heaven.<sup>28</sup> You yourselves know how plainly I told you, ‘I am not the Messiah. I am only here to prepare the way for him.’ <sup>29</sup> It is the bridegroom who marries the bride, and the best man is simply glad to stand with him and hear his vows. Therefore, I am filled with joy at his success. <sup>30</sup> He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less.</p> <p><sup>31</sup> “He has come from above and is greater than anyone else. We are of the earth, and we speak of earthly things, but he has come from heaven and is greater than anyone else. <sup>32</sup> He testifies about what he has seen and heard, but how few believe what he tells them! <sup>33</sup> Anyone who accepts his testimony can affirm that God is true. <sup>34</sup> For he is sent by God. He speaks God’s words, for God gives him the Spirit without limit. <sup>35</sup> The Father loves his Son and has put everything into his hands. <sup>36</sup> And anyone who believes in God’s Son has eternal life. Anyone who doesn’t obey the Son will never experience eternal life but remains under God’s angry judgment.”</p>

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**2. Discover key cultural and historical insights.**

- Purity systems were crucial in the ancient world. When things were pure or clean they were “in place” and when not they were “out of place.” People, groups, places, time, and things could be pure or impure. When something was impure it was “out of place and therefore did not belong and was excluded.
- In the Jewish system, people could be impure by contact with a dead person, contact with a woman during her menstrual cycle, by contact with fluids from another person such as urine, semen, spittle, or flux.
- John was born into a priestly family. His parents were old and it is not known how long they lived or when John went into the wilderness. Some have believed that John lived in Qumran with those Jews who practiced purification rites and who had abandoned the temple. There is no proof, however, he lived among them. Even if he did, at some point he left them for his ministry of calling Israel to repentance, a very different vision from the sect at Qumran.
- Aenon near Salim is a place of abundant waters in the Jordan River valley. It is west of the Jordan River in Samaria. John may have travelled up and down the Jordan River Valley, sometimes preaching on the east side, sometimes on the west side, sometimes as far south as the Judean wilderness, at other times further north by the Sea of Galilee.
- Friend of the Bridegroom  
On the eve of the wedding the two bridal parties assembled, the bridegroom’s under the direction of the friend of the bridegroom who acted throughout as master of ceremonies. The bridegroom would go to the house of the bride and they would go back to the groom’s house for the party. The bride would go first to her chambers. The next day the contract would be made, a meal would be served at the end of the day and at night the groom and bride would consummate their vows physically. The groom would call his friend to collect the sign of virginity, a blood stained cloth. This may have been the background to hearing the bridegroom’s voice.

*These insights are from A Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels by Bruce J. Malina and from The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah by J. Dwight Pentecost*

**3. Answer these reflective questions.**

**Why do you think John’s disciples told him about Jesus having bigger crowds? Do you think they were jealous for John or perhaps they wanted to go see what Jesus was doing?**

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**John gave four reasons why it did not matter that Jesus had bigger crowds.**

- A man can only serve according to the gifts God gives – 3:27**
- He was not the Messiah but only pointed to the Messiah – 3:28**
- He was the friend of the bridegroom and Jesus the groom for the wedding with His people – 3:29**
- Jesus must increase and he must decrease – 3:30**

**Which of these thoughts appeals to you the most? In what ways can you be humble like John?**

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**John 3:31-36 contains several more reasons why it did not matter that Jesus had bigger crowds.**

- Jesus is above all and we are earthly – 3:31**
- Jesus has testimony from heaven – 3:32**
- Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises of God – 3:33**
- Jesus is the One who has and who gives the Spirit of God without measure – 3:34**
- The Father loves Jesus above all else – 3:35**
- Jesus has the words of eternal life – 3:36**

**Which of these thoughts appeals to you the most about the greatness of Jesus?**

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