

# Exposition of the Gospel of John CHAPTER 10

## CHRIST MAGNIFIED BY HIS FORERUNNER

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### Transcript

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CHAPTER 10

CHRIST MAGNIFIED BY HIS FORERUNNER

John 3:22-36

We give first a brief Analysis of the passage which is to occupy our attention. Here we see: 1. The Lord Jesus and His Disciples in Judea, verse 22. 2. John baptizing in Aenon, verses 23, 24. 3. The attempt to provoke John's jealousy, verses 25, 26. 4. The humility of John, verses 27, 28. 5. The joy of John, verse 29. 6. The preeminence of Christ, verses 30-35. 7. The inevitable alternative, verse 36. Another typical picture is presented in the passage before us, though its lines are not so easily discernible as in some of the others which we have already looked at. The spiritual state of Judaism as it existed at the time of our Lord's sojourn on earth is revealed in three pathetic statements; first, the Jews were occupied with the externals of religion (verse 25); second, they were envious of the results attending the ministry of Christ (verse 26); third, they rejected the testimony of the Savior (verse 32). How pointedly did these things expose the condition of Israel as a nation! With no heart for the Christ of God, and ignorant, too, of the position occupied by His forerunner (verse 28), they were concerned only with matters of ceremonialism. Religious they were, but for a Savior they felt no need. They preferred to wrangle over questions of "purification," rather than go to the Lord Jesus for the Water of life. But this was not all. They were jealous of the outward success that attended the ministry of the Lord Jesus in its early stages. How this revealed their hearts! Plainer still is what we read of them in verse 32—the testimony of Christ they "received not." The Savior was not only "despised" by them, He was "rejected," too. Once more, then, is the awful condition of Judaism made manifest before our eyes. "After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized" (John 3:22). This must be read in the light of John 4:2. By linking these two verses together an important principle is established: what is done by the servants of Christ by His authority is as though it had been done by Christ immediately. It is the same as what we read of in 2 Corinthians 5:20: "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." It is the same in prayer. When we really pray to the Father in the name of Jesus Christ, it is as though Christ Himself were the suppliant. "And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they

came, and were baptized" (John 3:23). The meaning of the names of these places—like all others in Scriptures—are deeply significant. Aenon signifies "place of springs," Salim means "peace." What a blessed place for John to be in! These names point a striking contrast from "the wilderness of Judea" and "the region round about Jordan" (cf. Matthew 3:1, 5), which speak of drought and death. Surely there is a most important lesson taught us here, and a most precious one too. The place of drought and death was where God had called the forerunner of Christ to labor, and as he there bore faithful witness to the Lord Jesus it became to him a place of "springs" (refreshment) and "peace!" Such is ever the experience of the obedient servant of God. "John also was baptizing." There is a word of great practical importance here for many a servant of God. The Lord Jesus was there in Judea in person, and His disciples were with Him, baptizing. The crowds which at first attended the preaching of John had now deserted him, and were thronging to Christ (verse 26). What then does the Lord's forerunner do? Does he decide that his work is now finished, and that God no longer has need of him? Does he become discouraged because his congregations were so small? Does he quit his work and go on a long vacation? Far, far from it. He faithfully persevered: "John also was baptizing." Has this no message for us? Perhaps these lines may be read by some who used to minister to big crowds. But these are no more. Another preacher has appeared, and the crowds flock after him. What then? Must you then conclude that God has set you aside? Are you suffering this experience to discourage you? Or, worse still, are you envious of the great success attending the labors of another! Ah, fellow-servants of Christ, take to heart this word—"John also was baptizing." His season of popularity might be over: his light might be eclipsed by that of a greater: the crowds might have become thin; but, nevertheless, he plodded on and faithfully persevered in the work God had given him to do! "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. 6:9). John performed his duty and fulfilled his course. "John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there." This is one of the many verses in the New Testament which plainly intimates the mode of baptism. If baptism were by sprinkling or by pouring, "much water" would not be required. The fact that John baptized in Aenon "because there was much water there" strongly implies that the scriptural form of baptism is immersion. But the one who desires to know and carry out God's mind is not left to mere inferences, forceful though they may be. The very word "baptized" (both in the Greek and in English) signifies "to dip or immerse." The Greek words for sprinkling and pouring" are entirely different from the one for baptize. Again; the example of our blessed Lord Himself ought to settle all controversy. No unprejudiced mind can read Matthew 3:16 without seeing that the Lord Jesus was immersed. Finally, the testimony of Romans 6 is unequivocal and conclusive. There we read, "We are buried with Him by baptism into death" (verse 3). "Then there arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying" (John 3:25). The "Jews" mentioned here are the same as those we read of in John 1:19, who sent a delegation unto the Baptist to inquire who he was. There is a slight difference between the ancient Greek MSS, and following a variation of reading the R.V. says, "There arose therefore a questioning on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purifying." But we are thoroughly satisfied that here, as in the great majority of instances, the A.V. is preferable to the R.V. Clearly it is "the Jews" of John 1:19 who are before us again in John 3:25. This is seen from what we read in verse 28: "Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him." The Baptist reminds them of the testimony he bore before their representatives on the previous occasion, for John 3:28 corresponds exactly with John 1:20 and 23. "And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou bearest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him" (John 3:26). What was the object of these Jews? Was not their motive a malicious one? Were they not seeking to make John envious? It would certainly appear so. Why tell him of the outward success of Christ's ministry if it were not to provoke the jealousy of His harbinger? And

cannot we detect the Enemy of souls behind this! This is ever a favorite device with him, to make one servant of the Lord envious at the greater success enjoyed by another. And alas! how frequently does he gain his wicked ends thus. It is only those who seek not honor of men, but desire only the glory of their Lord, that are proof against such attacks. A striking example of the above principle is found in connection with Moses, who "was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3). In Numbers 11:26, 27 we read, "But there remained two of the men in the camp, the name of the one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad: and the spirit rested upon them; and they were of them that were written, but went not out unto the tabernacle: and they prophesied in the camp. And there ran a young man, and told Moses, and said, Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp." Now notice what follows—"And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his young men, answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them." Even Joshua was jealous for his master's sake. But how blessedly did Moses rebuke him: "And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake? would God that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!" The same unselfish spirit is seen in that one who referred to himself as "less than the least of all saints" (Eph. 3:8). While the beloved apostle was a prisoner in Rome, many of the brethren waxed confident, and were bold to speak the word without fear. True, some preached Christ of envy and strife, and some also of good will. How then did the apostle feel? Did he think these others were seeking to take advantage of his absence? Was he jealous of their labors? Not so: he said: "Notwithstanding... I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice" (Phil. 1:14-18). So, again, he learns of the ministry of Philemon in refreshing the saints, and to him he writes, "we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother" (Philem. 7). May more of this spirit be found in us and in other of the Lord's servants as we learn of how God is using them. "John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven" (John 3:27). It is beautiful to see how John conducted himself on this occasion. His reply was most becoming. First, he bows to God's sovereign will (verse 27). Second, he reminds his tempters of his previous disclaimer of any other place being his save that of one "sent before" the Lord (John 1:28). Third, he declared that Israel belonged to Christ, not to himself (verse 29). Fourth, he affirms that his own joy was fulfilled in seeing men turning to the Lord Jesus (verse 29). Finally, he insists that while Christ must "increase," he must "decrease" (verse 30). Blessed self-abnegation was this. "John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven." John was not at all surprised at the lack of spiritual perception in these Jews. The things of God cannot be discerned by the natural man. Before a man can even "receive" spiritual things they must first be "given him from heaven." And in the bestowment of His gifts God is sovereign. We are fully satisfied that the contents of this twenty-seventh verse contains the key to much that is puzzling. There are some brethren, beloved of the Lord, who do not see the truth of believer's baptism; there are others who stumble over the subject of predestination. What may be as clear as sunlight to us, is dark to them. But let us not be puffed up by our superior knowledge. Let us remember the admonition of the apostle Paul, "For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory (boast), as if thou hadst not received it?" (1 Cor. 4:7). But on the other hand, there is no excuse for ignorance in the things of God. Far from it. God has plainly made known His mind. His blessed Word is here in our hands. The Holy Spirit has been given to us to guide us into all truth. And it is our responsibility to believe and understand all that is recorded for our learning: "And if any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know" (1 Cor. 8:2). Nevertheless, there is the Divine side, too; and this is what is before us here in John 3:27. What did the Lord Jesus say in response to the unbelief of the cities wherein His mightiest works were done? "Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so,

Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight" (Matthew 11:25, 26). What did He say to Peter, when that apostle bore such blessed testimony to His Messiahship and Deity? "Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 16:17). And what is recorded of Lydia? "And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, THAT (in order that) she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul" (Acts 16:14). And yet God is not capricious. If it is not "given" to us the fault is all our own. We "have not" because we "ask not" (James 4:2). Or, we "find" not, because we are too lazy to "search" diligently for the precious things of God. Here is His sure promise, provided we meet the conditions annexed to it: "My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God" (Prov. 2:1-5). "Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him" (John 3:28). John now announces what he was not, and what he was. He was but the messenger before the face of Christ, His forerunner. A subordinate place, therefore, was his. How blessed was this. These Jews were seeking to stir up the pride of John. But the Lord's servant takes his proper place before them. He reminds them that he was only one "sent before" Christ. "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" (John 3:29). The first thing which claims our attention here is the opening sentence of this verse. Who is meant by the "bride" which the Lord Jesus even then was said to "have?" In seeking the answer to this question, particular attention should be paid to the connection in which this statement is found, the circumstances under which it was made, and also to the person who uttered it. The connection in which this occurs is discovered by going back to John 3:22, 23. The disciples of Jesus, as well as John himself, were "baptizing." This was not Christian baptism, for that was not instituted until after the death and resurrection of the Savior. This baptism, therefore, was kingdom baptism, and was one of the conditions of entrance into it (cf. Matthew 3). The circumstances under which this statement was made is seen in that John 3:29 formed part of the Baptist's reply to those who were seeking to arouse his envy over the fact that the crowds were now flocking to Christ. The person who uttered it was not Paul the apostle to the Gentiles, but John the Baptist, whose ministry was confined to Israel, and who here styles himself "the friend of the Bridegroom." When the Baptist said "He that hath the bride, is the bridegroom," he was not referring to the Church, the Body of Christ, for of that he knew nothing whatever, nor did any one else save the Triune God. At that time Christ was not forming a church, but as "the minister of the circumcision" He was presenting Himself to Israel. A repenting and believing few gathered around Him. That the twelve apostles are connected with Christ in an earthly relationship (though also, of course, members of the household of faith, and of the family of God) is clear from the words of the Savior: "Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matthew 19:28). This is something which the apostle Paul—the apostle of the Gentiles, the one through whom God made known the truth of one Body—will never do. "He that hath the bride" was the language of faith. The company who will form the "bride" was then far from being complete; only a nucleus was there, but faith viewed the purpose of God concerning Israel as already accomplished. But "he that hath the bride" rules out the one body, for that did not begin to be formed until several years later. If further proof of the correctness of what we have written be asked for, it is at once forthcoming in the very next sentence: "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." Without a doubt this refers to John the Baptist himself. But in no possible sense was he associated with heralding the truth of the Church which is the Body of Christ. His own language, as recorded in John 1:31 is final: "But that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore, am I come baptizing with water." Let it be clearly understood that in this chapter we are neither denying nor affirming that the Body of Christ will be His heavenly bride. That does not fall within the compass of the present passage. What we have attempted to do is to give a faithful exposition of John 3:29, and the "bride" there plainly refers to a company of regenerated Israelites, a company not yet completed. The work of gathering out that company has been interrupted by the rejection of Christ by the Jewish nation as a whole, and this has been followed by the present period. But after the Body of Christ has come "in the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13) God will resume His work with Israel and complete that company which is to be gathered out from them. "But the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice" (verse 29). This is very blessed. Notice first, how we have repeated here what we called attention to when considering John 1:35-37: the two disciples of John "stood" before they heard their master "speak" and say "Behold the lamb of God." The order is the same in the verse now before us—"Which standeth and heareth him." Standing signifies the cessation of activity: it denotes an act of concentrated attention. The principle illustrated is a deeply important one. It is one which needs to be pressed in this day of hustling and bustling about, which is only the product of the energy of the flesh. We must "stand" before we can "hear Him." "This my joy therefore is fulfilled" (verse 29). How precious is this! Joy of heart is the fruit of being "occupied with Christ!" It is standing and hearing His voice which delights the soul. But again we say that the all-important prerequisite for this is a cessation of the activities of the flesh. His voice cannot be heard if we are rushing hither and thither in fellowship with the fearful bedlam all around us. The "better part" is not to be like Martha—"cumbered about much serving"—but is to "sit" at the feet of the Lord Jesus like Mary did, hearing His word (see Luke 10:38-42). Notice, too, the tense of the verbs in John 3:29: "standeth and heareth." The perfect tense expresses continuous action: again and again, daily, this must be done, if our joy is to be filled full. Is not our failure at this very point the explanation of our joyless lives? "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). Blessed climax was this to the lovely modesty of John, and well calculated to crush all party feeling and nip in the bud any jealousy there might be in the hearts of his own disciples. In principle this is inseparably connected with what he had just said before in the previous verse. The more I "decrease" the more I delight in standing and hearing the voice of that blessed One who is Altogether Lovely. And so conversely. The more I stand and hear His voice, the more will He "increase" before me, and the more shall I "decrease." I cannot be occupied with two objects at one and the same time. To "decrease" is, we take it, to be less and less occupied with ourselves. The more I am occupied with Christ, the less shall I be occupied with myself. Humility is not the product of direct cultivation, rather it is a by-product. The more I try to be humble, the less shall I attain unto humility. But if I am truly occupied with that One who was "meek and lowly in heart," if I am constantly beholding His glory in the mirror of God's Word, then shall I be "changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18). The passage now before us contains the final testimony of the Baptist to the Lord Jesus Christ. In it the Savior and His servant are sharply contrasted. In witnessing to the manifold glories of his Master, John the Baptist draws a seven-fold contrast. First, John was one who could receive nothing, except it were given him from heaven (verse 27); where as Christ was the One to whom the Father "hath given all things" (verse 35). Second, Jesus was the Christ, whereas John was only one "sent before Him" (verse 28). Third, Christ was the "bridegroom," whereas John was but the "friend" of the Bridegroom (verse 29). Fourth, Christ must "increase," whereas John himself must "decrease" (verse 30).

Fifth, John was "of the earth," whereas the Lord Jesus had come "from above," and "is above all" (verse 31). Sixth, John had only a measure of the Spirit, but of Christ it is witnessed, "God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him" (verse 34). Seventh, John was but a servant, whereas the Savior was none less than the Son of the Father (verse 35). What a blessed and complete testimony was this to the immeasurable superiority of the Lord of Glory! "He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all" (John 3:31). John now witnesses to the person, the glory, and the testimony of Christ. It seems to us that John is here giving point to one of the seven contrasts contained in this testimony which he here drew between Christ and himself. "Earth and earthly" must not be understood to signify "world and worldly." John was of the earth, and spoke of things which pertain to the earth. But the Lord was from heaven, and is above all. All other messengers that God has sent had much earthiness about them, as those of us who are His servants now have much of it. We are limited by our finite grasp. The bodies of death in which we dwell are a severe handicap. Our vision is largely confined to the things of earth. But there were no limitations to the Lord Jesus: He was the Son of God from heaven, pure, perfect, omniscient. "And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth" (John 3:32). The testimony which Christ bore was a perfect one. The prophets received their message from the Holy Spirit, and they spoke of things which they had not "seen"—see Matthew 13:17. There are things which the angels desire to look into, but they were too mysterious for them to fathom—see 1 Peter 1:12. But our Lord Jesus Christ knows "heavenly things" by His own perfect knowledge, for He hath ever dwelt in the bosom of the Father. He knew the mind of God for He is God. "And no man receiveth his testimony" (John 3:32). How radically different was this word of John from that of the Jews who declared "all men come to him," verse 26! One lesson we may draw from this is the unreliability of statistics which seek to tabulate spiritual results. Those Jews were looking at the outward appearance only, and from that point of view the cause of Christ seemed to be prospering in an extraordinary way. But the Lord's forerunner looked beneath the surface, at the true spiritual results, and his verdict was "no man receiveth his testimony." Beware then of statistics, they depend largely on the one who compiles them. Some who are sanguine, will say everything that is pleasing and encouraging; others, who are more serious and severe in their judgment, will say much that is depressing. "No man receiveth his testimony." This is not to be understood without qualification, for the very next words declare "he that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true." It is evident that what John meant was that comparatively none received the testimony of Christ. Compared with the crowds which came to Him, compared with the nation of Israel as a whole, those who "received" Christ's testimony were so few, that they were as though none at all received it. And is it not the same today? In this favored land Christ is preached to multitudes, and many there are who hear about Him; but, alas! how few give evidence of having really received His testimony into their hearts! And why is it that men receive not the testimony of this One who "cometh from heaven" (verse 31), who testifies of what He has seen and heard (verse 32), and who has the Spirit without measure (verse 34), yea, who is none other than the—Son beloved of the Father (verse 35)? It is because they are earthly. The message is too heavenly for them. They have no relish for it. They have hearts only for things below. Others are too learned to believe anything so simple: it is still to the Jews a stumblingblock, and to the Greeks foolishness. They will not believe God; and how can they while "they receive honor from men!" With others it is wide that hinders. They think themselves good enough already. They are pharisaical. They are too high-born to see their need of being born again. They are too haughty to take the place of empty-handed beggars and receive God's gift. But the root reason for rejecting the testimony of Christ is that, "men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). Men are so depraved their hearts are hardened and their understandings are darkened, and therefore, do they prefer the darkness to the light. "He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal

that God is true" (John 3:33). To "set to his seal" means to certify and ratify. By faith in the Lord Jesus the believer has come to know God as a reality. Hitherto he heard of and talked about an unknown God, but now he knows God for himself, and declares his faith in His fidelity. God says, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life," and the believer finds that God is true, for he lives now in newness of life. The Lord says, "He that believeth on him is not condemned," and the believer knows it is so, for the burden of guilt is gone from his conscience. Those who receive Christ's testimony as true, take it unto themselves. They rest their souls upon it. They make it their own. They allow nothing to make them doubt what He has said. No matter whether they can thoroughly understand it or no; no matter whether it seems reasonable or unreasonable, they implicitly believe it. Whether their feelings respond or not, makes no difference—the Son of God has spoken, and that is enough. "For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him" (John 3:34). The Lord Jesus Christ was sent here by God, and He spoke only the words of God. Testimony to this fact was borne to Him by the Father on the Mount of Transfiguration: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased: hear ye him" (Matthew 17:5). And Christ differed from every other messenger sent from God—in all things He has "the pre-eminence." Others had the Spirit "by measure." They knew but fragments of the truth of God. To them the Spirit came and then went again. Moreover, their gifts varied: one had a certain gift from the Spirit, another an entirely different gift. But God gave not the Spirit by measure unto Christ. The Lord Jesus knew the full truth of God, for He Himself is the Truth. On Him the Spirit did not come and go; instead, we read, He "abode upon him" (John 1:32). And further: Christ was endowed with every. Divine gift. In contrast from the fragmentary communications of God through the prophets (see Hebrews 1:1), Christ fully and finally received the mind of God. We believe that the full meaning of these words that Christ had the Spirit "without measure" is a statement that is strictly parallel with what we read in Colossians 2:9, "For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his band" (John 3:35). What a glorious testimony was this! Christ was more than a messenger or witness for God, He was the "Son" beloved of the Father. Not only so, He was the One into whose hand the Father had "given all things." How this brings out, again, the absolute Deity of Christ! To none but to One absolutely equal with Himself could the Father give "all things." "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). Here is the inevitable alternative. Salvation comes through believing, believing on the Son. How Divinely simple! Those who believe on the Son have "everlasting life" as a present possession, though the full enjoyment as well as the full manifestation of it are yet future. But those who believe not the Son "shall not see life," neither enter into it nor enjoy it; instead, the wrath of a sin-hating God "abideth" on them. It is upon them even now, and if they believe not, it shall abide on them for ever and ever. How unspeakably solemn! How it behooves every reader to seriously and honestly face the question—To which class do I belong?—to those who believe on the Son, or to those who believe not on the Son? The following questions concern the next lesson: 1. What are we to learn from the statement that "Jesus himself baptized not"? John 4:2. 2. Why did the Lord "leave Judea" when He knew the Pharisees were jealous? John 4:3. 3. What prophetic foreshadowing do we have in John 4:3, 4? 4. Why was it that Christ "must needs" go through Samaria? John 4:4. 5. What are we to learn from the fact that the meeting between Christ and the Samaritan woman occurred at a "well"? John 4:6. 6. Why are we told that it was "Jacob's well"? John 4:6. 7. What is suggested by the "sixth hour"? John 4:6.

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