

# He Must Increase

## John 3:31-36

The entire Christian faith rests on the correct answer to Jesus' question (Matt. 16:15), **"Who do you say that I am?"** If you get that question right, everything else is secondary. If Jesus is who the Bible proclaims Him to be, then you must believe in Him as your Savior and Lord or you will face judgment. Either Christ died for your sins and is risen from the dead or not. If He is not who He claimed to be, then you're wasting your time being a Christian (1 Cor. 15:13-19).

As John writes his Gospel he is clear as to who Jesus is and what our response should be to Him (20:31): **"these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."**

Everything in the Gospel of John is written to reveal Jesus Christ, the Son of God to us so that we would believe and have eternal life. Every story in this Gospel, every verse, every phrase is here to show us the glory of Jesus Christ so that we would receive God's gracious gift of eternal life: a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. As Jesus prays in John 17:3, **"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."**

That is what is happening in every text of this Gospel in one way or another. Jesus is being held up as glorious—magnificent, splendid, supreme—full of grace and truth (Piper, [The Father Has Given All Things into Jesus's Hands](#)). And as we see Him for who He really is Jesus becomes for us the most precious reality in the world to us. In the words of John the Baptist (3:30), **"He must increase, but I must decrease."**

As I said last time, the verses at the end of John 3 expound on first part of the motto of John the Baptist: **"He must increase."** John 3:31-36 are really a theological summary of chapter 3. John tells us what we should have come to believe from the stories of Nicodemus and of John the Baptist and his disciples.

Listen for who John knows Jesus to be, and who we should believe Him to be.

John 3:31-36:

**31 He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all.**

**32 And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony.**

**33 He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true.**

**34 For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure.**

**35 The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand.**

**36 He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."**

Here, John sets out to prove the supremacy of Jesus Christ and to show how vastly superior Christ is to John the Baptist. These are reasons why we should believe in Jesus for eternal life.

John makes several points as to why Christ must increase and why then we must believe in Him. First, we must believe in Jesus Christ because of where He has come from.

### **1. His Place: Jesus is from heaven.**

Jesus' place is heaven. Listen again to verse 31, **"He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all."**

John is repeating the truth he has already stated that Jesus' existence did not begin when He was born to the virgin Mary. In chapter 1 he wrote that Jesus, the Word, was in the beginning, was with God, and was God (1:1-2). The eternal **"Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth,"** (John 1:14). Jesus came to this earth from heaven, where He dwelt eternally with the Father.

Over and over in the Gospel of John Jesus will claim to have come down from heaven and to be sent by God. For instance in John 6:38, 51 Jesus says

**38 "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. ... 51 "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."**

In verse 31 John contrasts Jesus with John the Baptist, **"who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth."** He is not belittling the testimony of John, contrasting it with the superior testimony of Jesus. John the Baptist was a faithful witness of all that God entrusted to him, but he was still earthly. His knowledge of God was limited just like the rest of us. Earlier in the chapter Jesus said to Nicodemus, **"If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"** (3:12).

The significance of Jesus coming down from heaven is stated clearly twice in verse 31, He **"is above all."** He is from above and is above all. Jesus told Nicodemus in verse 13, **"No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven."** That has always been Jesus' place, His position is **"above all."** Paul says that after God raised Jesus from the dead, He **"seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and**

**every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all *things* under His feet, ...**" (Ephesians 1:20-22). The apostle Peter affirms (1 Pet. 3:22) that Jesus **"has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him."** Because Jesus is from above, He is above all.

Jesus deserves to be above all. Is He above all in your life? Is there anything in your life that you have placed above Jesus?

So first, John informs us that Jesus must increase and we must believe in Him because of His place. Jesus has come **"from above,"** and is **"above all."**

Second, Jesus must increase and we must believe in Him because of:

## **2. His Proclamation: Jesus has a heavenly message.**

Since Jesus is **"from above,"** He speaks of the **"heavenly things"** which He has seen and heard in heaven. Verse 32 says,

**32 And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony.**

Jesus can speak of heaven because He is an eyewitness of heaven. Jesus can testify truthfully about heaven because He is telling us what He has seen and heard. He wasn't speculating or philosophizing about heaven. He was speaking the very words of God, telling us what the Father is like and how we can have eternal life. His witness is reliable and certain.

This isn't the only time that John asserts this. In John 7:16, **"Jesus answered them and said, 'My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me.'"** In John 8:28, **"Jesus said to them, 'When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things.'"** In John 14:10, after Jesus tells Philip that if he has seen Him, he has seen the Father, Jesus adds, **"Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works."**

In spite of this, John also calls attention to the amazing truth that even though Jesus speaks divine truth, **"no one receives His testimony"** (3:32). Of course that statement is meant to be a generalization, not an absolute. The general response to Jesus when He came to this earth was rejection. John 3:19, **"the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."** In the prologue John wrote: (John 1:11) **"He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him."** But the next verse (1:12) tells us that a few did believe, **"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name."** We see the same here in verse 33, **"He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true."** John the Baptist received that

testimony, the apostles received it, and many down through the centuries even to us have believed it.

The point for us is: the reason we should put our trust in Jesus is because we have come to the firm conclusion, based on the apostolic witness, that God is true and that Jesus spoke the words of God. He is who He claimed to be. He is the Christ, the Son of God, sent from heaven to redeem us from our sins. By setting your seal to this, John means that you fix in your mind and heart that Jesus is the promised Redeemer, your personal Savior and Lord.

John wrote in his first letter (1 John 5:10), **“10 He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son.”**

Have you certified that God is true by believing His message in Jesus Christ? Or are you calling God a liar by not believing His testimony?

So we must believe in Jesus because His place is heaven and because His proclamation is God’s message from heaven. Third, Jesus must increase and we must believe in Him because of,

### **3. His Power: He has the fullness of the Spirit and the authority of the Father.**

Verse 34 again says,

**34 For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure.**

Jesus speaks the Words of God not only because He is an eyewitness from heaven, but because He speaks as One who has the fullest measure of the Spirit of God. He alone has the Spirit without limit. He is the One who speaks as empowered by the Holy Spirit. You may remember that this is the very thing which indicated to John the Baptist that Jesus was the Messiah. John bore witness saying, **“I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.”** (John 1:33-34).

Because Jesus has the fullest measure of the Spirit of God, Jesus speaks for God with full authority. Indeed, Jesus speaks as God. Only Jesus can infallibly speak the very words of God. In fact Peter tells us in 1 Peter 1:11 that when the prophets and writers of scripture spoke it was **“the Spirit of Christ who was in them,”** who **“testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.”** Whatever word we have from God is through the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Christ.

The power of Christ is shown not only in His having the fullness of the Spirit, but in verse 35 John says,

**35 The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand.**

The love between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit is eternal and perfect. At Jesus' baptism, the Spirit descended on Him and the Father proclaimed (Matt. 3:17), **"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."** Because the Father loves the Son, He has given all things into His hand. Jesus affirmed (Matt. 11:27), **"All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him."** Just before He ascended into heaven, as He gave the Great Commission, He again affirmed (Matt. 28:18), **"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth."**

You simply cannot go any higher than this. Who is John compared to the Son? Why would his disciples seek to defend him against Jesus, when he is His servant?

The conclusion comes in verse 36,

**36 He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."**

Jesus is the One on whom the destiny of every human being rests. There are two and only two options: Believe in Jesus and have eternal life; or, do not obey Jesus and be under God's perpetual wrath. One person believes, and puts his seal on Jesus: "God as true." Another person disobeys—that is, refuses to believe on Jesus—and makes God a liar. Right now, you either have eternal life or you are under God's wrath. Whatever state you are in when you die continues forever after you die (Matt. 25:46).

You might expect that John would say that whoever believes in Christ has eternal life, but the one who doesn't believe is under God's judgment. But instead, he uses a different word, saying, "he who does not obey the Son will not see life." He does this for two reasons. First, not to believe in Jesus is to disobey God, who calls on all to repent and believe. Second, genuine saving faith is obedient faith. Of course, none of us can obey God perfectly, but the overall direction of our lives should be that of obedience to Christ.

Those who refuse to believe in Christ are presently under the curse of sin and death. If they die unbelieving, they will experience the fullness of God's wrath throughout eternity. Thus our eternal destiny hinges on believing in Christ or disobeying Him.

The most important question anyone can ask and answer is, "Who is Jesus Christ?" The answer is the key to everything. It is the key to one's eternal destiny. It is the key to one's ministry and service. It is the key to the gospel itself.