

**He Must Increase – Part II**  
**Pastor Ty Blackburn**  
**John 3:30-36**  
**August 21, 2011**

Please turn with me in your Bibles to John 3. We'll be looking at Verses 31-36, though we'll read from Verse 22 to set the context in a moment. John 3:22-36, focusing in on those last six verses of the passage. We began looking at this larger text last week, and we asked the question: How do you recognize a spiritually vital and healthy ministry? What distinguishes a truly, faithful, gospel ministry? How do you know if a preacher is on the right track, moving in the right direction? Or a Bible study teacher? How do we examine ourselves against a standard and say, "Am I moving where I need to move as a Bible study teacher, as a preacher, as a counselor, as someone just discipling, as a parent?" What is the measure of effective ministry for Christ? How do you recognize it? Certainly, it applies to those looking for a church home. You know, when you move somewhere and you're looking for a church home, what do you look for? What are the main things that you look for? This passage really outlines that because in this passage we have really a paradigm for faithful, Gospel ministry. John the Baptist is set before us as a model to emulate as the prototypical witness for Christ. This is what ministry ought to look like in all of our lives, and we're all called to minister for Christ. We're all called to lift Him up, to share Him with the lost, to edify the saints, and this gives us a good series of tests to evaluate how we're doing.

We looked at last time, the first section of this passage, Verses 22-30, and we saw the character of faithful, Gospel ministry. We saw there are four characteristics that we could look at, and we looked at those last time. The character of faithful, Gospel ministry. Then this time, as we look at Verses 31-36, with Verse 30 really being like the hinge in the passage. *He must increase, but I must decrease*, John says. Verses 31-36, we're going to look at the content of faithful, Gospel ministry. The content, that'll be our subject this morning. Let's look at this passage. We're reading Verses 22-36.

**John 3:22-36:**

*22 After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing. 23 John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and people were coming and were being baptized—24 for John had not yet been thrown into prison.*

*25 Therefore there arose a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purification. 26 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." 27 John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven. 28 You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent ahead of Him.' 29 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. 30 He must increase, but I must decrease.*

*31 "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. 32 What He has seen and heard, of that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. 33 He who has received His testimony has set his seal to this, that God is true. 34 For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure. 35 The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand. 36 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."*

Let's pray together.

*Our Father, we thank You for Your Word. We thank You that Your Spirit that inspired it is here and ready to illuminate it for those of us who are open to You this morning. We pray that we would all be open to You, and that You would speak, and You would apply Your Word to our hearts and our lives, and show us more of the glory of Jesus. We pray in His Name, Amen.*

What is the essential content of faithful, Gospel ministry? Faithful, gospel teaching and preaching? How do you recognize it? You distill it down, if you distill down someone's preaching, and teaching, or counseling, if you could distill it down to its barest essence, what do you find? That's the question that our text addresses this morning. It's the acid test really of ministry. It's the quintessential issue that defines whether or not we've been faithful or not. When you look at John's preaching, in this passage and really throughout his preaching ministry, if you distill it down what you find is everywhere one thing: The supremacy of Jesus Christ. That is, his content is to preach Christ, and it is to preach Christ not in a man-centered kind of way, as the answer to all of your problems. I mean, there's a part of that that's always a part. We come to God with broken hearts. We need to

be mended. But when you look at the way the Bible presents, the way preaching ought to be, and teaching ought to be, and counseling ought to be, it's not a man-centered approach. John preaches Christ, and he preaches Him high and lifted up. He preaches the supremacy of Jesus Christ, and that is what it's all about. His whole ministry is all about Jesus. When we look back over all of this testimony, John 1:15, John the apostle continually lets us hear from John the Baptist, what he testified about Jesus. John testified about him and cried out saying, in Verse 15 of Chapter 1:

***John 1:15 ~ John \*testified about Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'"***

"Even though I was born six months before this Man, He existed before me. I know it. Look to Him," Verse 29:

***John 1:29 ~ The next day he \*saw Jesus coming to him and \*said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"***

What's the proclamation? What's the focus of his teaching? Look at Jesus. Then in Verse 30, he repeats what he said earlier.

***John 1:30 ~ This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'***

Verse 34:

***John 1:34 ~ I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God."***

Verse 36:

***John 1:36 ~ and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and \*said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"***

Then you come to Chapter 3, and here we have John's testimony again. "I'm not the Christ, He is. I'm not the Bridegroom, He is the Bridegroom. He must increase, I must decrease." Then Verses 31-36, he gives us again a beautiful portrait of the supremacy of Jesus Christ. So the acid test is: What does a ministry, what does a teacher say about Jesus? What are they talking about when they teach? When they preach? Is Christ prevalent in the ministry?

Bishop J.C. Ryle, a wonderful man of God from the 19th Century, actually an Anglican theologian, but a biblical man who loved the Lord, said this:

*Would we know whether a minister is sound in the faith and deserving of our confidence as a teacher? We have only to ask a simple question: Where is Christ in His teaching? Would we know whether we ourselves are receiving benefit from the preaching we attend? Let us ask whether its effect is to magnify Christ in our esteem? A minister who is really doing us good, will make us think more of Jesus every year we live.*

That's what we're all called to do, to make one another think more of Jesus every year we live. It's not primarily about making life work. That's secondary. It's not about having good marriages or good families, primarily, that's secondary. It's about knowing and loving Christ and esteeming Him, and when you know, and love, and esteem Christ more, what do you find? You find every treasure of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Him. Everything you need is in Jesus. So all of the secondary stuff gets really taken care of when you get the first thing right, which is Jesus Christ.

James Denney, a Scottish pastor, framed this in the vestry of his church in Scotland:

*No man can bear witness to Christ and to himself at the same time. No man can give the impression that he himself is clever, and at the same time that Christ is mighty to save.*

What an important thing for us to reflect on. I know for myself, that when I'm ministering to people, when I'm preaching, I have struggled with this, but especially it seems like it's even more in certain situations that I find myself thinking about what are people thinking of me? I did a funeral the other day, and some of you prayed, you saw the prayer request come through for a lady who lost her daughter. A sudden illness came on and she had a virus attack her heart, in five days she was dead. A young, vibrant, strong, young woman. And in ministering to them, I tried to lift up the Lord, and in reflecting on this even through the week, thinking back to how could I have failed to not, even in the funeral, it seems like I didn't say enough about Jesus. I mean, I proclaimed the Gospel, I made clear the way of salvation, that everybody here needs to evaluate where you are with God. That's something I think that you must do as a pastor. Is there any better time to talk about eternity than when you are talking at the graveside of someone these people loved? No, you must make the Gospel clear, but I thought, "Did I fail to

show them Jesus as a friend Who can comfort you?” It’s compared to the standard of what should be done. How often did I fall miserably short in even situations like that where it was so pivotal?

Well, John the Baptist, in the content of his preaching was always the supremacy of Christ. What we see in this passage as we look at it, there are four aspects of Jesus’ supremacy that John celebrates, that he lifts up before our eyes, and before the eyes of his disciples who were needing to see what really mattered. The first two aspects of His supremacy we’ll look at today, and the other two next Sunday. What I want us to look at today as we look at John’s words in Verses 31-36, is supremacy of Jesus. First of all, the supremacy of His Person, and secondly, the supremacy of His Word. The supremacy of His Person and the supremacy of His Word.

### 1) The Supremacy of His Person:

First, the supremacy of His Person, Verse 31:

***John 3:31 ~ “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.***

John paints a stark contrast between himself and Jesus. His disciples, remember, are all worried about John’s ministry diminishing. “The numbers of people are going to Jesus in larger and larger numbers and they’re not coming here, John. This is not good.” John is like, “No, you’ve missed the whole point. He is the point. This is success. I’m the friend of the Bridegroom, why would I not rejoice that the Bride is going to the Bridegroom? He doesn’t come to the friend of the Bridegroom. The friend of the Bridegroom only takes the Bride to the Bridegroom. You need to understand that there is a great chasm of difference between me and He, between me and Jesus.” ***“He who comes from above is above all,...*** He’s speaking of Christ. ***...he who is of the earth is from the earth...*** He’s saying, “Me, I am of the earth and I am from the earth. He is from above and therefore is above all.” The emphasis in the verse is dramatic. Look at the repetition, ***“He who comes from above is above all, he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth...*** Do you see that repetition? ***...of the earth, of the earth, of the earth...*** In fact, in the Greek it’s exactly identical. ***...of the earth, of the earth, of the earth...*** You can translate the preposition ‘from’ or ‘of’. It’s the same three phrases and it’s just separated by a couple of words in the Greek text. You basically read, ‘of the earth’, ‘he’, ‘of the earth’, ‘speaks’, ‘of the earth’, over, and over, and over. That, “Bam! Bam! Bam!”

That's who John is. Of the earth! "I'm of the earth. He's from above! I'm of the earth, He comes from Heaven. I'm of the earth, He is above all." See that repetition twice? "Above all. He is above all. He is above all." He's showing the stark contrast between Himself and Jesus. The question of origin paints this contrast. John says, "I am of the earth. He is above all. He is from above." Now when he says '*the earth*', '*of the earth*', he's not saying so much John's sinfulness. He's not emphasizing his moral distance. If he were emphasizing his moral distance from Jesus, he would have used the word '*world*'. Remember we talked about the world '*cosmos*' in other places like John 3:16, "That God so loved the world..." That John uses the word '*cosmos*', the word translated into English '*world*' to mean the whole world's system as opposed to God. He doesn't use that word here. He doesn't say, "I am from the world. He is from above." That's not the point. I mean, certainly John came out of a sinful world, was born, conceived in sin just like everybody else, but what he's emphasizing here is not the moral distance but the distance of being. He's saying, "I am a man, and only a man. He is from Heaven."

Now certainly we know Jesus is a man, and John's not arguing that. He knows, remember he's second cousins with Jesus. I mentioned earlier, he's six months older. Remember how we know that from Luke's Gospel, the story of John the Baptist's birth, and Jesus' conception and birth. Mary goes to see her first cousin Elizabeth and she's told by the angel, "Go visit Elizabeth. She in her old age is now pregnant. She who was barren has a child." Six months pregnant when Mary arrives and there, when she gets there, Elizabeth hears her voice. You know she comes in, "Elizabeth, is anybody home?" The sound of that going into Elizabeth's ear causes the baby in her womb to leap, and the Spirit of God comes upon Elizabeth and she says, "How amazing that the mother of my Lord should visit me." How does she know that? John is even then testifying, in the womb he's testifying, "There He is! There He is! He's the One Who is going to save us!" How amazing! Both babies, both man, Jesus is truly man, yes, but John says here, "Truly man, but not merely man. No, He existed before me." To pick up the words of the prophet Micah, "His goings forth are from eternity. He is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. He's from above, and comparing Him to me, I am of the dirt and the earth, and He's from Heaven." John is even now in the eyes of his disciples, decreasing Himself. Do you see that? "I must decrease, He must increase." He's saying, "I am nothing. He is everything."

If you think about this it's really astonishing when you put it in context of the rest of the New Testament. Do you remember what Jesus said about John? Remember when John had some doubts after these events? Later he's arrested and we have the story in Matthew 11. In prison, things are not going well and John somehow has a

moment of incredible weakness. The one who had testified in his mother's womb, the moment when he saw Jesus the first time with his own eyes said, "Behold the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world." The one who always was pointing to Jesus, in his moment of weakness, because he's of the earth, there languishing in Herod's prison, he sends his disciples to ask Jesus a question. Remember what the question was? "Are You the One or are we to wait for another?" What a profound moment of weakness. Jesus, rather than taking the moment to chastise John, "Can you believe this?" I mean, that's what I would have said. "Can you believe this?" I mean, if the apostles had been clued in, all the 12 that were with Jesus, John, and Peter, they didn't have enough sense to even know enough to really take issue with it yet either. But if they had, Peter would have been fired up. "What? Let's go beat him up!" It was an amazing moment of weakness, but what Jesus does in that moment shows His tenderness, and He says, "First of all, go back and tell John that the lame walk, the blind see, the dead come to life. Go tell him that. There is no waiting for another, he knows that." But He says to the people around Him, "You went out to see John the Baptist and what did you see? You see a prophet. Yes, and more than a prophet, for he was the one about whom it was said, 'I will send My messenger before you,'" quoting Malachi 3:1. He says, "Truly I say to you, among those born of women, there is not one greater than John the Baptist." Isn't that amazing? His grace to say that at that moment? "There is not one greater."

He's saying that in the history of humanity, that nobody is greater than John the Baptist, outside of course, of Christ Himself. I mean, he is the apex of the Old Testament prophets. Compare him to Isaiah, to Jeremiah, to Daniel, to Abraham, to Moses—nobody outclasses John. And John says, "When you look at me compared to Jesus, I am on my face in the dust, and He is everything." What he's getting at is not his sinfulness at this point, remember I mentioned the word 'earth', he's saying, "Listen. You look to me, I am of the earth. I am human and I am completely limited. I have no resources. He is from above. He has all of the resources. He is the answer, I am not." It's about Jesus' fullness versus John's emptiness. "I have nothing. I am of the earth. I cannot lay hold of the resources of Heaven." He's really picking up on what Jesus had said to Nicodemus when He said, in Verse 13, "No one has ascended into Heaven, but He Who descended from Heaven, even the Son of Man. You see, the only One that can bring the resources of Heaven is the One Who came from Heaven."

John had marvelous gifts. John was an amazing man. Think about his place in history. I mean, what an astonishing man and ministry! He broke the silence, he broke the spiritual drought, in 400 years nobody had been speaking for God. This

man comes onto the scene wearing a camel-hair outfit and a leather belt, eating locusts and honey. A Nazarite by vow, and he has the Word of God on his lips for the first time in 400 years, and because of this, the Jews of the 1st Century revered him greatly. Throughout the Mediterranean world, those who were not accepting Jesus were accepting John, or thinking about John. He was a prophet. We don't know about Jesus until John the apostle, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, says to those Jews who were doubting about Jesus, he says, "You want to revere John? Look what John said about Jesus." Some were following Jesus but were esteeming John too high. They had Jesus kind of as the first, maybe He's ahead of John, but He's the little head of John. This passage says there are no rivals to Jesus Christ. He is so far above and we so far below.

Now how does that relate to us? How does that relate to the character of our ministry and the content of our ministry? This means that we have to realize that every moment, every time we try to do anything for the Lord, we need to remember that we are absolutely and fundamentally empty. We have nothing in ourselves to give. Jesus has everything. We have nothing. This is what Psalm 127:1 is talking about.

***Psalm 127:1 ~ Unless the Lord builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the Lord guards the city, The watchman keeps awake in vain.***

It's really not about you and I. Now, you say, "Well, we have Spiritual gifts, don't we?" Yes, we do. Of course, where did we get those? We got those from God, but even just say we got our gift and we have it, and we should work and use our gifts, right? Absolutely. When we minister to people, we use our gifts. We're supposed to, but what this passage is teaching us is don't think that your gift is in itself able to accomplish anything at all. You and I are of the earth. We're from the earth and of the earth. That's all we are. He is everything. You say, "I have the gift of mercy, and so I hear of this person who has a broken heart, and I want to go, and my wife has the gift of service, or at least the gift of cooking, and so we're going to take a meal to her house, and I'm going to meet with that person who's bereaved and brokenhearted, and I'm going to serve them." Absolutely. Go do it, but realize that unless Jesus goes with you, nothing ultimate will happen.

So what you're supposed to do is go in dependence. Use your gifts. Expend the effort. Make the commitment and the sacrifice to go and be there, but at the time you're there, trust that Jesus is going to make Himself known, and that your goal is to point to Him. Certainly a thank you from them is appropriate, and you can say,

“You’re welcome,” right? But it’s not for that purpose, is it? It’s that oh, that they would see Christ. Oh, that they would know that even the reason I’m here is because of Jesus. You point to Him, and if you don’t point to Him, you’ve missed out on the opportunity. You say, “I have the gift of exhortation. I will go and meet with this brother who is in the throes of depression. I’m a good listener, and God’s given me the ability to understand how to encourage people, and I want to go and do that.” Absolutely. Go, but this passage says you don’t have any resources. You and I don’t, and so when you go, ask and pray that Christ would show up when you’re there, and that this brother who’s in the throes of depression would see the One who is the fountain of joy and find in Him everything he needs.

You have the gift of teaching and counseling, and you find a sister who’s struggling and in the grips of sin and fear, but she wants to walk in holiness. She’s repented. She’s responding, and you have the gift of teaching to show her what her heart idolatry issue is. “I will teach her.” These are important, essential things, but the one thing that must happen is she must come to see Jesus in a new way. He is the only One who has the power to dispel her fears. He is the only One who has the power to calm the anxious thoughts. I mean, those who are brokenhearted, those who are in prison, don’t need us. They need far more than we can ever offer. They need the One who quoted this passage when He preached in His hometown of Nazareth:

*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me because He has anointed Me to bring Good News to the afflicted. He has sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord, to comfort all who mourn, to grant those who mourn in Zion the oil of gladness instead of mourning.*

How are people going to be delivered? They must have Jesus speak to them. Now, it’s not some kind of mystical, magical thing we’re talking about, but there has to be that kind of central focus that you need Christ. We’re not doing ministry in an impersonal, third person kind of way, talking about issues and principles. Christianity is not a list of principles of how to live. It’s not merely that. It has some application there, but that’s not what Christianity is. If you just want to live by principles for living, other religions have that, but Christianity is a relationship with a living Savior. It is loving Christ more, and the reason you expose a heart idolatry in counseling is what? So they can quit worshiping the idol and come before Christ, and find in Him the answer to every need.

So in the supremacy of His person, if He has all of the resources, if He is the essence, what we need to do is celebrate Christ. Don't celebrate anything else. This is why we don't want to celebrate recovery. We don't want to celebrate anything but Jesus. We want to see people delivered. We want to see people overcoming things, but they will be delivered and overcome things rightly when they do it in the presence of Jesus Christ.

Now, let's move to the second point, which is:

## 2) The Supremacy of His Word:

This helps us to know how to apply that. How do you lead people to this supreme Person who is the answer? What if I don't have the resources and I'm meeting with someone? This is so comforting, because listen, when we meet with people, we never have the resources. Isn't that good news? I mean, it's not good news at first, is it? "We have nothing to give you. I'm here and I have nothing to give you." That doesn't sound so good right up front, does it? "But I know One who does, and I come as His ambassador to present Him to you, and I'm confident that in the ministry that we're about to have, I'm asking that as I speak His word to you, He will come personally to you." If you're unsaved, that's what evangelism is, but if you're a Christian, that's what we're doing to each other. We're coming in each other's needs and saying, "I love you. God's given me some gifts. I'm here to use my gifts, but my desire is that you would see Jesus, and I would see Jesus. I need Him and you need Him." That's the goal.

So as for the supremacy of His Person, how does His fullness become real in a situation? We first of all understand that He has the fullness and we're emptiness, but how does it happen? That comes to the second point, which is the supremacy of His word that John calls us to. Look at Verse 32:

***John 3:32 ~ What He has seen and heard, of that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. 33 He who has received His testimony has set his seal to this, that God is true.***

Contrast that with what John said about himself in Verse 31:

***John 3:31 ~ ... he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth.***

You see the contrast? John's saying, "Look. I'm of the earth. I'm from the earth, and I speak of the earth. He who is from above, He who is from Heaven, is above all, *for He whom God has sent speaks the words of God*; John's drawing a contrast not just between his being and Jesus' being, John being down here of the earth, and Jesus being up here from above, but he's drawing a distinction, a contrast, between John's words and Jesus' words. "My words are of the earth. His words are from above. His words are the very words of God."

Now here again, this initially causes us to ask some questions. I mean, John is a prophet. He wouldn't deny that. He's a prophet sent by God. He didn't claim to be the Prophet, but he's a prophet sent by God. A prophet, by definition, has the words of God put in his mouth, so what does he mean by this? He's trying to draw a distinction between him (as I mentioned earlier), the apex of the Old Testament prophets, John and Jesus. He's saying the difference between us and Him is that we are just giving you what we've been given. He's giving you what He has seen and heard. I mean, He knows. He has known the Father for all eternity. When Jesus comes, He's giving you eye witness and ear witness testimony to who God is.

An analogy might be that the Old Testament prophets – let's be clear on this. The word of God, everything written in the Bible, is the word of God. It's perfect.

*2 Timothy 3:16 ~ All Scripture is God-breathed...*

*2 Peter 1:21 ~ No prophet's writing ever came about by his own private interpretation, but holy men of God were led by the Spirit to write what they wrote.*

So it's all perfect. Jesus Himself testified to this. The Scripture cannot be broken, He said. "Not one jot or tittle will pass away." All of it is perfect. But John is just saying there's something about when a messenger comes, saying, "This is what God gave me to tell you," and when God Himself comes. He's emphasizing the personal nature of Jesus' word. Imagine that I am a herald in the old days and there's a king coming, and the herald goes out in front of the king and he makes a proclamation. The king has signed and sealed the proclamation. It's the word of the king and it's binding. No king's revelation in this world is perfect, but if you don't do what it says, you're in trouble. But what about when a king himself comes? That's what he's saying. We were just mouth pieces. We're of the earth, but when He comes, He's God Himself.

I think what he's also getting at is that, in reality, everything that we ever said was really what He said anyway. He was speaking through us. And so now anything that you ever got from Moses, or Isaiah, or Jeremiah was really spoken by Him. So you see, we're of the earth, but He's everything. It's His word.

He uses a couple of interesting Greek words in Verse 34, when he says: ...*speaks the words of God*. The verb *speaks* is the Greek word λαλέω (laleō) rather than the Greek word λέγω (legō). Legō is related to logos, but laleō speaks more of the active speaking itself, not the content that's said. It's the fact that He's speaking. That's when they would use the Greek word laleō. He's speaking. Now, if they wanted to say, "Did you listen to what He said?" then they'd be more likely to use legōmai or legō in the content. So he uses the word laleō here. Jesus speaks the words of God, and the idea is it has this connotation.

If we had different words for *speak* in English, and I was going to tell you that, I can't think of a good example of this, okay, let's say one of my modern heroes would be John MacArthur. John MacArthur came by the other day and, you know, he actually spoke to me. He spoke to me. Now, realize this doesn't compare really, because he wouldn't want me to even use his name, because he would say the same thing. "I'm nothing." But do you get what I'm saying? It's not that I want to tell you what he said. I just want to tell you he spoke to me! What John the Baptist is saying is, "God has spoken to us. He came and talked to us." The word he uses for *word* is not the word *logos*, but it's the word *ramatas* or *rama*, which means the actual words that are spoken. He's emphasizing that in Christ, God has come down and conversed with you. It's not us delivering a message that He gave, which is wonderful – it's perfect, but in Jesus Christ, God came down to converse with you, to talk with you, to be with you.

Now, how does that apply to us today? I think what he's getting at is that when you and I ever speak the word of God, at our best moments, we're like John the Baptist. We're giving what somebody else has given us. We're speaking the word of God. But I think what he's getting at is that one of the characteristics of the whole Bible is that it is not words of black print on white paper. It is alive. The Spirit of God makes it alive, and when the Spirit blows, and you are speaking, and you are presenting the truth, and (listen carefully) you are trying to lift up Christ, what happens is He comes down and converses with that person. He draws near into their situation, and He speaks to them. It's personal, intimate communication, and that is the goal. It's not third person, theological concepts. Theological concepts are important. Please understand that, but the goal is intimate communion with a living Savior. That's the goal.

The wonderful message that you and I have in any situation – we go into situations where we don't know what to say, we don't know what to do. I joke with other minister friends of mine that once you figure out how to deal with a situation, you never run into that one again. You'll never see that one again. You learned how to deal with it, but you'll never get that one again, because the Lord just likes us to always be feeling completely inadequate. *I don't know what to say. I don't know what to do, but I know One who knows what to say and just what to do, and I want to tell you about Him.* That is ministry. It's Jesus. He has all the resources. He has just the words to say.

I mean, think back to how we were talking about if you go to visit someone who's been bereaved and brokenhearted, we don't have anything, but we're to go. We're to use our gifts, and we're to try to lift up Christ and talk about Jesus, and to open the Book, to open the Bible and to always be looking for Jesus, and to point them to Him. And as you are lifting up Christ, Romans 10:17 says that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. I think it's talking about saving faith there, primarily, but I think there's a principle there.

It's interesting that he uses there the same Greek words not *logos* for word, but *rama*, which is a personal word, and "word of Christ" when you look at it in Scripture, speaks of not so much of a technical term for the Bible, but as the personal words that you're giving about Jesus. I think what he's saying in Romans 10:17 when you read it in context of the whole chapter is that in the preaching of Christ, that when you lift up Christ, He comes and begins speaking. It becomes not the word of Christ about Christ only, but it becomes the word of Christ that he's speaking and that's when saving faith happens, because who can save? You and I don't have the power to save. Believing just merely in some doctrine in an intellectual way doesn't save anyone. What is it that saves? What is it that brings a person who's dead to life? It's the word of Jesus Christ. It is Christ saying like what He said to Lazarus, "Lazarus, come forth!" I like what Spurgeon said about evangelism. He said:

*I am not foolish enough to go to the zoo and to converse with a hungry tiger and lecture him on the benefits of vegetarianism, but I would sooner succeed at that than I would call a sinful unbeliever to love my Savior.*

He's saying, "I have less ability to do that than to convince a tiger to be a vegetarian." What's he saying? I can't do it. Spurgeon, the prince of preachers, with all of his beautiful, eloquent language, could not bring someone to life from death. What must happen? I must lift up Jesus. I must lift Him up, and hope by His

power that He comes in the middle of the conversation, and suddenly the person who's listening becomes less aware of me, the speaker, less aware even of himself, and he sees Christ, and he hears Christ speak to him. That's where salvation happens.

So it's the same thing with a person who's bereaved, a Christian who's broken down, brokenhearted. You come and you comfort them. You listen. You mourn with those that mourn. You look for opportunities and you're sensitive to the right time. You don't just preach a sermon at them. You just listen for the right time and you point them gently to Jesus, because you're hoping that in the midst of that conversation or shortly after that, something that you said, they will hear in it the voice of the Man of sorrows, because they say, "I'm hurting and nobody understands." I've been in situations like that.

The other day, that lady that had a daughter who died, 30 years old, she lost a child. She's bereaving a child. I've never done that, and I don't want to do that, and I know that she feels you don't understand at some level. She was being very kind and gracious. We had a good conversation. *I don't understand what you're going through, but I know One who does.* You hope in the conversation that they will begin to hear the voice, that in their sorrow, they will hear the voice of the One who was called a Man of sorrows acquainted with grief, the One who is a great High Priest. Why is He a great High Priest? Because He's able to sympathize with us in our weakness, feel with us our pain, because He has experienced every measure of suffering. Everything that we've experienced, He's experienced, and more, and so He's able to come to our aid.

So in our ministry, we want them to see Him and hear Him. He knows what they feel. *He wept at Lazarus' tomb and He will weep with you, dear one.* That's our message. And in sweet communion with Him, as He speaks to you, you will find that He alone can bind up the brokenhearted, the one who's bound in sin, fear gripping their life, or lust imprisoning them, chained in sin, their thoughts are a tangled mess. You keep pointing them to Christ, lifting Him up, until they forget you, they forget their sin, they forget the chains, and they come into the presence of the mighty Savior of God, the Lord Shabuoath. His Name is King Jesus, and He breaks the chains. He delivers them. One mightier than the strong man has come. The strong man, Satan, deceiving even Christians and binding them up, thinking he has his goods in order, when you come and you lift up Christ, at some moment and in some way, and usually it's progressively breaking more and more the chains, but if you keep lifting up Christ, they will find One greater than the strong man is here, and He's able.

It's not us. It's not our wisdom. It's not anything about us. It's about Christ. I mean, think about it. When you lift up Jesus and when Jesus comes into the room, everything changes. Now, He's always with us, but it's the preaching of the word. It's the lifting up of Christ. The Spirit uses that to captivate the heart so they can really hear him. And when he says, "Loose them and let them go," they are. I mean, I love the pictures in the Gospels. If we were to encounter demons, if the Lord allowed us to have a vision of that, the good thing is it's only going to happen if God allows that. I always remember that I was very scared of demons when I was a teenager. I'd seen some of those crazy movies back then, and stuff, and I used to have some experiences where I was really afraid and couldn't sleep, and I came to understand what Jesus says in John 19:11 to Pilate. He says to Pilate, "You have no authority over Me but such as has been given to you from above." That is, "Pilate, you couldn't be doing anything here right now unless God had given it to you."

It comforted me to realize if a demon (and I don't think it's going to happen) but if a demon appeared, the first thing that I would want to think is, "You couldn't be here unless the Lord had allowed you to come. So I'm not so concerned about you. I'm concerned about what God is doing in this." That's the issue. It's about what the Lord is doing in this. But thinking about that now, if we encounter demons, you and I by ourselves, we'd want to think that way, but we would be terrified. I mean, we're no match for Satan and his kingdom. This is why it's so ridiculous for this charismatic thing of just telling demons to go and all that. That's not a part of what the Gospel is. We preach the Gospel, we preach the truth, we trust in God, and the Gospel overcomes them. But I love when you look at the Gospel picture, and you see these great beings that are far above us in their power, yet watch them when Jesus comes on the scene. They've got a man bound up throughout his whole life. He's throwing himself in the fire. He's cutting himself. He's doing all kinds of crazy things. Nobody can get through to him because his thoughts are such a jumbled mess, but when Jesus just comes into view, the demons start screaming, "Lord, have mercy on us!" They see the Man and they see He's more than a man. He just needs to come on the scene. If He's willing, He can speak and every demon in hell will go flying away.

The glorious privilege that you and I have is that as weak, frail, empty vessels, we have the opportunity to proclaim His truth, and by the power of His Spirit, to be used to see Him come in and work. It's that kind of conviction, that belief that He is everything and we are nothing, that really opens the door for Him to work. That's what John the Baptist understood, and that's what you and I need to understand. He is everything. We are nothing. He must increase. We must

decrease. When that becomes a reality in our lives, we really become a great benefit to others, because we get out of the way and they can see Him. That's what they need, and that's what we need.

Let's pray together...

Our Father, we praise You...

This audio presentation, description, and transcription by Providence Church in Duluth, Georgia, USA, is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 License.

 Except where otherwise noted, this work is licensed under <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

Attribution:

Based on work at Providence Church, Duluth, GA, USA and found online at <http://www.providenceduluth.org>. Permission for use beyond the scope of this license may be requested by contacting Providence Church, Duluth, GA through their website.