

“Who Is Jesus?”
January 18, 2026
John 3:22-36

I. Introduction

The first half of this chapter, when Jesus taught Nicodemus, has been studied so much that the second half, where John the Baptist answers the question “*Who is Jesus?*” is often shortchanged or skipped entirely. In these verses there is some information that isn’t found anywhere else in the New Testament. For example, the Apostle John wrote that John the Baptist had a committed group of disciples and that some of them, unlike Andrew and John, struggled with the decision to shift their commitment from John to Jesus. Also, not found in the other three Gospels is that for a time Jesus and John the Baptist ministered relatively close to one another. Most likely, Jesus and John knew each other well; they were relatives as well as working near each other. Their disciples probably knew each other, too.

The statement “**this was before John was put in prison**” did more than state the obvious that John was free to preach since he wasn’t in prison yet. It informs the reader that John’s conversation here and Jesus’ talking with a Samaritan woman in chapter 4 took place between Jesus’ baptism and John’s imprisonment. The other 3 Gospels begin their accounts of Jesus’ public ministry later—after John was already in prison—e.g., following Jesus’ temptation recorded in [Matthew 4:1-11](#), [Matthew 4:12](#) says, “**When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee.**” In today’s Scripture the Apostle John set the scene and then recorded John’s final testimony concerning himself and Jesus.

II. The Scene: John’s disciples were jealous.

The Apostle John wrote that after Passover and Jesus’ discussion with Nicodemus, “**Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized.**” Here, away from the hustle and bustle of Jerusalem, Jesus could teach His disciples as well as any others who came to hear this “*Prophet from Nazareth.*” During this time, it was Jesus’ disciples who were baptizing those who came to hear Jesus preach and answered His call to repent. [Turn to John 4:1-2.](#) This baptism

was the same baptism as John the Baptist's, a baptism of repentance. Christian baptism didn't/couldn't exist until after the death and resurrection of Jesus—turn to Romans 6:3-4.

While Jesus was teaching and His disciples were baptizing, John the Baptist was also teaching and baptizing but he was in a location a little north of Jesus. At some point during this time, an argument between some of John's disciples and an unnamed Jew developed. It began over a matter of which the Pharisees were particularly interested, the matter of ceremonial washing. But this argument soon moved to the issue of baptism, something that had been bothering John's disciples for some time—the relative importance of John's ministry and baptism compared to Jesus' ministry and baptism.

It seems that during the time that Jesus and John have been working near one another, John's following had gradually gotten smaller while Jesus' popularity had increased. John's disciples said, “Everyone was going to him.” They were jealous. Unwilling even to name Jesus—they called Him “that man.” John's envious disciples saw Jesus as a competitor who was gaining popularity at their master's expense. They had missed the purpose of John's ministry: to point the nation to the Messiah. As John 1:8 says, “He himself was not the light, he came only as a witness to the light.” This was the scene: John's disciples were jealous. So, John needed to set his followers straight—he did so through his testimony regarding himself and Jesus.

III. John's Testimony

A. Regarding himself: he was God's messenger. Unlike his zealous followers, John was not bothered by his declining popularity. John had remained focused on his ministry, his mission from God was to testify to Christ. He was God's messenger. Earlier, in John 1:27, he said of Jesus: “He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.” Now as his ministry was coming to a close, John's purpose wasn't changing.

John's humble reply, “A man can receive only what is given him from heaven,” must have surprised his disciples. Since all ministry and blessings come from God, there can be no competition. There is no place for envy or jealousy. Paul dealt with this issue, too, turn to 1 Cor. 3:1-9. Our gifts and

opportunities come from God, and He alone must get the glory. **Matt. 5:16** says, “**In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.**”

Back in the Gospel of John, John the Baptist reminded his disciples that he had said, “**I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.**” John was God’s messenger. John had never tried to mislead his followers. He saw Jesus’ popularity as a fulfillment of his ministry. Far from getting upset with Jesus’ popularity, John was filled with joy. Later, he said, “**He must become greater, I must become less.**” *John’s point was that the measure of success for any ministry is not how many people follow the minister, but how many people follow Christ.* Then John turned his attention to Jesus.

B. Regarding Jesus

1. First, John said that He is the bridegroom. John used the familiar picture of a Jewish wedding to explain the relative importance of Jesus and himself. He compared Jesus to the bridegroom and himself to the friend of the bridegroom—the best man. The friend of the bridegroom oversaw many of the details of the wedding which included bringing the bride to the bridegroom to begin the wedding ceremony as well as serving as the master of ceremonies. Once his task was done, the focus rightfully shifted from best man to the bridegroom. It would be a foolish thing for the best man to try to “*upstage*” the bridegroom and take his place. John’s joy, the best man’s joy, was to hear the voice of the Bridegroom and know that He had claimed His bride; that everything was in order.

John summarized his view of himself in relation to Jesus in perhaps the most humble statement made by anyone in Scripture: “**He must become greater; I must become less.**” “**Must**” implies divine necessity. It was God’s will for John to give way to Jesus. There was no reason for the crowds to hang around the messenger once the Messiah had arrived. Because John understood this and accepted this, he joyously accepted God’s plan for his ministry.

2. His credentials—the Superiority of Christ John then gave five reasons or credentials to help his disciples (as well as everyone else) accept the superiority of Jesus Christ.

a. First, He came from heaven; He is God. Unlike others, including the prophets and John himself, Jesus wasn't simply called from heaven or empowered by heaven, He came from heaven. **Turn to John 10:30-33.** The Jews were going to stone Jesus because He was claiming that He was God. Jesus didn't just come from heaven—He was and is God. Unlike Jesus, John the Baptist wasn't “from above.” He declared himself to be from the earth—as **John 1:6** says, he was “a man who was sent from God.” No earthly messenger from God came from above. Only Jesus Christ can make that claim. Jesus was God incarnate and His testimony to the truth is infinitely greater than John's. Because of Jesus' heavenly origin, He had to increase while John had to decrease.

b. He knew the truth firsthand. Jesus' teaching is superior to anyone else's, including John's, because His knowledge isn't secondhand. John said, “He testifies to what he has seen and heard.” Jesus knew the truth firsthand. **Turn to Hebrews 1:1-3.** Jesus shared what He has seen and heard from the Father. In **John 8:26** Jesus said, “He who sent me is reliable, and what I have heard from him I tell the world.” Because of this, Jesus was able to speak with a special authority—even Jesus' enemies said in **John 7:46**, “No one ever spoke the way this man does.” Jesus knew the truth firsthand.

c. He had the Holy Spirit without limit. The prophets of old who spoke for God were led, empowered, and inspired by the Holy Spirit. For example, in **Luke 1:15** the angel said that John the Baptist “will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth.” But because of each person's sinful, fallen human nature, the Spirit's ability to empower them was limited. But Jesus Christ was without sin (**1 Peter 2:21-22**) and therefore as **Colossians 2:9** says, “In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.” John said that God gave Jesus “the Spirit without limit.” There was no limit to the Spirit's power working through Jesus. He had the Holy Spirit without limit.

d. Finally, He received all authority from the Father. John said that because of His love for the Son, the Father “has placed everything in His hands.” In **Matthew 28:18** Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” To reject the Son's witness is to rebel against the highest authority in the universe.

C. John's Final Warning Before he disappeared completely from the scene, John the Baptist gave an invitation and a warning—his final warning. Just as Joshua did in [Joshua 24:15](#) and Jesus did in [John 3:18](#), John set forth the only two choices available to lost sinners: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.” There is no middle of the road; you either trust Jesus Christ or you reject Him.

“Eternal life” does not simply mean “*spending eternity in heaven*.” The believer possesses that life the instant he believes; John said, “has eternal life.” The opposite of eternal life is eternal death, the wrath of God. A person does not have to die and go to hell to be under the wrath of God. Jesus said in [John 3:18](#), “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already.” The verdict has already been given, but the sentence has not been carried out yet. In [2 Peter 3:9](#) Peter tells why: “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

IV. Conclusion

John's testimony about Jesus is just as important for us today as it was for his own followers 2000 years ago. Since Jesus came from heaven, He represents the Father. [John 1:1](#) says, **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.** Jesus is God incarnate; God in human form. For that reason, we can trust and rely on what He says. Since Jesus' words are the Words of God, they are to be obeyed and put into practice in our everyday life—all of them, not just the ones we find convenient to do. It's when we follow all of Jesus' teachings that we will see their truth and experience their power. When we accept Jesus' witness and believe in Him, making Him our Lord and Savior, becoming His children, we will share in His love and His wealth beginning at that instant; from that point on we have eternal life.

In these verses, John the Baptist clearly declared the sovereignty and supremacy of Jesus Christ. Only Jesus is able to save sinful men from the consequences of their disobedience, their sins. A verse that is quoted often, [Acts 4:12](#) says, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under

heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” 1 Cor. 3:11 says, “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

On the other hand, if Jesus is rejected, then the Father is also rejected. John 5:23 says, “He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent Him.” To reject Jesus’ words is to reject the Words of the Almighty God. 1 John 5:10 says, “Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son.” This is rebelling against the highest authority in the universe. In his final warning, John the Baptist said that “whoever rejects the Son will not see life; instead, God’s wrath remains on him.” God’s displeasure against sin remains on disobedient sinners who refuse to believe in Jesus Christ. Just as eternal life is the present possession of believers, so also is condemnation the present condition of unbelievers. The idea is not that God will one day condemn sinners for their disobedient unbelief; as we read earlier in John 3:18 they are already in a state of condemnation from which only saving faith in Jesus Christ can deliver them. As John 3:16 says, it was to save helpless, doomed sinners from the terrible fate of God’s wrath and the final judgment of hell that God sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. Really, who is Jesus in your life?

John the Baptist did exactly what God had gifted and called him to do. He accepted the supremacy of Jesus Christ. John was aware that anyone can only be and do what God gives him. Paul put it this way in Philippians 4:13, “I can do everything through him who gives me strength.” Each one of us needs to be content and faithful with his gifts and his own calling. Can you like John rejoice with others when they are victorious? There is no place for jealousy. We, like John, are instruments to be used by God to bring people to Jesus and glory to God. Now it is our responsibility to use our particular gifts and talents to carry out the Great Commission. Paul’s challenge to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:1-2 is really for all of us: “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage-- with great patience and careful instruction.”