

Who is worthy to follow?

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[0 : 00] We will be reading from John chapter 3 verses 22 to 36. You can follow along in your bulletin, in your Bibles, or on the screen above. Let's read.

After this, Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. John also was baptizing at Enon near Salem because water was plentiful there and people were coming and being baptized.

For John had not yet been put in prison. Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. And they came to John and said to him, Rabbi, he who is with you across the Jordan to whom you bore witness, look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him.

John answered, A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness that I said, I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.

The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete.

[1 : 16] He must increase, but I must decrease. He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way.

He who comes from heaven is above all. He bears witness to what he has seen and heard. Yet no one receives his testimony. Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true.

For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand.

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him. This is the word of God.

Thank you, Zoe. Well, good morning again. Good morning, Kevin. Good morning again. My name is Oscar.

[2 : 18] If you don't know me, hopefully this doesn't fall over as I preach. I'm one of the elders here at Watermark, and I have the great privilege of... Sorry, thank you. Thanks, dude.

I have the great privilege of delivering God's word today. Can you pray with me as we consider God's word? Father, we all humbly come before you. As Kevin was sharing, we all...

We're broken people. We don't have it all together. And yet you are perfect and holy God. So we ask as we look into your word today, as I try to deliver it, I pray that all of our hearts would be open and soft to hear your voice.

I pray that we would receive what you want us to hear. Not what I want us to hear, but what you, Holy Spirit, want us to hear. May Jesus be glorified in our hearts as we consider your word today.

We give this time to you in the precious name of Jesus. Amen. Amen. In this day and age, with the widespread use of smartphones and social media, we can easily go online and follow all sorts of different online influencers.

[3 : 34] We can follow celebrities and athletes. We can follow artists and musicians. We can follow thought leaders and so-called experts in multiple different fields.

So who do you follow? Cristiano Ronaldo, apparently the most followed person in the world with a billion followers. Lionel Messi, LeBron James. How about Blackpink or BTS?

I don't know who they were until last year. How about, do you follow Jamie Oliver or Gordon Ramsay? How about Dr. Peter Atiyah or Andrew Huberman?

Maybe you follow Warren Buffett or Jack Ma. Or perhaps you don't go on social media like our good friend Kevin here. But maybe it's closer to home. Maybe you've been influenced, your worldview and values have been influenced by a parent or an older sibling or a coach, a teacher, maybe a pastor or an elder.

Who is it that when they say or do something, you have to click on it? You have to sit up and listen to them. And have you ever asked yourself, why do you spend so much time following the people that you follow?

[4 : 50] Why do they have the credibility to be someone worthy to be followed? Have you looked into their private lives? Do their outer lives look all nice and put together? But behind the camera, it's a different story.

This morning, as we dive into this passage from John chapter 3, 22 and onwards, the question is, if we all follow someone, which we all do, then who should we follow?

Who should we follow? And we'll look at this passage in two parts. The first is, don't miss the point. And the second is, who is Jesus? Don't miss the point.

Over the past six or so weeks, we've been looking at this book of John, the first few chapters. And towards the end of this book, in chapter 20, John the Apostle, the writer, he writes that this book was written that you may believe that Jesus is the Son of God.

And by believing in him, you may have life in his name. This book was written to give us a sense of who Jesus is from multiple different accounts or testimonies.

[6 : 01] From John the Apostle, the writer. From John the Baptist, a different John. From many people who interact with Jesus. And of course, from Jesus himself, who spoke about himself.

He spoke about his Father in heaven. He spoke about heaven and hell. He spoke about eternity.

This book of John was written that we may see Jesus, believe in him, and have life in his name.

And today in our passage, the background is that Jesus has left the city. He's out in the countryside.

And there, he's baptizing. Actually, chapter 4, verse 2, tells us that Jesus' disciples were baptizing.

And at the same time, John the Baptist was also somewhere out in the countryside at a place called Anon near Selim. We don't know where that is. But John the Baptist was also baptizing somewhere else in the countryside, apart from Jesus.

And a situation comes up. Some tension comes up. Some of John the Baptist's disciples are upset that some people are leaving Jesus' Some people are leaving John's group and going to Jesus' group to be baptized.

[7 : 15] Team John was losing people to team Jesus. In verse 26, John's disciples complained to him. Rabbi, he who is with you across the Jordan to whom you bore witness.

Look, he's baptizing and all are going to him. Now, clearly, not all people were leaving John and going to Jesus. But this sort of emotional tone of the disciples indicates the jealousy in their hearts. Now, this comment that all are going to Jesus and that that's a bad thing, is this surprising to you? After all, ever since John the Baptist began his ministry, he was pretty clear as to who he was and who he wasn't.

Back in chapter 1, John the Baptist said, He who comes after me, referring to Jesus, ranks before me. Because he was before me. John the Baptist also says, when he saw Jesus, he said, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And John responds to his disciples in verse 28. He says, You yourselves bear me witness. You've heard me say this before. That I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.

[8 : 32] John was quite clear. I am just a messenger. I'm not the most important person. Jesus is who you should follow. Jesus is who you should trust. Jesus is the one you should run after and adore.

And yet, somehow, John's disciples completely missed the point of his entire ministry. And his ministry was to shine a spotlight on the beauty of Jesus. Imagine it's a beautiful day.

You've hiked up Twin Peaks or another mountain in Hong Kong. And the sun is just about to set.

And you're just ready to bask in all the beauty of nature. You're overlooking the harbor.

The sun's coming down. But over there, you notice a couple folks. They're armed with their selfie sticks. And they're spending all this energy trying to take the perfect selfie just as a sunset with the perfect light.

But they take too long. They spend too much energy. The angle's not perfect. The light's not perfect. And they miss the sunset. They miss the selfie. They completely miss the point of that experience.

[9 : 37] And it was kind of like that for John the Baptist's disciples. They were so fixated on John as if he was someone to worship that they miss Jesus. Now, I've been a Christian since I was probably, I don't know, seven or eight years old.

But for the first 20 years of my Christian life, I cannot honestly say that I knew Jesus. I didn't really have a personal relationship with him. I went to church in my teens. I went to youth group. I was in university ministry. I even helped to plant a church. But for those first 20 years, I didn't know Jesus personally. We didn't have a relationship. I thought that being a Christian meant I had to serve in church. I had to be a good moral person and not sin. Of course, I was sitting all the time, and I still do. For the first 20 years of being a Christian, I missed the point of being a Christian. How about for you? Maybe you've grown up in church, and you're a Christian by tradition. [10:46] But if you're truly honest with yourself, sitting right here, you can't say that you really know Jesus personally. Or maybe you grew up in a Christian home, but you find it difficult to believe that God loves you because you've never experienced love before.

Or maybe you've been in church for a while, but your church leaders have hurt you. And now you find it hard to love God and trust God because, well, if his church leaders were not good people, how can God be good?

Or maybe you've struggled with life. Nothing ever goes your way. And so how can God be good? Well, on this last point, when we give our lives to Jesus, when we surrender to him and say that he's our Lord and Savior, he does bless us with many, many things.

He gives us his grace and forgiveness. We receive eternal life in heaven. And he also gives us many material things as well, many resources, if he so chooses.

But the point of being a Christian is not what Jesus gives us. It's Jesus himself. It's that relationship with him, knowing him, praying to him, experiencing him, experiencing his joy, being in a relationship with him.

[12:03] It's kind of like marriage, in a way. For my wife Celeste and I, the point of our marriage is not that we need to work really hard to raise our kids, to send them out into the world.

The highest calling of marriage is the intimacy of a relationship. It's not just functional partnership. It's relational intimacy. It's loving intimacy.

You know, years ago, I'm not sure if you were here for this, but we ran a poll here at Watermark and we asked everyone, what's the best thing about Watermark? And the most common response was, it's the community.

And that's a wonderful response. We're called Watermark Community Church. Being a Christian is not a solo project. We will miss the beauty of Jesus if our Christianity is just internal and private and away from community.

And yet, community is not the most important part of church, nor the most important part about being a Christian. Jesus is. And in this passage, in many ways, John, sorry, Jesus, was messing up this community of discipleship that John had.

[13:23] People were leaving John's CG and going to Jesus. And, imagine what Niels would say if that happened. But, and John's disciples were upset at this.

But John said, hey, that's a good thing. You're leaving me, but you're going to the one that should be adored. You're going to Jesus to know him, to experience him, to understand him, and to love and trust him.

Because being with Jesus was more important than being in John's community. And so for us, let's remember, don't come to church primarily because your friends are here.

Don't come to church primarily because you think that if you can just hang on to that good sermon, not for me, from Kevin and Niels, if you can just hang on to that good sermon, all will be okay.

Don't worship your church leaders. Worship Jesus. We should all follow our church elders, yes, but all the elders here, we're all broken men. We're all highly fallible.

[14:30] We're all sinful and need the grace of Jesus. The point of being a Christian is to worship Jesus Christ. And so the question is, do we truly love Jesus or do we just love our church community?

Do we truly love Jesus or we just love what we think he can give us? And this is what John the Baptist was trying to say in these verses.

Don't miss the point. Don't focus on me. Focus on Jesus. I am not the point. Jesus is the point. And in verse 29, he uses this metaphor of a wedding.

Similar to in chapter 2, when Jesus turns water into wine at that wedding, a wedding is a symbol of the ultimate celebration. And the seminal part of a wedding is the wedding ceremony.

But imagine if at that ceremony, just as the bride and the groom were saying their vows, the best man interrupts and starts talking about himself. Or imagine if just as a newly married husband and wife are taking their wedding photos, the best man photo bombs them.

[15:47] Of course, all the guests and the family would say, dude, get out of here, man. It's not about you. It's about the husband and the wife, the bride and groom. John says, the best man isn't the point.

Verse 29, he says, the one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice.

Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete. The bride is for the bridegroom. We are the bride. Jesus is the groom. It's interesting, this last sentence, therefore, this joy of mine is now complete. What an incredible thing to say in that context, if you really think about it. John's own status was being diminished. He was pretty much giving up his ministry and career, but his joy was full and complete and perfect because he saw Jesus lifted up and adored.

How about for you? What would make your joy complete? Is it that perfect job? Is it that perfect relationship? Is it financial security?

[17:01] For John the Baptist, it was seeing Jesus lifted up and adored. And so for John, the very thing that offended his disciples was the exact thing that he wanted to see.

Verse 30, he must increase and I must decrease. My ministry must diminish so that Jesus can be lifted up. Jesus is the main show.

I'm just the opening act. John lived not for his glory. He lived to honor Jesus. These were the last recorded words of John the Baptist in this book of John as around 6 to 12 months later, he was put in prison and then he was executed a bit after that.

You could say this was John the Baptist's last testimony. In our culture of self-promotion, isn't it hard to believe that John the Baptist was excited at the downfall of his ministry?

This is his career. How many of us here today have worked incredibly hard in school, at work, to get to where we are today? Would you be able to give it all up?

[18:08] Give up all your hopes and dreams, your status and position to honor Jesus? Who here can truly say he must increase, I must decrease?

Often actually we say this and we say he may increase and may we decrease. Actually it says he must increase and we must decrease. This is the Christian life.

I imagine it took John years to build up a reputation in the ministry field. I imagine it took him a lot of hard work to build up all those disciples that followed him around.

But John was willing to give up all of that if it meant his disciples were going to experience Jesus and love and trust Jesus. And so the question is, how could he do that?

How could he give up everything? Well, it's because he knew who Jesus was. He knew who Jesus was. Who is Jesus?

[19:10] Well, let's take a step back. Over the past six or so weeks, as we've opened up these first few chapters of this book of John, we've seen and heard about Jesus from multiple different angles and perspectives.

In chapter one, John the Apostle, the writer, he tells us that Jesus is the Word. The Word, Jesus, he was there from the beginning creating the world. And then the Word became flesh and lived among humanity.

And then John the Baptist, he comes on the scene and he tells us, look to Jesus, he is the Son of God. And then in chapter two, Jesus turns water into wine at that wedding in Cana.

showing the reader for the first time that he isn't like everybody else. The laws of nature and physics don't apply to him. And after that, he goes into the temple with full authority.

He drives out all of those money changers and people doing commerce and trade. And he shows that, yes, I'm not just any rabbi. He said, this is my father's house.

[20:12] And then last week, we heard that Jesus spoke to Nicodemus. And in the dead of night, he tells Nicodemus, if you want to see God, if you want to see the kingdom of heaven, you must be born again.

You must be born of heaven. But how? How? Through the Son. Through the Son.

And only through the Son. Believe in the Son and you shall be saved. Over these few chapters, John the Apostle has been slowly painting this mosaic of Jesus, adding texture and color.

And now, in these last few verses of chapter 3, after all the testimony and comments about Jesus, dialogue and actions from Jesus himself, John finally cuts to the heart of the most important question.

Who is Jesus? Is he a political activist? Is he a rabbi? Is he like an Old Testament prophet? Is he a good moral teacher?

[21 : 17] Who is Jesus? And in these last verses, from 31 to 34, John tells us, Jesus Christ is none other than God himself.

If you have seen Jesus, you've seen the very face of God. If you have heard Jesus speak, you've heard the very words of God.

If you have seen Jesus in action, you've seen the very hand of God at work. Jesus is none other than God in flesh. Jesus is divine.

Listen to what John says. Verse 31. He who comes from above is above all. Jesus was born as a human, as a baby, excuse me, 2,000 years ago in Bethlehem.

But Jesus existed always in eternity. The Old Testament prophet Micah, he says this about Jesus. He says, from the clan of Judah, which was a lineage of Jesus, from you shall come forth one who is ruler over Israel, whose origin is from old, from everlasting.

[22 : 38] Jesus comes from heaven and is therefore above all. He has full authority to do anything and everything he pleases. Hence, the laws of nature and physics don't apply to him and he can turn water into wine in a heartbeat and even death and the grave have no hold on Jesus.

He's from heaven. verse 34, if we go on, it says, for he whom God has sent utters the words of God for he gives the spirit without measure.

In the Old Testament, prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah, for example, were given a measure of God's spirit for a period of time to speak God's word for that period of time.

But Jesus Christ is full of the spirit without measure. He's been given God's spirit fully and completely. He's full of God because he is God.

And if we pay attention to these verses, 31 to 34, we see these words, speaks, bears witness, testimony, utters the words of God, referring to Jesus speaking.

[23 : 51] These are like arrows pointing us to pay attention to the words of Jesus. What he said was very important. We should listen to him. And so as we reflect on the words spoken by Jesus, this raises three questions for us.

The first is, are we following the words of Jesus? Going back to the people that we follow, I mentioned Dr. Peter Atiyah. Dr. Atiyah, years ago, he was espousing these medical views, these health hacks, that cold baths and hot saunas and long-term fasting were good for immunity and health.

But recently, Dr. Atiyah, he changed his mind. He said, after further research and empirical experience, he doesn't recommend these things anymore. The negatives outweigh the positives. He changed his mind because, well, he's human. But Jesus Christ, because he's from above, he's above all. He's full of God's spirit without measure because the Father has given all things into his hands.

Everything Jesus said in the Bible either came true or will come true. He never changes his mind. He never changes his convictions. He never, never lies.

[25 : 11] He always tells the truth. Everything he says comes true. And yet, how much of what Jesus said do we actually listen to?

How much of what he said do we actually believe and respond to? Actually, Jesus said, whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up his cross.

Jesus said, whoever wants to save their life will lose it. But whoever loses their life for me will find it. Jesus said, no one can serve two masters.

You cannot serve both God and money. Are we following the words of Jesus? And second, who is Jesus to you?

Last week we heard Jesus on Nicodemus, the most famous passage in the Bible. For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

[26 : 12] belief. We cannot separate belief in God from belief in Jesus. The very words of Jesus, the testimony of Jesus is the testimony and the words of God.

Jesus was there at creation. The Father loves all, the Father loves Jesus and has given all things into his hands. Jesus said, the road to all that is good come through me.

The road to all that is good now and forever Jesus said comes through me. I am the good shepherd who comes down and from heaven and gives life.

I and the Father are one. I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. Who is Jesus to you?

Is he an interesting influencer? Is he a good moral teacher? You know, Coldplay is coming to Hong Kong I think next month. I bet if Chris Martin walked through those doors right now, some here would gush, some would scream and yell and I bet a select few may even faint.

[27 : 27] Where is Leo De Silva? He would faint. What would you do if Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world walked through those doors right now into this hall? Would you gush?

Would you meet him with indifference? Would you be fearful? Or would you bow down in worship and adoration? Who is Jesus to you?

And third, do you believe in the Son? When Jesus walked this earth, he made astounding claims and performed miracles that no one had ever seen before.

He claimed that you must believe in him and him alone to be saved. There is no middle ground.

Verse 36, whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.

Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life but the wrath of God remains on him. The challenging verse. this morning, if you're not yet a Christian or if you think you're a Christian but your words and your actions suggest that you're not, this verse is speaking directly to you.

[28 : 46] And friends, your response is binary. Either you bow down to Jesus in worship and adoration or you reject everything he has said and the wrath of God remains on you.

Either you believe that Jesus is who he said he is from above and above all full of the Spirit without measure who utters the very words of God the Son of God the Savior of the world the one who died on the cross for you.

Either you believe all those things or you reject everything he has said and done. John the Baptist has made his choice and I've made mine.

With all my mind when I go down the rabbit hole of history I can see that Jesus is who he said he is everything he said is true. And with all my heart and every bone in my body I know my Redeemer lives I know him.

Don't let another second go by without knowing your Savior. Come talk to me or Kev or another elder if you want to know your Savior Jesus Christ. We'd love to help you to get to know him.

[29 : 54] And for those of us who are Christians and have declared that our faith hope and trust is in Jesus today's passage reminds us that Jesus is divine and he's worthy of worship.

And so as we as we think about how to respond this week let's consider these couple ways. For me I find spending a little bit of time every morning in prayer just pouring my heart out to Jesus.

I read his word a little bit and I just pray to him and I just pour out all that I'm thinking feeling all my hopes and anxieties praise and adoration it's a relationship. He's my refuge he's my shepherd he's my God it's a wonderful time of intimacy and relationship.

Perhaps consider doing that this week or I suggest coming up for prayer our prayer team will be around the hall in just a moment sometimes you know God works when we take that step of faith to ask to physically ask for prayer not that we're earning God's favor but God honors that step of faith and finally perhaps consider opening up and sharing with someone a burden on your heart or perhaps this is something that you know isn't right in your heart maybe there's a conflict that you haven't resolved yet maybe you've been repeatedly sitting against God in some certain way you've been idolizing something confess that to someone and then ask them to pray for you let me close today's passage tells us that we can call ourselves Christians and come to church for many years and totally miss the point being

Christian is about knowing Jesus loving Jesus experiencing Jesus and experiencing the incredible joy and peace and satisfaction that nothing in this world could ever replace and it's not because of a new way of thinking it's not because of a philosophy or mindset it's not because of some great moral clarity it's not because we're really disciplined it's because of Jesus Christ who he is the son of God the savior of the world he's from above and above all who utters the very words of God it's about him he's God and yet he beckons us and he invites us to know him what an incredible thought the God of the universe says hey I want to know you I want you to know me I already know you I want you to know me I want you to love me and trust me Jesus Christ is worthy not just to

follow he is worthy of all our adoration praise and worship let's now respond to him let's respond to him let's pray

[32 : 59] Father God Holy Spirit Lord Jesus if you've been speaking to us Lord if we have heard your voice today Lord I pray that we would not just let it pass us by like some interesting information and data I pray God that you would convict us may our hearts open up and receive your word today Lord I pray God that Jesus Christ would be magnified in every person's heart today Lord I pray God for those of us who have been indifferent about you those of us that have struggled to believe that you're good and you love us those of us that don't even know you at all those of us that have rejected you God wherever we're at we're all in different places I pray even now right now we would respond to you in praise and worship in surrender and God we may not even know what that looks like what does it mean to surrender help us

Holy Spirit open up our hearts and reveal to us the ways in which we have put other things and prioritize other things above you open up our hearts to show us where we've idolized the things of this world our own hopes and ambitions above you open up our hearts to help us to see where we have prioritized even things in church above you help us to see make these words come alive that you are from above and above all you are full of the spirit without measure that the father loves his son has given all things into his hands the son utters the very words of God as we respond to you may our hearts adore you and love you and worship you we give you the rest of this service in Jesus name amen