

What is the measure of a man (or a woman)???

Is it:

- the number of “friends” one has on Facebook?
- the number of “likes” they receive when they post a comment somewhere?
- the number of “views” one gets on YouTube, or TikTok?

And at this point, you’ll probably realise that I’m living in the past because I don’t know what other social media examples to use...

But you see, what these things do, is they quantify the cravings humans have, to be seen/recognised/valued/appreciated – It’s a quest for “significance”...

Now, as someone who’s been a Pastor for over 20 years, I don’t know if you realise it or not, most Pastors (myself included), are quite shallow. We have a level of craving for significance...

Maybe it’s because of the things one has to sacrifice to serve long-term in full-time ministry as a Pastor/missionary/chaplain,,,,, whether it be:

- capacity to earn high wages;
- fulfilment of running one’s own business;
- prospects of advancement;
- live where you want to live;
- do what you want to do...

For me, probably the biggest cost for me, is that we can rarely get away for a weekend, or how our extended family have to work around us when planning family functions...

But, because of their personal cost of ministry, most Pastors (in some way) crave evidence of significance – they need to know, that it's worth it ...

Some might count:

- the number of people in church on a Sunday and compare it to other churches;
- the number of conversions – how many people came forward at an altar-call;
- the number of downloads of their messages; or
- the number of likes on their Facebook feed...; or
- just seeing the spiritual growth as infant Disciples of Jesus mature in Christ...

The human nature, craves significance...

John the Baptist: Well, he's a bloke who gave up more than most:

- lived out in the wilderness;
- clothes were made out of camel's hair (scratchy);
- wasn't allowed to drink any wine or any alcohol;
- religious leaders hated him;
- the king hated him;
- eventually, he was locked up in the dungeons, and he was beheaded on the whim of a spoilt girl and her vindictive mother...

The cost of ministry was very high for John the Baptist (JB/Bapto),,, but when his disciples came to him, belly-aching that that Jesus bloke is baptising more people than what we are now,,,, we realise that JB, was one who didn't crave significance for Himself.... the significance that JB craved, was for Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to be lifted up: Recognised; seen; exalted...

Righto:

So, Jesus and His disciples have been in Jerusalem for the Passover, but now they've gone into the Judean countryside, and part of what they've been doing, is baptising.; Bapto and **his** disciples, are **also** baptising.... Go team Jesus; Go team Bapto...

And V25 says something, and I think we're meant to read-between-the-lines, to understand what's going on.

²⁵ Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification.

Now, we've got to remember that these people are **all** "Jews". But whenever the Gospel of John talks about "The Jews", it's talking about the religious leaders from Head-Office in Jerusalem (and these are not the good guys)...

And so, when it says "**a discussion arose**", that's a nice way of saying "they got into it" – "an argument happened". These guys did not get on... and it's in **this** context, that Bapto's disciples come back to him and belly-ache about Jesus & his Disciples, baptising more than what they are...

I wonder what went on in that confrontation with the trouble-maker from Head-Office. “What pointed things – what niggling statements, did he have a go at Bapto’s disciples about?”...

You see, that’s what Satan does – he tries to set one ministry against another ministry; one preacher against another preacher; one church against another church... And one way that he does that, is to raise a bit of jealousy...

How many times have you heard an unbeliever say, “Why are there so many different religions? If you lot can’t agree, why would you expect me to?”

Is that what’s going on here? Well, we don’t really know, but maybe, because out of that “discussion”, came the gripe that “*Jesus is baptising more than we are.*”... “Team Jesus is beating us, Bapto...”

But John’s OK with that. In fact, he rejoices in it. His whole purpose, is to point to Jesus. Why would he get his nose out-of-joint because people are paying more attention to Jesus than what they are to him???

And he starts out by telling them, “It’s a God-thing”. “**A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.** – The rise of Jesus, is what God was doing... And BTW, weren’t you expecting this anyway? I mean, I did tell you, that “I’m not the Christ. But I was sent before Him”... Guess Who Jesus is...

And he uses the image of a wedding (to help them to understand). Now, things have obviously changed since then, because these days at a wedding, everybody's waiting for the bride. But back then, it was the other way around. It was the groom whom they would be waiting for.

And Bapto draws the analogy of himself being the best-man, and Jesus being the bride-groom.

The Best Man doesn't get the bride (at least he's not supposed to). The **Groom** gets the bride. The Best Man is standing there, waiting for the Groom to turn up. And when he hears the Bride-Groom's voice: "**Yeah**, Good times"...

Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. ³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease."

Now, I've heard this verse quoted a few times, in relation to succession planning within a church – a change-over of Ministers/Pastors... The long-term faithful minister is stepping down, and a new, younger version is stepping up to take over "**He must increase, but I must decrease.**".... That completely mis-understands what this is about.

Do not go putting another minister or pastor on a level with Jesus... The joy of the **new** pastor taking over, is that **he** is going to decrease, while Jesus increases...

In some churches, it's all about the cult of the Pastor or the "Senior" Pastor.... And the more popular the Pastor is – the

more attention he receives, the greater the draw of the church...

And let me tell you: When a church culture becomes about the cult of the personality – the popularity of the leader, we've lost the plot...

My hope and my prayer, is that despite me, you would be pointed to Jesus... I mean, I try to be a good Minister/Pastor/Preacher/Bible-teacher,,, I want to serve God as effectively as I can,,, but I know I'm nothing special.... But even if I was, I don't want to ever be lifted up. I must decrease, for Jesus to increase.

And this is not only for leaders. This is a spiritual truth for all of us... For Jesus to increase, we must decrease... Sadly, the message being preached today is often something that appeals to the self-centredness of our narcissistic culture – where the message received is “You will increase”...

And we're given promises of:

- More money;
- more satisfaction;
- more blessings
- more prominence;
- more respect;
- more importance;

- “You'll become a person of influence”;
- you will be so much more significant...

We might as well be listening to some kind of self-help guru...

John knew better: “I must decrease, for Jesus to increase”...

What does that mean for you and me? In the context of the rest of Chapter 3, it means we are born again. This is a transformation so radical, Jesus said “You must be born again”... It means we put to death, our old self-centred life, and we are born again, to a life where **Jesus** is No.1.; He is lifted up; He is exalted; It’s all about Him and not about me... And guess what: We decrease, and He increases.

Now, I don’t know about you, but I find this greatly freeing... While most of the world are striving for significance – wanting to be noticed – they’re desperate to create a lasting legacy,,, it is so freeing to flip that on its head and say,

- “I don’t need any of that nonsense....
- “I am nothing...
- Jesus is everything...”

In Hebrews, it talks about having a Sabbath rest. For me, that’s a Sabbath rest...

It doesn’t matter if I don’t have any significance – I don’t have to strive for significance, because the Lord Jesus Christ is significant, and I remain in Him...

Everything else in this world, is fuel for the fire. The only thing that lasts – the only thing of eternal significance, is the significance of Christ...

I know man, who claims to be a Christian, and yet, throughout his whole life, he’s been well-known as “an achiever”. And

*not by accident – he has cultivated this... He **wants** to be known/recognised/have a lasting legacy as a person, who has been significant...*

And one of the saddest things I've seen, is as he reaches old age, it seems to me, that he is trying harder than ever to feel that he's significant, but he's no longer able to be the high achiever he once was. His body is letting him down (/mind/time remaining)...

And yet he hasn't yet grasped the concept of³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease.

Nor has he caught on to the **freedom** of less of self, and more of Jesus.

Righto:

When we get to V31, we don't know if John the Baptist is still speaking, or if these are the words of the Apostle John narrating to us, but it doesn't matter. It's in the Bible, and that's what matters...

But, from V31 through to the end of the chapter, it proclaims the greatness and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Because Jesus comes from above – **because** He is the Son of God, He **is above all** . He's greater than John the Baptist; He's much greater than me; He's even greater than you.

And he repeats the greatness of Jesus, over and over again.
He who comes from heaven is above all.

I'll tell you what, while our generation is so full of self-importance,,, Jesus trumps that. He's from heaven. He is above all...

We live in an era of where the knowledge-base has never been so great... (at least the knowledge we can access – most don't store it in their heads any more. Why would you do that, when you can just Google it???)

But, what sets Jesus apart from any other teacher/spiritual leader??? He who comes from heaven is above all.

³² He bears witness to what he has seen and heard...

Wow!!! Imagine that!!! For millennia, Humans have craved; sought; and studied for Spiritual enlightenment...

The great big questions of life:

- Is there more than this?
- What comes next?
- What is the nature of God?
- How can I enter into the Spiritual realm???

Humans have searched for answers to these questions for thousands of years. There are people who are searching today....

If; If only; If only there was someone Who has been to heaven – if only God would come down from Heaven and reveal to us, the spiritual truth we crave... Guess what: He

did. V³² He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony.

BTW, when you're reading the Bible, don't tie yourself up in knots. It's not a legal document. The Scriptures quite often use "exaggeration" to make a point. And this is a case in point here. it says yet no one receives his testimony. But, they do... The Disciples believed Him; You believe Him; The whole gospel of John was written that we might believe, and many have...

But most don't... The one person Who has come from heaven; The one witness who can reveal genuine spiritual truth, is Jesus Christ, but sadly, many will search for spiritual enlightenment, anywhere but Jesus – they will not receive His testimony...

But as I said, "No one" is an exaggeration. V³³ Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true.

Last week in V²¹ But he who is doing the truth, comes to the light, so that it will become visible that his works have been achieved in God."

Alright, there **are** lovers of **the** truth – there **are** truth-seekers. And this is what V33 is talking about today. A truth-seeker,

receives the testimony of Jesus. And he **sets his seal to this, that God is true.**

*In the world of legal and corporate affairs, there are levels of commitment/attesting to “this I agree to”... And so, most of us would sign our name to “Yep, I’ll guarantee that”. We sign a contract... But an even **more** formal and unquestionable act, is to use a seal...*

I am a Commissioner of Declarations.

That means, I can:

- *take your Oath;*
- *witness your signing of just about any legal document;*
- *testify to your oath on a Stat Dec;*
- *testify to the genuineness of a copy of a document...*

And when I do, I have a stamp (seal). And with that seal, I stamp the document – I seal the document... This is true...

And whoever receives the testimony of Jesus **sets his seal to this: that God is true.**

You know those Christians,,, they actually believe this stuff.

Why wouldn’t we believe it? When we hear Jesus speak, we’re hearing the words of God...

So many times, I’ve heard people say something along the lines of:

“If only God would:

- speak to me;
- tell me His will;
- tell me what to do.”...

He has!!!!

When we’re hearing Jesus speak, we’re hearing the words of God... And I just want to shake them and say “Jesus has already spoken. Read your Bible. Concentrate on doing what God has already said... Have you already achieved the will of God that He’s revealed, that you want more...

And Jesus gives the Spirit without measure.

Have you ever wondered why, when you read the Bible, **you** see:

- life;
- freedom;
- joy;

- It’s a thing of beauty;
- It’s lifechanging;
- wonderful...

But an **un**believer will read the same Bible and be repulsed by it...

What’s the difference? The difference, is the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 2: (ESV)

¹⁴ The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is

not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

Alright, the things of God (and God's Word, itself), are foolishness to those who don't believe... Why? Because it takes the Holy Spirit to help us to understand the Word of God.

I've been to Bible College, and it gave me some useful tools to dig into God's word and whatnot,,, but some of the greatest minds in the world have done far deeper studies than me,,, (Doctorates of Theology),,, but they don't get it... They use their human wisdom to dissect and pull apart and to try to discredit God's word...

If they don't have the Holy Spirit, they won't understand it.

Isn't it great, that Jesus **gives the Spirit** without measure.

You and I (as simple as we are), we can open the Bible and read the word of God, and not only do we understand it – It comes alive; and we can be completely changed by it.

Next time you're reading the Bible and have an **aha** moment, give thanks to Jesus for giving the Holy Spirit without measure...

I wonder, did you notice that in today's Bible Reading, there's a real focus on the Trinity???

- **God** sent His Son;
- The Son gives His **Spirit** without measure;

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

The eternal relationship between the Father, the Son and the Spirit, is a beautiful, beautiful thing. It is an eternal relationship of love... And this is the relationship that those who believe in Him, are brought into...

And just like last week, we've given an image of the great separation that is already in place: V³⁶ **Whoever is believing in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.**

BTW, I know this doesn't really matter, but are there any Americans here? If you are, then feel free to say "rath", but proper English is "roth"...

³⁶ Whoever is believing in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

Last week, V¹⁸ **Whoever is believing in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.**

You see, the state of those who have rejected Jesus, is they are already condemned... And while we continue to reject Jesus – while we continue in our disobedience toward The Son, we

remain condemned – we shall not see life – the wrath of God remains on him.

But hear the Good news: from V¹⁸ **Whoever is believing in him is not condemned**

Hear the Good news for V³⁶ **Whoever is believing in the Son has eternal life;**

The message is clear

The eternal destinies of a believer and an unbeliever, are very different.

Their status is stark:

- Not condemned;
- condemned already;

Their state of life:

- the believer has eternal life;
- the unbeliever shall not see life.

Their behaviour:

- The believer obeys;
- the unbeliever disobeys;

And their future;

- By the Holy Spirit, the believer is already brought into the loving relationship with the Father and the Son; while
- The wrath of God remains on the unbeliever

And so, the Gospel of John, is once again, urging us to believe.

Let me finish up with this question:
Are you “a friend of the Bride-Groom”?

John rejoiced at the lifting up of Jesus. Do you???

The invitation, is

- come to Jesus;
- believe in Jesus
- receive from Him, His Holy Spirit, who helps us to understand His word...

The gift is Freedom:

- Freedom from sin;
- Freedom from death;
- Freedom from wrath.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,
we thank You, that You sent Your Son.

We thank You for Your promise,
that Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life;

We believe.

Help our unbelief.

Lord Jesus,
we rejoice, that You are above all;

Your testimony is true;
Your promise is sure.

We rejoice in your coming,
And our prayer is that we will decrease,
as You increase.
And that our joy, will be complete.

in Jesus' Name,
Amen.