

## LESSON #7 CHAPTER 3:22-36; 4:43-54

***Jesus healed the Son of the Official - The Progression of Faith***

Divine Attribute: Patient

Theological concept: Living Faith

Geographical location: Cana

Chapter Structure

3:22-36 The Joy of the Forerunner

4:43-54 Progression of a Living Faith

Spiritual Principles:

**P1 The new self must grow, the old self must vanish.**

**P2 Faith is like rowing upstream, it either progresses or regresses**

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A. Today's lesson...

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We have seen how the Lord Jesus taught Nicodemus about the mystery of rebirth into the Kingdom of God. In this lesson, we will continue to look at the remaining verses of chapter 3, where we learn about how John the Baptist derives the full extent of joy in his diminishing ministry. Then we will skip the passage of Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman and move to chapter 4:43-54 where we learn about the progression of a living faith from the official's faith.

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B. 3:22-36 The Joy of the Forerunner

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*22 After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. 23 John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized 24 (for John had not yet been put in prison).*

"*After this*" in verse 22 refers to Jesus' meeting with Nicodemus. Jesus left Jerusalem and stopped at Judea, where he began his baptism ministry. In lesson #3, we learned that John baptised with water, whereas Jesus baptised with the Holy Spirit. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance aimed at preparing sinners to depart from sin and enter the Kingdom of God, while Jesus' baptism was to give sinners a new birth and a sanctified life through the regeneration of the Holy Spirit.

Four points should be noted regarding Jesus's baptising work in v.22. Firstly, verse 4:2 tells us that "*it was not Jesus who baptised, but his disciples.*" This is important because Jesus did not baptise with water.

Secondly, Jesus' disciples could not have baptised people with the Holy Spirit. Thus, we may understand it as the baptism of repentance, which is an extension of John's baptism ministry to prepare sinners to walk by Jesus' way. The baptism conducted by the church today does not have the power of regeneration; however, as the baptism is carried out in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit, it is filled with divine grace and blessings.

Thirdly, according to verse 24, Jesus' baptism ministry preceded his Galilean ministry since it was before the imprisonment of John (Mat 4:12).

Lastly, we can see plainly from verse 26 that the centre of the baptism movement has now shifted to Jesus Christ. How does it affect John the Baptist?

*25 Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. 26 And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him."*

John's disciples viewed Jesus' ministry as a strong competition and were disturbed that so many should now be flocking to Jesus, whereas formerly, they would inevitably have flocked to John. Their words implied that Jesus was ungrateful.

*27 John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. 28 You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.' 29 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. 30 He must increase, but I must decrease."*

John's magnanimity was not a gift by nature. It came from his full knowledge of the way God works. God's work is not to be accomplished by might, power, or personal experience but by the gift of God through the Holy Spirit. Without the gift of God, no man can do God's work right and well. Therefore, John knew that Jesus' ministry could not have expanded without God's approval.

He further helped the disciples see the spiritual truth by analogy between the best man and the groom at a wedding. John was commissioned to direct people to Christ. The best man would not feel jealous but happy when he sees the bride walking down the aisle towards the groom because he must accompany the groom until the bride comes. Similarly, the bridesmaid will not feel jealous but happy when the bride is handed over to the groom because the reason for her to walk ahead of the bride is to lead her to the groom.

Therefore, seeing many flocks to Jesus and the banner of the Messiah Kingdom increased John's joy to the full extent, just like the barrel is filled up to the rim and overflows.

*"He must increase but I must decrease"*

Now that Jesus has started his public ministry, John knows that it is time for him to step aside. Who can stand in front of Christ? In every worship service, fellowship meeting, gospel rally, and testimony... we ought to stand behind Jesus so that all may see Jesus and not us.

**Reflection:** Whenever I see a brother receiving more commendation than me or doing better in ministry, I am fuelled with jealousy. I am too self-centred, so I have no joy in doing God's work. O Lord, please forgive me for being petty and self-love. O Holy Spirit, please grant me strength to lay down myself. Amen!

*“He must increase but I must decrease”* depicts a Christian’s sanctification. A true Christian’s life is one in which Jesus’ image is constantly augmenting while the ‘old self’ is constantly diminishing, *“and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”* (Eph 4:24) And Paul assures us that the indwelling Holy Spirit will help us fight the battle:

*“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.”* (Gal 5:16,17)

Nonetheless, we are not to think we can lay idle and leave the battle entirely to the Holy Spirit. If we do that, we will be standing on the side of the flesh. To stand by the side of the Holy Spirit, we ought to give our full obedience to the Holy Spirit, and we will win the battle.

### **P1 The new self must grow; the old self must vanish**

John gave all his heart and strength to his commission and all his mind and soul. His noble self-renunciation was based upon his clear certainty of the divine purpose for him. For him, as far as Christ is magnified, he is magnified. Therefore, he pointed out the supremacy of Jesus by comparing himself with Jesus,

*“31 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. 32 He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony. 33 Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. 34 For he whom God has sent utters 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 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.”*

Firstly, Jesus came from heaven, whereas John is from the earth. Secondly, Jesus’ authority is of ultimate superiority because what he taught are things he saw and heard in heaven, whereas John derived his teaching from God. Thirdly, Jesus is commissioned by the Holy Father and is empowered by the Holy Spirit to save His own.

To receive Jesus’ testimony means to accept Jesus as the Saviour, and no man can receive Jesus’ testimony unless he is regenerated by the Spirit. Whoever receives Jesus’ testimony is a testimony of God and would affirm with full confidence that God is true. In verse 36, John pointed out the ultimate supremacy of Jesus is that He is the object of faith. Those who believe in Jesus will have eternal life secured for them; those who do not could never have that life.

Here, let us revise the concept of God’s wrath (this is the only appearance of the Greek word *orgé* in the Gospel of John). Wrath is not a sudden gash of anger or a burst of temper. ***It is God’s settled displeasure toward sin and immorality***; it is the response of righteousness to unrighteousness. God is not temperamental or revengeful, but due to the divine attribute of righteousness, God will reject and judge those who reject righteousness.

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### C. 4:43–54 Progression of a Living Faith

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*43 After the two days he departed for Galilee. 44 (For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.) 45 So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they too had gone to the feast.*

Jesus was now leaving Samaria and on his way to Galilee. In the synoptic Gospels, the words “*a prophet has no honour in his own hometown*” was referring to Nazareth, and for this reason, Jesus left Nazareth (Mat 13:57; Mk 6:4; Lk 4:24). But here in the Gospel of John, the Lord was referring to Jerusalem which is the “*city of God*”, “*holy mountain of Yahweh*”, “*My Father’s house*” (Ps 48:1; Lk 2:49) According to the flesh, Nazareth was Jesus’ hometown; but according to the spirit, Jerusalem is the home of the Son of God. Our Lord always looks at the spiritual reality in every matter.

We ought to do that, too. For our old self has been crucified with Christ. It is not “I” living now but Christ living in me. Let us be mindful of the spiritual truth in our daily happenings. For example, ask ourselves, is it appropriate for me, a child of God, to speak like that? Or when the pulpit message rebukes us, do we see it coming from the preacher or the Holy Spirit?

The people in Galilee received Jesus because they knew about the miracle Jesus did in Jerusalem.

*46 So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill. 47 When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.*

Capernaum was not far from Cana. When the official whose son was heavily ill heard that Jesus has come to Cana, he came to Cana to meet Jesus personally with a specific request: to go to Capernaum to heal his son. The official believed, otherwise he would not have left his dying son at this critical time.

*48 So Jesus said to him, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.”*

From these words, we know that not just the official but also the spectators were hoping to see Jesus perform a miracle to decide whether to believe him. Such faith differs from the faith of the Samaritans in the previous passage. Jesus did not perform miracles there, yet the Samaritans believed, “*And many more believed because of his word.*” (4:41-42) To believe Jesus for the miracles he performed is not the kind of worshippers that Jesus is looking for, because Satan could do supernatural performance too.

From Jesus’ response to the official, we know he had not put his faith in Jesus as the Messiah. His faith was limited to Jesus’ healing power, as he heard from others from Jerusalem. That was why he begged Jesus not to delay further but to go with him to Capernaum before his son died, *49 The official said to him, “Sir, come down before my child dies.”*

Jesus often individualises his teaching according to the needs of the soul. He always leads people to see their true need, i.e. to be saved from sin and to put their trust in him. Jesus wanted to help the official take a leap in faith. How did he do that?

Jesus granted him what he asked for, not in his way but in Jesus’ way. Jesus didn’t go down to Capernaum. He healed the child from Cana by speaking, “*Go; your son will live.*” *50 The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way.*”

The official had to make a choice: to believe in Jesus’s words. In other words, he was not to believe in Jesus by sight but by faith.

Amazingly, the official chose to believe in Jesus’ words, that the power of Jesus’ words surpasses the physical world. He believed that when Jesus said, “Your son will live,” his son would truly live! So even though he had not been seen, he returned to Capernaum immediately as if he had seen!

*51As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. 52So he asked them the hour when he began to get better, and they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." 53The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." And he himself believed, and all his household. 54This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.*

When the servant attested that the son got well when Jesus spoke, the official believed in Jesus because now he had witnessed the power of Jesus' word! This is no other than divine power, as the prophet Isaiah said, *"so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."* (Isa 55:11)

The official listened to Jesus' words for him and his faith was now elevated to higher level: leading his household to follow Jesus. Dear brothers and sisters, let us remember that *faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.* (Ro 10:17)

We are influenced by materialism far more than we realise. For example, we take pride in having strong logical thinking or scientific mindset, *"Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."* But Jesus replied, *"Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."* (20:25, 29)

Dear brothers and sisters, many Christians believe in Jesus because they have heard the testimonies of other Christians and hope that Jesus will also solve their problems. This imperfect faith, however, ought to progress: from hearing of Jesus to seeking him, from seeking him to knowing him, and from knowing him to following him, just as we saw in the official! Faith, if not progress, would regress.

In our sanctification process, one of the reasons God allows trials to fall on us is to elevate our faith. If we could stand firm and keep the way of God, our faith would increase and progress. But if we stumble, our faith will diminish, *faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.* (Ro 10:17)

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### **P2 Faith is like rowing upstream; it either progresses or regresses**

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The way to increase faith is not by watching miracles but by hearing the words of God. Faith does not progress 'by sight'. We ought to continuously read the words of God, meditate on them, and apply them, then, our faith will gain a new height, just as the official did. When we read the bible, in the Spirit, we are not reading but hearing - Jesus speaking to us personally, just as He speaking to the official. Paul said, *"for we walk by faith, not by sight"* (2Cor 5:7) Let us train ourselves to be a walking-by-faith Christian in every trial.

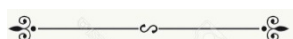
Reflection: O Lord, my faith always wavers when You do not answer my prayer; now I realise I am a 'by sight' Christian! O Spirit, please help me to keep your words in every storm of life and turn me into a 'by faith' Christian and thus a witness to the power of the Gospel. Amen!

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### **D. Closing**

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In the two passages we studied today, we saw that in the bible times, God granted salvation to a household through the master of the household – the father. Dear brothers and sisters, today, God has graciously increased the channel of blessing to a household by placing a Christian in it, who may not be



the father. Every Christian is the channel of blessing for the household to which he belongs. Through the transformation of your life and the progression of your faith, the light of eternal light may brighten your household! Let us be like that official, keep on attaining a new height in faith, and “*sets his seal to this, that God is true!*” (3:33)

