

Mountain View 15 — In His Hand and Shadow

Sermon File Type	Sermon
Passages	John 3:22-36
Sermon Series	Mountain View
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Introduction (Connection):

[Invite to John 3]

This is our fifteenth week in the book of John, friends. I'm grateful you've stayed with me so far!

Tension:

We all had dreams of what we wanted to be when we grew up, right?

What was your dream? Shout out a few?

I wanted to be an accountant, then an FBI agent, and then an accountant for the FBI, and then God called me into the ministry.

Regardless of how silly, didn't all of us start off with these great expectations for our own lives, where we'd make a name for ourselves, be successful in our careers, then leave a legacy behind.

Let me ask you, How's that going? Is your life meeting your expectations? Or for those of you who already have lived most of your lives, did you meet yours?

Most likely not.

There is always more to do, more to have, more to become.

More exercise, more job satisfaction, more money, more followers on social media, more influence, more success.

And when we see all the more that's needed to measure up, we start looking to those who have those things and set them as the standard.

We want to be them, even though we probably don't say it like that.

Even in our society, we celebrate those people who begin with nothing and end with great stories of success.

Like, Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, one of the most well known celebrities, who came from being evicted from the island of Hawaii, multiple arrests, and having \$7 to his name to being a worth over \$280 Million and a household name.

We admire that sort of story and are motivated by it; his story has been viewed over 20 million times on youtube.

And when that becomes the benchmark, the desire starts to fester and turns into envy and then it makes it hard for us to watch others, even other Christians, continue to succeed to acquire more than us.

Is that you?

Today's text is going to show us how empty those dreams are, and its going to show us exactly what our place is in this world and the joy that comes from knowing and operating in our right place.

Exposition:

John 3:22–36 (ESV) — 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).

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.” 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.”

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.

Remember, John the Baptist, who I’ll call “Johnny B” was having this effective ministry and had been baptizing people for a while now.

Jesus was just in Jerusalem, and he and his disciples head out to the boondocks of rural Judea, and he starts to baptize people, though John 4:2 tells us it was just his disciples doing the baptizing.

And it turns out, more and more people started going to Jesus to be baptized instead of Johnny B.

A disagreement crops up between a Jew and Johnny B's disciples about purification, which should point our thoughts back to the Wedding at Cana in John 2, which we can't explore today, but this dispute likely had to do with Jesus baptizing.

So Johnny B's disciples come to John and start complaining, and here is where that pressure of success and measuring up sneaks in.

"Jesus is getting more recognition, he's getting all the attention, everyone's going to him and not you, how could he do this to you? I mean, you're John the Baptizer, its literally your last name! He's not Jesus the Baptizer, he's Jesus the Christ."

How does Johnny B. respond?

The first part of his response is this amazingly simple yet wildly complex maxim of life.

v. 27 — "John answered, 'A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven (or from God).'"

John is thinking of his life and ministry and following and says, "What I have, what I've been able to do, who I've been able to influence, have all come from God. I've done nothing to earn it or deserve it."

Memorize this so you can meditate about it: *I cannot receive even one thing unless it is given me from God.*

Does this mean everything? Yes, it means absolutely everything.

"I'm a self made man! Everything I have is because I earned it!"

Yea no.

Whatever you have in your life, it isn't because you deserved it or earned it; it is because God gave it to you as a gift.

The sooner we accept this the sooner we'll be able to say, "My boundaries have fallen for me in pleasant places. Surely, what I have is beautiful."

Which is what Johnny B. says about his own ministry.

Look at what else he says; he says something we heard back in John 1, and then he uses an illustration of a groom and a best man.

v. 28-29a — "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."

We'll explore the wedding illustration a bit more in a minute, but in summary John is saying, "None of what I've done has even been about me! It's always been about the Christ, who is Jesus. I know my place in His story, and I'm preparing the world for all that he is!"

We're going to jump down to v. 31-36 because those are the words of the apostle John and author of this gospel account, and he reminds us of exactly who Jesus is, which explains why Johnny B. responds the way he does.

Want to know your place in this world? Look to who Jesus is; John the author emphasizes three points:

1) Jesus is above all

Look at...

v. 31 — “He who comes from above is above all... He who comes from heaven is above all.”

We’re just earth people; Jesus literally came from heaven.

v. 32 — “He bears witness to what he has seen and heard...” in heaven from God, which is what we see in v. 33 and 34.

vs. 33-34 — “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...”

Jesus comes from above, speaking the Word of God above, such that to receive Jesus is to receive God.

Which makes Jesus above all, “above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named.”¹

There is no one higher than Jesus!

2) Jesus has it all

Check out...

v. 34 — “[Jesus] whom God has sent utters the words of God, for God gives the Spirit [to Jesus] without measure.”

God didn’t just give Jesus a plate from the menu, God gave full, unlimited access to the Holy Spirit buffet.

Then check out...

¹ Ephesians 1:21

v. 35 — “The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand.”

Literally, everything the Father possesses has been given over to the authority of Jesus.

Jesus has absolutely everything!

So Jesus is above all, has it all, and thirdly...

3) Jesus arbitrates all

Meaning Jesus decides it all; your views and opinions on Jesus determines everything important about you.

v. 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.”

Jesus is the deciding factor; your eternity is determined by Him and Him alone.

By the way, obedience to the Son means listening to what he’s commanded, which is to believe, so to not obey means to fail to believe.

So Johnny B’s life work has been to prepare the way for the one who is above all, has it all, and arbitrates all.

Therefore, v. 27, you and I cannot receive even one thing unless it is given us from heaven.

Already we have a massive take away for the morning:

Our existence and everything ours came from and is in Jesus’ hand.

This is how big a deal Jesus is!

Which means our place is where? Where do we find ourselves?

Our place: Jesus' hand.

In the protective, strong, gentle, nail-pierced hand of Jesus who is above all, has it all, and arbitrates all is where we find ourselves, and there is no better place for us to be.

Now, let's go back to v. 29 because this explains even more the thought behind it.

Johnny B. says, "The one who has the bride is the bridegroom."

What's he mean? Those people who are leaving Johnny B. and flocking to Jesus are the bride because Jesus is the Bridegroom, not John.

In other words, all of history is one big story of a hero who gave his life to save his future bride from utter destruction and the wedding is coming; Johnny B. knew this very well from several passages in the Old Testament.²

So if Jesus is the bridegroom, then what does Johnny B. see his role as in this wedding? The Best Man.

Back then, the friend of the bridegroom organized all the details of the wedding and made sure, at the end of the night, the groom got his bride.

Friends, this is our place. You and I are friends of the bridegroom, which means history isn't about us.

It's not like here's me and here's the world spinning around me.

² Isaiah 62:4-5; Jeremiah 2:2; Hosea 2:16-20

You and I came from dust, and to dust we will return.

We are not God, we are not functional saviors, we are not the point of everyone's existence.

But we will too often make ourselves and our success and fame the reason for our existence and everyone else's.

Let me try to show you what John says you're doing.

For those who didn't know, I have an identical twin brother named Mark.

This is us on my wedding day.



Well, Kaitlin and I enjoy this great ceremony, we exchange our vows and rings, our families come up and pray for us, and then after getting settled back in, this happens...

[Show clip]

Now of course he was kidding, but what if he was serious? Like, how insane would that be? This isn't *The Maury Show* — the groomsmen doesn't leave the wedding with the bride.

When you put your own fame and success front and center as the reason for you life, you're fighting to switch places with Jesus, the bridegroom.

Johnny B. knew his place in the story of the world... and its the same place we need to stay in.

Yes, we're in Jesus' hand, but we're also in:

Our Place: Jesus' Shadow

It is Jesus that should be standing in the spotlight, it's his name that belongs up in flashing lights.

Which is why we get to the verse that has greatly influenced my life...

v. 30 — He *MUST* increase, I *MUST* decrease.

Do you realize this is why God sent John?

This was God's plan for him: Gather a people and then give them up.

Rise like a fire in the wilderness, and then flicker out.

That's the plan! John knows it!

He didn't feel slighted that his popularity was waning; he rejoiced that Christ's fame was spreading!

He was focused on the kingdom of God.

He didn't try to expand his ministry or influence; he was content to go where God called Him!

In every day, John subordinated his ego and his plans to God's.

Once Jesus emerged, the masses paid less and less attention to John, because Jesus must increase, and John must decrease.

In fact, do you know how Johnny B.'s story ends? v. 24 mentioned that this all happened before he was arrested and imprisoned.

He didn't even have this glorious death where an arrow takes him out as he's double choke-slam baptizing two people in the river... he was beheaded by a wicked king amused by the dancing of the daughter of his brothers' wife whom the king had been sleeping with.

From a worldly perspective, that's failure. His ministry flickered out after just a few years.

But John said, "He must increase, I must decrease" because John knew his place in the world: in Jesus' hand and shadow.

And how did that make Johnny B. feel?

Look at the end of...

v. 29 — "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."

This joy of mine is now complete. Why?

Because the Bridegroom is getting all the attention.

The cameras are flashing all in that direction. The rice is flying in that direction.

Nobody is glancing back at the silenced voice of the best man sitting on the church steps with a grin on his face because his work is done.

The Bridegroom's voice is calling, and his bride is following.

Johnny B. is showing us that the greatest glories and joys in this life are not in receiving attention or fame, but in funneling it all to Jesus.

This is the loudest statement Johnny B. makes with his life; it wasn't in the number of his followers, it was how he responded when his followers fled to Jesus!

John came alive as the nobody next to Jesus.

It satisfied his soul fully.

Application/Challenge:

Which is exactly what I want us all to leave here today with, this amazing truth.

Why is it best for us to see our place being in Jesus' hand and shadow?
Because...

Full joy is found in self-effacing faithfulness, not self-exalting fame.

To efface means to erase a mark from a surface.

When Jesus becomes greater in the world and you and I become lesser in the world, joy increases.

It frees us to joyfully accept who God has made and called us to be.

It also transforms our relationships with those around us who have more.

It even frees us to love and celebrate how he's gifted, called, and placed other believers in our lives.

We no longer feel like we have to measure up to someone else's successes.

When we struggle with comparing ourselves to those people who have accomplished more than we have, or have produced more measurable fruit, remember this...

"God did not call me to be successful; he called me to be faithful." —
Mother Teresa

Success is not a benchmark, it is a blessing.

The key to the Christian life is to rejoice in whatever ministry or life we've been given.

We never deserved to be a part of this story in the first place.

Can we find joy when God uses us, like John, even if our influence and popularity is diminishing?

Can we find our worth in Christ alone and remember that our goal on this earth is to make God's name look great and not our own?

Conclusion (Cast Vision):

John the Baptist knew the joy and freedom of being found in the hand and shadow of Jesus. Do you?

I have a quote that I've strived to live by since high school.

"Preach the gospel, die, and be forgotten."

I live in the shadow of Jesus; I don't need to leave a legacy, just Jesus.

What about you? Because that's where full joy is waiting for you.

Communion:

Let us remind ourselves of this gospel by taking communion together.

Communion is an ordinance established by Jesus Christ as a way to perpetually affirm the new covenant that He purchased for us with His body and blood symbolized by the bread and drink.

There is nothing mysterious about the bread and drink that we are about to partake; they do not transform into the literal body and blood of Christ.

Taking communion is the affirmation that you have placed all your trust and confidence in Jesus Christ, in his sinless life, in his atoning death and physical resurrection.

1 Corinthians 11 offers a caution to those of you who do not agree with this... he cautions you not come to this table; for in doing so, you drink judgment upon yourself.

And yet Jesus is knocking at the door, ready to raise you up through faith.

We would love for you to join us in the Son and at this table if you'd receive Jesus today.

[Finish instructions]