

**Sermon Series: LIFE IN HIS NAME**

**Sermon Title: Life's Greatest Paradox**

**Text: John 3:22-36**

**Discussion Questions:**

A paradox is defined as:

*A seemingly absurd or self-contradictory statement or proposition that when investigated or explained may prove to be well founded or true.*

Discuss a few of these familiar paradoxical statements. What makes them a paradox?

- "This statement is false."  
*(If this is true, then the sentence is false, but if the sentence states that it is false, and it is false, then it must also be true! So the sentence is both true and not true at the same time.)*
- "The second sentence is false. The first sentence is true."
- "You can save money by spending it."
- "I know one thing; that I know nothing."
- "This is the beginning of the end."
- "Deep down, you're really shallow."
- "What a pity that youth must be wasted on the young."

Can you think of any paradoxical statements in the Bible?

**Examination:**

- Read **John 3:22-26**
  - John makes it very clear at the end of this Gospel (John 21:25 & John 20:30-31) that he was VERY SELECTIVE when choosing the accounts from Jesus' life to include in this book. With that in mind, does it surprise you that we have another reference to John the Baptist inserted here?
  - Go back and read **John 3:1-21**. Jesus is teaching Nicodemus some very "spiritual" truths such as: "You must be born again"; "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit"; "The wind blows wherever it pleases - so it is with everyone born of the Spirit"; "Whoever lives by the truth comes into the light".
    - Do you think Nicodemus understood what Jesus was telling him?
    - Based on what you know about Pharisees (and people in general), what do you think Nicodemus was looking for in life?
    - What do you think Nicodemus was looking for in Jesus?
    - Do you think it crossed Nicodemus' mind that if Jesus was truly the Messiah - that he might be wise to "get in on the action early" so to speak?
    - Putting it bluntly, do you think Nicodemus had a "what's in it for me" mindset?
  - We see in verse 22 that Jesus withdrew with his disciples into the countryside somewhere outside of Jerusalem (mostly a desert wilderness). What was His purpose in doing this?
    - Why do you think Jesus wanted to spend this time with His disciples?

- What do we learn from John 4:1 about who was actually doing the baptizing?
  - Why do you think Jesus wanted his disciples to take part in baptizing the people who were traveling out into the countryside to find Jesus?
  - We learn from verse 23 that John the Baptist was also continuing to baptize people - apparently at a spot not too far away from Jesus. It was close enough that some conflict and controversy arose. What do you suppose was the nature of the argument that developed between a certain Jew and John's disciples?
  - Do you suppose John's disciples were a bit bothered by the fact that "everyone is going to Jesus" (v. 26)? Think of some words that might apply to this situation (hint: jealousy, competition, confusion, etc.).
  - What do you think John's disciples were hoping John would say to them?
- Read **John 3:27-36**.
    - What do you think John meant when he said, "A person can receive only what is given them from heaven"?
      - Wouldn't you say that John the Baptist's "God-awareness" was completely off the charts! We can basically hear him saying, "God is in complete control - it's not about me!". In his commentary on this verse, Frederick Bruner said: *"The best antidote to envy is the conviction of the sovereignty of a wise God. It is extremely comforting to know that what one has been given or has not been given in one's vocation is traceable not only to our abilities or disabilities but even more to the providence of God. We would welcome each placement and employment (and even displacement and unemployment) with more gratitude and grace if we believed the Baptist's present maxim. Confidence in the sovereignty of God delivers vocational peace."* Discuss this. Do you agree? How does confidence in God's sovereignty lead to peace and joy?
    - John the Baptist mentions joy twice in verse 29. What is it that brought him joy? Why do you think this brought him joy?
    - Nicodemus was full of confusion. John's disciples were likely full of competition. John the Baptist is full of joy. What made the difference?
    - Have you ever experienced a time in your life when you were "full of joy," or when your "joy was complete"?
    - How is verse 30 a paradox? Is this paradox true for us as well?
    - Verses 31-36 clearly indicate that John the Baptist KNEW that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God - and that He CAME FROM heaven (not from earth). John KNEW that the message that Jesus came to deliver (as well as the baptism He came to offer) was from heaven - from the Father. What, according to verse 36, is the key for all of us to grasp? What is the result of believing this truth?

### **Application:**

Think about your own life. Are you viewing things from a heavenly - or an earthly perspective? Do you believe that what you have been given (or not given) is the result of the providence of God? Can you welcome each employment (or unemployment) with gratitude and grace, believing with all your heart that it is GOD who is in complete control?