

Victory of the Lamb – Influencers – John 3:25-29 –

February 12, 2023 – Pastor Ben Sadler

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²⁷ To this John replied, “A person can receive only what is given them from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves can testify that I said, ‘I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him.’ ²⁹ The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. ³⁰ He must become greater; I must become less.”

What do you do when the people that you care about no longer need you? This can happen to anyone but I think it happens especially to parents. there was a time when our kids needed us for everything. we gave them life. my wife fed our children with her own body. we changed their diapers we taught them how to eat we did everything for them but then one day they became teenagers and they no longer need us at least not as much.

So what do you do when the people you care about no longer need you? My wife is a teacher. And every year she pours her heart into her students. She does everything she can to help them grow. But then the end of the year comes around and they no longer need her.

This can happen to doctors, nurses, or other types of caregivers. There is a time when your patients need you. They come to you because of the specific pain or trouble they are in. You use your gifts and abilities to help and heal them. And then there is a time when they no longer need you.

This could happen at your employer. I remember when my dad was in his late forties. Which is only about 10 years older than me. He had been working for this company for quite a while, selling larger, expensive machinery. He drove about an hour to work every day. Gave his best to that company. And then one day, they called him into their office and said, “We no longer need you.”

I had this experience this week. It is almost humorous that God seemed to be teaching me the exact lesson of my sermon the very week I’m preaching. Well, on Wednesday, I dropped off my daughter at high school and then I went to my favorite coffee shop, Stone Creek, right on Bluemound. I love to look out those big windows as I thinking about my sermon topic. Well, I was writing on this topic, what do you do when the people you care about no longer need you? And I finished my first draft of this sermon. I took a moment to check my email. I write a personal blog. And every week, I’ll get an email telling me who subscribed or unsubscribed to my blog. And it is encouraging when someone new stumbles onto my blog and starts to read. But on Wednesday, I opened up my blog report and some people that I care about unsubscribed. It hit me. Those people who I, at one point, served and cared for with my writing, no longer need me. Maybe I offended them somehow or maybe the blog is no longer interesting or

maybe they were trying to clear out their email. I don't know. But they unsubscribed because someone I care about no longer needs me.

Have you had this experience? A child or a friend no longer needs you? Maybe you got let go from your job and the company no longer needs you. Maybe at one time the phone used to ring more often because there was a lot of people who wanted your advice. But now many of those people who you care about no longer need you.

Today we are concluding our sermon series **Influencers**. In this series we have acknowledged that many people are using YouTube and Podcast and other mediums to be influencers. But we have also said that all of us are influencers at some level. We all have a role in influencing the people around us. But for all of us, our moment in the sun will pass. And we won't seem to have the influence with some people that we once had. So what do you do when the people who care about no longer need you? Or maybe we could say it this way **What do you do when you don't have the influence you once had?**

To answer that question we are going to go to our reading from John 3. John was one of Jesus' closest disciples and he is the author of one of Jesus' biographies. In his biography about Jesus, he goes into detail about another John, John the Baptist.

I don't know how much you know about John the Baptist, but he was one of the most influential people in the Bible. Hundreds of years before he was born, prophets like Isaiah and Malachi were predicting his powerful ministry. And they were right. All four biographies about Jesus describe how people from all the surrounding regions came out to see John the Baptist. He had such a large following, that when the Apostles started to travel long distances to do missionary work, they found some of John's disciples way in the in region of Ephesus, which is modern-day Turkey.

Jesus himself gave John one of the highest complements that a person could receive. He said, **I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John. (Luke 7:28)**

That's a pretty remarkable endorsement for someone who, to be honest, was kind of weird. The Bible says John wore clothes made of camel's hair and lived on a diet of locust and honey. And he led a ministry that was different that what normally happened. Usually, teachers would read and teach in local synagogues. But John the Baptist took people out to the Jordan River. Now this was very important place in Israel's history. After the Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years, Joshua led them into the Promised Land. Just like God did for Moses, God caused Joshua to part the waters of the Jordan River. And so the people passed through the Jordan River into the Promised Land. The only problem, when they entered into the Promised Land, they didn't act like God's promised people. They gave into idolatry and sexual immorality and unbelief.

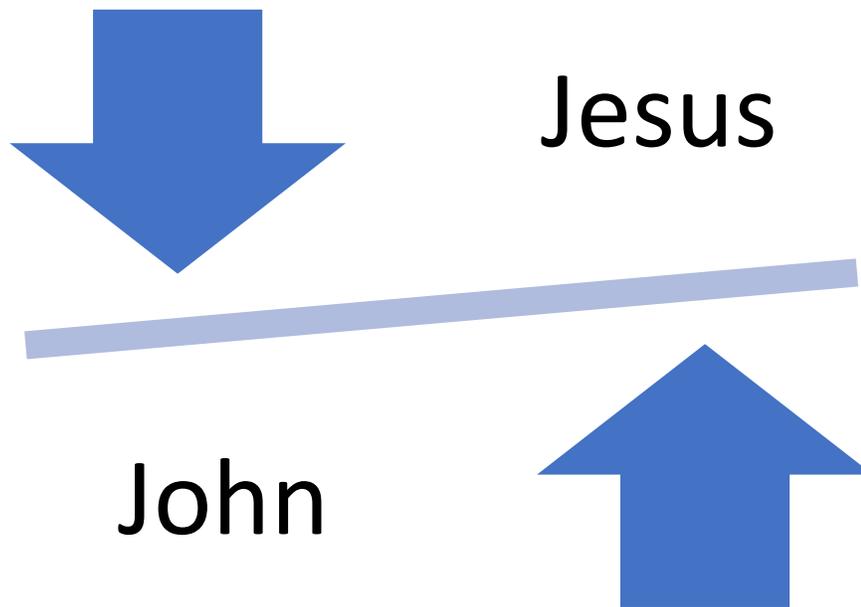
So, John the Baptist took them back to that same river, as if to say, let's start over again. And he had them pass again through the waters as he started a practice of baptism. John would preach a message about the need to confess and repent of their sins and the people would confess and repent of their sins. Then he would plunge them into the waters of the Jordan as a way of showing them that they had been forgiven and washed clean. And then they were to live a new life and God's promised people once again.

And it worked! Multitudes of people became disciples of John. He had a large following. The people needed him to show them who God was and what God thought of them. But then one day, his followers

started to notice that the crowds were so big. And less and less people were coming out to be baptized. And that's where I text picks up the story:

²⁵ An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing. ²⁶ They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—look, he is baptizing, and **everyone is going to him.**"

If this account were in modern times, John the Baptist disciples would have set up a board meeting with John. And at that meeting they would have shown John a graph that might have looked like this.



They would have said, "John, that man over there on the other side of the Jordan, his numbers are going up because your numbers are going down. All of our disciples are leaving us and going over to him. You are losing influence. And we are going to lose financial support from all these people. And soon we will be here at the river all by ourselves. You need to do something about this!"

We know what this feels like. We might feel sad or depressed because our kids no longer seem to need us and they are moving on to listening to someone else. Maybe our clients or patient or students don't seem to need us anymore.

Maybe we feel angry or frustrated that our company is moving on and choosing someone else. Maybe we used to have a large Online following but our numbers are plateauing and people are moving on to someone else.

So what are we to do when we feel defeated, sad, or frustrated because the people we cared about no longer seem to need us?

Well, John the Baptist didn't seem to struggle with those feelings. He heard the report from his disciples that they people were leaving him and going to Jesus and he was not upset. He was not upset for two reasons. He knew his limits and he understood how to label himself.

First, he understood his limits. He said, **“A person can receive only what is given them from heaven.”** John the Baptist understood his limits. The reason he had his moment in the sun, the reason he was able to reach so many people and baptize so many people was because the God of heaven had blessed him. God had predicted and planned the ministry of John. God had moved the crowds to come out to the Jordan River to be baptized. God had changed the lives of the people. And John was just God’s instrument.

In this way, John sounded a lot like Job, who when he lost his money, family, and health said,

**“Naked I came from my mother’s womb,
and naked I will depart.
The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away;
may the name of the Lord be praised.”**

(Job 1:21)

This is what John understood. We are limited. We came into this world with nothing. God gave it all to us. And we will leave this world with nothing. We are limited creatures who are utterly dependent on God for everything.

And so we can begin to answer our opening question: **What do you do when you don’t have the influence you once had?**

1. Accept your limits.

God gave you these children. And you get to serve them for a limited time, in a limited way. God gave us people to care for and jobs to do. And we are thankful for those opportunities. But we can’t serve and help everyone everywhere for all time.

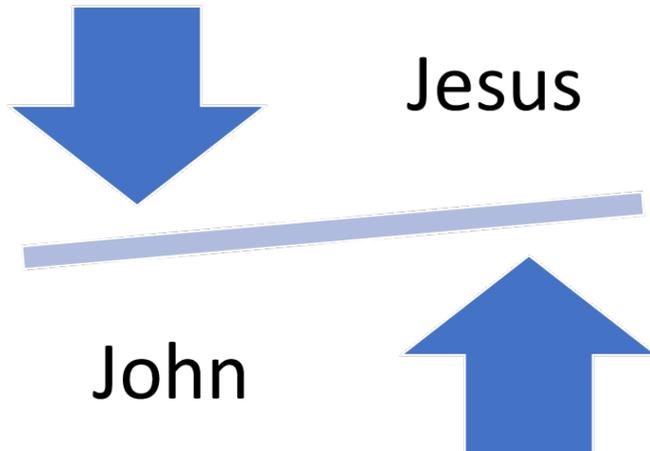
I need to accept that our kids will move on. I need to accept that some of the Christians I serve as a pastor, writer, and counselor will one day move on to other pastors or other churches.

We all have limits. And we need to accept those limits.

But that is not all. Not only did John accept that he was just a frail and limited human being, he also was very clear on how he labeled himself. He said, ²⁸ **You yourselves can testify that I said, ‘I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him...’³⁰ He must become greater; I must become less.” (John 3:28,30)**

John had such a large and successful ministry that originally people were wondering if he was the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ. And he told his followers over and over again, “I am not the Messiah.” Don’t put all your trust in me. Don’t look to me for salvation and eternal hope and eternal life. He would tell people I’m not the Messiah, but I work for him.

In fact, my whole goal in life is to send people to Jesus. I’m going to talk about Jesus and point people to Jesus. And overtime people will forget about me and what I’ve done so that they can focus on Jesus and what he has done. John the Baptist would have looked at this graph



and said, “Exactly! This is my goal. I want Jesus and his name to increase, and I want to decrease.”

And that is exactly the mentality that we need to have. We are not the Savior of our children. We are not the ultimate Savior of our clients and patients or of a company. Jesus is the Savior. He must increase and we must decrease. And helps us fully answer our opening question: **What do you do when you don't have the influence you once had?**

1. Accept your limits.

2. Accept your label.

We must not label ourselves as the Savior. There is only one Savior. Jesus is ultimately the only one who can save our children. He is ultimately the one who can eternally save our students and patients. Jesus is the one who is ultimately in charge of our business and jobs.

Jesus is the one who has no limits. He was not limited in his holiness or his love. He could do it all. And then he took all of our limits and all of our sins and he brought them to the cross, where he died to pay for all our sins. And not even the grave could stop him. He was not limited by death, but rose again. There is only one Almighty, unlimited God. There is only one Savior, Jesus Christ. He must increase, and we must decrease.

When we accept our limits and accept our label we can say with John the Baptist: **We are not the Christ, but we work for him.** And how did John the Baptist understand that work that he was supposed to do? Well, John compared himself to a friend of the wedding party. This is what he said,

²⁹ **The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete.**

Often in the Bible, the writers will compare God to a royal bridegroom and God's people, the Church are the bride. And the Biblical authors summarize history as an eternal love story. God and his people have been separated because of our unfaithfulness. But God longs to be reunited with his bride, the Church. And so that is why Jesus gave up his life. He gave up his life on behalf his bride. In fact, the last pages of the Bible say that when Jesus returns we will have the wedding celebration.

So where does John see himself in this eternal love story? He believes that he is the friend of the groom who sets up the meeting with the bride. He believed it was his job to introduce the bride, the Church to Jesus, the bridegroom. And when God's people leave him to meet Jesus, the Bridegroom, he is not upset. He is overjoyed.

It makes me think of the best man in our wedding. He gave one of the best, best-man speeches I have ever heard, even if it was at my expense. After he told some embarrassing stories of how long it took me to get up the courage to ask Emily out, he celebrated that we were finally together and he rejoiced in our happiness.

That is really our job on this earth. We are Jesus' friends. And we are live like friends of Jesus. And if someone would talk to us long enough we would introduce them to Jesus. If we were helping someone with a problem, we will ultimately show that all our biggest problems are answered in Jesus.

We are limited human beings. We will not be able to help and serve everyone forever. Some people will no longer need or want our help. They will move on. We are limited people. We are not the Christ. And yet, we will always have important work to do. You can always make much of Jesus. You can make his name increase, even as you decrease. You might not be the Christ, but you do work for him.