

HE MUST INCREASE – Sunday June 24th 2012.

²² *After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing. ²³ John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and people were coming and were being baptized—²⁴ for John had not yet been thrown into prison.*

²⁵ *Therefore there arose a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purification. ²⁶ And they came to John and said to him, " Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him." ²⁷ John answered and said, " A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, ' I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent ahead of Him.' ²⁹ He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made full. He must increase, but I must decrease.*

John 3:22-30

Beloved in the Lord,

John the Baptist gives us the key to a blessed life here in these words which are part of his final testimony. John has just received a report that those who followed him, are now increasingly turning to Jesus and following Him. John replied to this report in great humility: ***" He must increase, but I must decrease."*** John had understood his mission. God had sent him ahead of Jesus to prepare the way for the Messiah. John came to prepare people's hearts to receive Jesus. Now that Jesus had begun His public ministry, having been baptised by John, it was time for John to exit the stage. John knew that he must decrease in importance and prominence and Jesus must increase.

Herein is the key to a blessed life. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul writes: ***" Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, ⁷ having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude."*** (Col.2:6-7)

The first step that we need to take is to receive Christ. John the Baptist taught this by preaching that men should repent of their sins for the Kingdom of God has come. When we admit that we are sinners, and when we repent of our sin and receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour, He comes into our heart forever. From that moment onwards we should begin to grow in Him. A tree that is no longer growing is dead.

As God's children, as Christians we should be striving to grow in Him daily. This growing should continue until the day when by His grace and mercy He calls us home.

As we grow in Him, we find that something interesting happens to us. We begin to decrease and He begins to increase. Slowly our thinking is renewed, our desires change, and we learn to subject our will to His will lovingly, obediently, and joyfully. God's will, not our desires, become paramount.

We find that our own ideas, wants and desires fade into obscurity and are replaced by a desire to do God's will and to glorify His name in all things. We understand that God's ways are perfect and we desire for His will to be done.

In order for us to decrease so that Jesus may increase, there are certain things that we need to do. Just think of a plant that you are trying to grow in your garden. It needs your attention and care in order for it to flourish. No less our faith.

One very important aspect of gardening that I must admit I am not good at is weeding. It is important to get rid of weeds, because if we don't, we find that they propagate very quickly and it is only a matter of time before they take over and suck all the nutrients out of the soil. If left unchecked they may even kill your plant.

Sin is the weed in our lives and we must deal with it effectively. It is vital that we come before God humbly on a regular basis and confess to Him our sin and receive His forgiveness. As soon as we detect sin in our life we should go to the Father in prayer, humility and repentance.

David helps us with a great prayer in Psalm 19:7-14

The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul;

The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

⁸ The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;

The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.

⁹ The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;

The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether.

¹⁰ They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold;

Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.

¹¹ Moreover, by them Your servant is warned;

In keeping them there is great reward.

¹² Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults.

¹³ Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins;

Let them not rule over me;

Then I will be blameless,

And I shall be acquitted of great transgression.

¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart

Be acceptable in Your sight,

O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer.

This is a blessed prayer we should pray often.

Cleanse me or acquit me of secret faults/sins.

Many times our sins are secret. We may not even be aware of them. We do not always sin wilfully,

God is calling us to a holy life, but the problem is that we live in a dirty world. We know how difficult it is to keep a white shirt or dress spotless. It is hard to live a Holy, clean, pure life in a dirty, sinful world. Prayer is a great aide.

The closing petition of this prayer is a great one: ¹⁴***Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer.***

Please remember that we cannot hide anything from God. Not only does He hear every word that we speak, He knows all of our thoughts even from afar. If we remind ourselves of this often then it helps us stay on track. It helps us to grow in Him.

So firstly we need to regularly weed our garden.

Secondly, it is important that we feed our plant with good nutrients. Not only does the plant need regular water, it needs good fertilizer, that provides the necessary nutrients. We need to read the Bible, feed on God's Word at least once a day. God's Word is our main source of nutrients for a healthy soul and spirit.

In order for us to decrease and Jesus to increase we need to be in God's Word.

It is not enough to feed off the crumbs or serve we get on a Sunday. We need to read and read and read. You cannot overdose on God's Word.

So many Christians today are so incredibly weak in their faith, because they hardly ever or never feed on the Word of life. I cannot over emphasise the need to read the Bible daily. The Bible is God's Word, it is living and powerful. It contains all you need to grow and stay strong.

Hand in hand with reading God's Word is prayer. Prayer is so much more than saying: "God Bless me, my wife and family and my friends." Prayer is conversation with God. Learn to speak to Him all that is in your heart. Share your joys and sorrows.

God created us to live in fellowship and friendship with Him. He desires a close, intimate, loving relationship with us. The more we pray and speak to God, the more we find that Jesus increases as we decrease. As our faith increases, so too our desire to be closer to God. The more we read and pray and spend time with Him, the more we get to know Him as a loving God, a Father who loves us so incredibly much. We find purpose in our lives. Joy and peace increase. We become more useful to God and His Kingdom. God uses you to bless others.

The last thing I would like to touch upon today is praise. Paul writes to the Philippian Church:

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. ⁶ Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Phil.4:4-7)

When we live our life in such a way that our focus is on Jesus then we have joy and peace in our hearts. We are blessed. That is why we must decrease that He may increase.

As we remember John the Baptist today may we make a commitment to decrease, that Jesus may increase.

Amen.

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.