

COMMENTARY ON JOHN

LESSON NUMBER 38

John 3:28 ***“Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before Him. ²⁹ He that hath the bride is the Bridegroom: but the friend of the Bridegroom, which standeth and heareth Him, rejoiceth greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. ³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease.”*** John 3:25-27)

JOHN TESTIFIES OF JESUS

INTRODUCTION

John the Baptist not only introduced Jesus, He made known how people were to think about Him. When it comes to actually benefitting from Jesus, who He is and what He has accomplished do not bring lasting benefit to men unless they perceive it, and conform their lives to Him, what He has done, and what He is doing. As simplistic as that may appear, there are countless numbers of professing “Christians” who are living just as though Jesus is not what God has declared Him to be in the record of His Son. Although He possesses *“all power . . . in heaven and in earth”* (Matt 28:18), they think nothing of seeking required power elsewhere. Although no one else can bring us to God (Heb 2:10), they are living as though they can safely negotiate from time and earth to glory in their own strength and wisdom. Jesus is really *“the wisdom of God”* (1 Cor 1:24), yet they are seeking to obtain wisdom from other means. Jesus clearly affirmed that He is not of this world—i.e. He does not belong to or conform to its manners (John 8:23); yet they think nothing of doing so. The Lord Jesus clearly declared, *“My kingdom is not of this world”* (John 18:36), *yet men have wearied themselves to build religious empires that are fashioned after the manner of “this present evil world” – a “world”* from which Jesus has effectively *“delivered us”* (Gal 1:45). For all such people, the ministry of John the Baptist was futile. They have failed to discern the manner of Christ’s Saviorhood and Reign, and have chosen to live just as though He was nothing more than a kind of demigod or superman. The number of professing Christians that appear to have no satisfactory understanding of salvation, reconciliation to God, and justification by faith is staggering. This is particularly unjustified because of the apostle that has been given to the Gentiles – Paul, *“appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles”* (2 Tim 1:11). He has, by the grace and power of God, elucidated what is involved in Jesus being *“the Lamb of God”* who took away the sin of the world (John 1:29), the *“Bridegroom”* (John 3:29), and what it means for Him to *“increase”* (John 3:30). A life that is lived without Jesus being prominent is totally pointless.

I SAID I AM NOT THE CHRIST

John 3:28 ***“Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before Him.”***

The question had arisen concerning Jesus and John both baptizing. Were these

washings, or purification ceremonies like those contained in the Law of Moses? Which baptism was better? Since both were visibly successful, was there a competition between John and Jesus – for the mind of the flesh cannot grasp two leaders working for the same cause, with one diminishing and one increasing. Men still have great difficulty with this type of issue. Some cannot comprehend the Old Covenant passing away, while the New grows in resplendent glory (2 Cor 3:7-10). They cannot see that the New Covenant is established on *“better promises”* (Heb 8:6), continuing to declare that the inferior promises of the Old Covenant are fully applicable under the New Covenant. All of this confirms the absolute greatness and distinction of the New Covenant, and *“the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory”* (2 Tim 2:10). This is why God’s *“so great salvation”* is neglected (Heb 2:3). It is why some *“depart from the faith”* (1 Tim 4:1), and fail to *“grow up into”* Christ *“in all things”* (Eph 4:15). It is because they really do not perceive the superiority of Christ’s Person and work. Through his subtlety, Satan has perpetrated *“another Jesus”* (2 Cor 11:4) that allows for spiritual mediocrity and ignorance. He has handed men a lifeless institution that does not yield a change in men, or glory to God. Under such a lifeless system, men have taken over the role of the *“Wonderful Counselor”* (Isa 9:6-7), and failed!

YE YOURSELVES BEAR ME WITNESS. The confusion that had surfaced is not owing to any deficiency in John’s ministry. He had not failed to emphasize the right things, or spoken loosely so that his words could not be understood. His message had not only allowed, but promoted, an accurate view of Jesus of Nazareth. He left no question about who was greater, affirming Jesus was *“mightier”* than himself, and that he was not worthy to *“unloose”* the latchet of Jesus’ shoes (Lk 3:16). He told them that the threshing floor of humanity belonged to Jesus, and that He would ultimately purge that floor, gathering the wheat into His barn, and burning the chaff with *“fire unquenchable”* (Lk 3:17). He told them that the baptism Jesus would effect was that of the Spirit, as compared to being baptized only with water (John 1:33). Boldly John announced that Jesus was *“from heaven”* and was *“above all”* (John 3:31). How could anyone accept his words and conclude that Jesus was in any sense inferior to anyone? What form of sound thinking would lead a person to believe that Jesus was competing with John?

Those who heard and believed what John said about Jesus began following Jesus at the first opportunity (John 1:37-38). Those who followed Jesus brought others to Him as well (John 1:39-41, 43-46). But, alas, these disciples of John had not yet grasped what John had said, and had therefore viewed Jesus baptizing disciples as some form of competition.

Here we ought to note that Jesus is not competing with the world’s wise men, or the wisdom of this world. His wisdom is superior to that of the world, and there is no question about who is the superior Teacher.

I SAID I AM NOT THE CHRIST. By saying this, John was acknowledging that he was not *“the Answer,”* but one that introduced the Answer. **He was not the one the people were to be looking for.** The scribes, for example, accented the coming of Elijah before the coming of the Lord, instead of the Lord Himself (Matt 17:10-12). A type of Elijah would come in John the Baptist – but the coming of Jesus was the real point, while the ministry of John was preparatory. The final Elijah would come before the coming of Christ again – but the coming of the Christ is the point, with the coming of Elijah being preparatory!

I AM SENT BEFORE HIM. In the kingdom of God, what is first is inferior, what is second is of a new and superior order. Thus we read of *“the first man Adam,”* and *“the*

last man, Jesus, who was a *"quickenning Spirit"* (1 Cor 15:45), *"the first man"* who is *"of the earth, earthy,"* and *"the second man" who is "the Lord from heaven"* (1 Cor 15:47). There is *"the First Covenant"* with its *"ordinances of Divine service, and a worldly sanctuary"* (Heb 9:1), and the *"New Covenant,"* which is *"better, which was established upon better promises"* (Heb 8:6). There is also *"the old man,"* which is first (Eph 4:22; Col 3:9), and the *"new man"* which is created in righteousness and true holiness (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). There is *"the first heaven and the first earth,"* which will pass away (Rev 21:1), and the *"new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness"* (2 Pet 3:13). There is our first body, a *"vile body"* (Phil 3:20-21), which is an *"earthly house"* (2 Cor 5:1), and our resurrection body, our *"house from heaven"* (2 Cor 5:2), which is *"immortal"* (1 Cor 15:53-54). In the kingdom of God, the best is always last – covenant, people, Prophet, Teacher, body, etc.

Thus John was sent to announce the passing of the Old Covenant, together with its ordinances, and the coming of the New Covenant, which is not be able to be put into old bottles (Lk 5:37-38). He prepared the way for a New Savior, a New sacrifice, a New life, a New Covenant, and a New Creation. Jesus would be superior to Moses, as well as John. Compared to those who went before, none had arisen that was greater than John (Matt 11:11). But when it came to the Savior of the world, John was not only lesser, he had to decrease. This he proclaimed with great clarity and consistency.

THE BRIDEGROOM AND THE BRIDE

²⁹ *"He that hath the bride is the Bridegroom: but the friend of the Bridegroom, which standeth and heareth Him, rejoiceth greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled."*

The extent of John the Baptist's understanding will become more and more apparent in his answers and affirmations. This was the result of him being filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb (Lk 1:15). He is also described as *"a just and holy man"*^{NKJV} (Mk 6:20), and *"a burning and shining light"* (John 5:35). Jesus said he was *"more than a prophet"* (Matt 11:9), and *"Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist"* (Mat 11:11). That covered a period of four thousand years, and included men such as Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and the prophets. There was no person until that time who could speak of Jesus as John did.

"HE." John refers to Jesus as *"Him"* and *"He."* Because of the uniqueness of the Lord Jesus, it was clear that John was speaking of Him – Jesus of Nazareth, and the Son of God. There are 6,171 references to Deity that include the following pronouns: *"He"* = 4,256 times, *"Him"* = 1,767 times, and *"Himself"* = 148 times. I will not dwell on this, but it buttresses the fact of the centrality of Deity in Scripture.

HE THAT HATH THE BRIDE IS THE BRIDEGROOM. This is prophetic language, although the Messiah is never clearly referred to as the *"Bridegroom"* prior to this. In His identity with Israel, God frequently likened Himself to a Bridegroom, and Israel to His *"bride"* (Isa 62:5; Jer 7:34; 16:9; 25:10; 33:11; Joel 2:16). In the sixty-first chapter of Isaiah, which is Messianic in nature, converted Israel (and ultimately the church) is depicted as both a bridegroom and a bride that is gloriously attired (Isa 61:10). The prophets also spoke of the togetherness of the bridegroom and the bride (Isa 61:10; 62:5; Jer 7:34; 16:9; 25:10; 33:11; Joel 2:16).

There were also allusions to the Lord's associations with Israel that paralleled marriage: *"Thy Maker is thine husband"* (Isa 54:5); *"In that thou buildest thine eminent place in the head*

of every way, and makest thine high place in every street; and hast not been as an harlot, in that thou scornest hire; But as a wife that committeth adultery, which taketh strangers instead of her husband!" (Ezek 16:31-32); *"Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god"* (Mal 2:11).

Yet, under the Old Covenant, this relationship was profaned by Israel's propensity to worship other gods, which God said was committing adultery against Him. Therefore, the depiction of a bride and a bridegroom was rarely set forth as being honored by Israel.

Now John elevates the figure by focusing on Jesus as the Bridegroom, clearly indicating that He had come to earth to accomplish the requirements for that marriage to take place. That Jesus came to *"save sinners"* is a glorious reality (1 Tim 1:15). But that He came, and is presently ministering, to obtain a *"bride"* is even more lofty and focused. That shows the higher side of salvation, which is more than a rescue from sin and the wicked one. The figure of the Bridegroom and the bride accents **what Jesus obtains**, and it is something that must be seen. The saved ones belong to Jesus. They are His bride, and are to conduct their lives as those who are faithfully betrothed to be married to Him, and are eagerly awaiting that marriage.

THE FRIEND OF THE BRIDEGROOM. John refers to himself as *"the friend of the Bridegroom."* Other versions read, *"the husband's friend,"* ^{BBE} *"the best man,"* ^{GWN} and *"the groomsman."* ^{AMPLIFIED} The *"friend," "best man,"* or *"groomsman,"* is the one who acts as an intermediary between the Bridegroom and the bride. Specifically, he makes arrangement for the bride to be apprised of what is required of her by the Bridegroom. In John's ministry, that was repentance, and a commitment to holiness. That is what is required for a person to be joined to the Lord. Spiritual harlotry will not be tolerated. That is why the disciple must *"forsake all"* (Lk 14:33), and avoid competing associations (Lk 14:26). John's commission is summarized in these words: *"to make ready a people prepared for the Lord"* (Luke 1:17).

WHICH STANDETH AND HEARETH HIM. Other versions read, *"waits and listens for Him,"* ^{NIV} *"whose place is by His side and whose ears are open to Him."* ^{BBE} Rather than competing with Jesus, as some of his disciples suggested, John was submissive to Him, listening for His voice of direction.

REJOICETH GREATLY. John heard the *"Bridegroom's voice"* when Jesus said, concerning John baptizing Him, *"Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness"* (Matt 3:15). How refreshing those words must have been to John! At that point he probably put together the fact that the ministry of his baptizing was that Jesus would be revealed to him in the act of baptism. This was confirmed by a voice from heaven, affirming that Jesus was God's Son (Matt 3:17).

THIS MY JOY IS FULFILLED. Other versions read, *"That joy is mine, and it is now complete,"* ^{NIV} Now John realized that his ministry had been fulfilled. The time had come when he, like Paul, had finished his course (2 Tim 4:7).

HE MUST INCREASE, BUT I MUST DECREASE

"³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease." Other versions read, *"He must become greater; I must become less,"* ^{NIV} *"He must become more important, while I become less important,"* ^{CJB} *"He must increase in importance, while I must decrease in importance,"* ^{GWN} *"He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less,"* ^{NLT} *"That One must grow, but me to lessen,"* ^{ABP} *"This is the assigned moment for him to*

move into the center, while I slip off to the sidelines," ^{MESSAGE} and *"He must grow more prominent; I must grow less so."* ^{AMPLIFIED}

This is the necessary implication of Jesus being *"the Son of God"* (Mk 1:1), and *"the King of kings and the Lord of lords"* (1 Tim 6:15). It is the necessary outcome of Him being *"glorified"* (Acts 3:13), *"highly exalted"* (Phil 2:9), enthroned (Acts 2:30-33), *"made higher than the heavens"* (Heb 7:26), and being placed *"over all things"* (Rom 9:5; Eph 1:22). This is the result of Jesus being given *"authority to execute judgment"* (John 5:27), and assigned to *"judge the world in righteousness"* (Acts 17:31).

IMPLICATIONS. The things mentioned above are, what is called, "implications." An implication is: "A LOGICAL RELATION BETWEEN TWO PROPOSITIONS THAT FAILS TO HOLD ONLY IF THE FIRST IS TRUE AND THE SECOND IS FALSE: A LOGICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TWO PROPOSITIONS IN WHICH IF THE FIRST IS TRUE THE SECOND IS TRUE." ^{MERRIAM-WEBSTER} In the above statements, if Jesus is the Son of God, all of the other statements are true. If any of them are false, then Jesus is **not** the Son of God.

A NEGLECTED AREA. Throughout history, from the very beginning, the church has had trouble with making a correlation between the affirmations concerning Jesus Christ, and the many implications of those assertions. This is the reason for all apostolic correction, and it is also what necessitated an extended exposition of the death, resurrection, ascension, and present ministry of Jesus. The failure to perceive these things has left a gaping hole through which carnality and worldly wisdom crept into the church. It is why false teachers *"crept in unawares"* among those to whom Jude wrote. It is why professing believers to whom James wrote had become *"adulterers and adulteresses"* (James 4:4). It is why the Galatians *"removed"* themselves from God, who had called them *"into the grace of Christ"* (Gal 1:6). It is why the Corinthians had embraced *"another Jesus," "another spirit,"* and *"another gospel"* (2 Cor 11:4).

Perceiving the implications of the Gospel is synonymous with comprehending *"what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God"* (Eph 3:18-19). This is what moves people away from being *"children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine"* (Eph 4:14). It is what enables them to *"grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ"* (Eph 4:15).

HE MUST INCREASE, AND I MUST DECREASE. All of this is summarized in the words, *"He must increase, but I must decrease."* If Jesus is small in our thinking, then we are large in our own estimation. In such a case, decisions are made out of purely personal interests, with no regard to how they impact upon our relationship to God through Jesus Christ. When a person does not *"decrease,"* in their own estimation (as compared with Jesus), then such an one rarely thinks of the words of Jesus: *"Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven"* (Matt 6:10).

Paul expressed this attitude doctrinally, affirming that it explained why he lived the way he did: *"I count all things but loss for **the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord:** for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, **that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead . . . this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"*** (Phil 3:7-14).

That is Jesus increasing, while Paul was decreasing. Why was Paul so aggressive in his stance? It was, like John the Baptist, because he saw the implications of Jesus being the Son of God. The rarity of this perspective in our time is startling. **It is the reason for all carnality and worldliness in the church, all division, and all false teaching.** Modern Christianity has been relegated to the basement of theory, supposition, and human opinion. As long as that condition exists, Jesus is being decreased in the minds of men, and men are being exalted.

Notice how succinctly John stated this: ***"He MUST increase, but I MUST decrease"*** (John 3:30). Other versions read, *"has to,"*^{BBE} *"behoveth,"*^{YLT} *"expedient,"*^{JUB} *"is necessary,"*^{LEB} *"the assigned moment."*^{MESSAGE} I do not care for the toned down versions. The word used denotes absolute necessity, required, and determined. No other posture of life is acceptable, and the person who lives in contradiction of this revealed priority will, if he does not change, be thrust from the Lord's presence.