

### **“More of Jesus, Less of Me”**

One of the most crucial things needed for a successful marriage is the support of both the bride and the groom’s families. When one of the families doesn’t support the marriage it makes it particularly difficult.

On a practical level this affects what families will do on the holidays, and who can and can’t see the kids. Sometimes it can get so bad that it can cause a family to work against the marriage. This type of thing will soon lead to resentment amongst everyone involved. For when two people get married it’s not just them who get married, but whole families.

### **The Bride and the Bridegroom, Who’s Married to Whom?**

In our text today we have a bride and a bridegroom. The bride is the followers of Jesus and the bridegroom is Jesus himself.

In our text we also have a disagreement about who is supposed to be married to whom; for the disciples of John the Baptist think that they are supposed to be married to him, not Jesus. They think John is the bride, so to speak.

So consequently, they grow jealous of Jesus. “Rabbi,” they cried, “that man who was on the other side of the Jordan with you- the one you testified about- he is baptizing and everybody is going to him!” (v.26)

Somehow they missed the point about who they were supposed to be following.

Ironically, John the Baptist has been trying to tell them all along that they were to be following Jesus.

Earlier in this gospel he told those who were questioning him that he was not the Christ (1:21) and that he was not even worthy to stoop down and untie the shoes of the Savior (1:26).

John had also said that the one who came after him, which was Jesus, was greater than him because he was before him. (1:15, 30) Do you remember how this great gospel began? “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.” (1:1)

And every time John saw Jesus coming he would say, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!” He was always pointing others to Jesus.

In v. 28-29 of our text John tries one last time.

He says, “I am not the Christ, but am sent ahead of him. 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.”

What John is saying here is that he is wed to Jesus. He is not the bridegroom, but rather the bride of Christ. He is the one who waits for Jesus. Not only that, but it was his sole role to point others to the bride and away from himself. That is the purpose for which John came.

He came as the forerunner of Jesus, “The voice of one calling out from the dessert, prepare the way of the Lord.” (Mk. 1:4)

John then goes on to tell those who had been following him that “he must become greater and that I must become less.” (v.30)

Now why must Jesus increase and John decrease?

Our text tells us in v. 31-36.

In this section of scripture John the Baptist explains to his followers that he is from the earth and that Jesus is from heaven, and because of this the one who is from heaven is above all; therefore he is the one they are to listen to and follow, not John.

It was time for John’s disciples to let go of him and cling to Christ. For if they did not they would not see life. “Those who believe in the Son” -not John the Baptist- “will have eternal life and those who reject the Son will not see life.” (v. 36)

### **The Key to the Christian Life- “He Must Become Greater, I Must Become Less”**

The key to the Christian life, I think, is found in the words of John the Baptist in v. 30. “He must become greater and I must become less.”

This was the attitude of our Savior. Paul tells us that Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. Instead Christ made himself nothing. He took on the nature of a servant and he humbled himself and became obedient to death- even death on a cross. (Phil. 2)

It is also the life that Jesus calls us to.

He said that we must “deny ourselves and take our crosses daily and follow him.” He also told us that “the first shall be last and the last shall be first” and that we are not to worry about who will be “the greatest in the Kingdom” (Lk. 9:46-50) because “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mk. 10:45)

The apostle Paul expressed this same idea well in his letter to the Philippians when he said, “But whatever were gains to me in this life I now consider a loss for the sake of Christ. Those things that I gave up to do not compare to the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord. I consider whatever I had to give up to be garbage, so that I may gain Christ and be found in him...” (3:7-9)

## **Making Application of the Text**

This text raises three points of application for us in our Christian lives.

### **(1) Who are we married to?**

This analogy of the bride and the bridegroom that John the Baptist uses to describe the relationship between God and His people is the most prominent one in all of scripture.

Our relationship with God is frequently likened to that of a marriage. In the Old Testament the prophets declare that Yahweh (The Lord) is Israel's husband. And when Israel is unfaithful she is most often referred to as an adulterous. In the NT Jesus tells us parables about the Kingdom of God being like that of a wedding banquet and he refers to himself as the bridegroom. In Ephesians Paul calls us the bride of Christ and in Revelation 19 the second coming of Christ is referred to as a marriage supper.

So the question for us is are we the bride of Christ, or are we someone else's lover?

In a marriage the Bible says that a man and woman become "one in flesh;" it is to be inseparable. That's the way our relationship with Jesus is supposed to be. It is to be deeply intimate and it is to reign supreme over all other relationships.

Other lovers, be they money, education, the pursuit of pleasure, or our jobs, even our families, are not to take precedent over our relationship with Christ. Christ must increase; we must decrease. More of Jesus, less of me. That's the way the marriage is supposed to work.

### **(2) Does Jesus Christ bring joy in our lives?**

In our text John the Baptist says that as he **attends** to Jesus. That is to say that he **serves** him. He also says that he is always **waiting** and **listening** for the bridegroom, and that when he hears his voice he is full of **joy**.

What about us? Are we as anxious as John to sit at the feet of the Savior? Do we come to him in prayer and in our study of the Word expecting to hear his voice?

John's greatest joy in life was to see the ministry of Jesus flourish and to point people to the Savior. Here in the text John's mission had finally come to a climax. His time in the spot light was up. Jesus' ministry to save people from their sins through his death on the cross was now fully operational and it was now time for John to fade away into the background. This reality did not bring sadness in John's life. In fact John tells us that because of this his **joy** was now complete.

Do you have joy in your life? Not happiness, but joy. Happiness comes and it goes. We go through dark nights of the soul, but in the midst of those dark nights do you have joy? John is telling us that Jesus Christ can give us joy because he can give to us God- for he is God in the flesh. We receive that joy by letting Christ increase in our lives, and ourselves decrease.

This the way of our Savior. “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross...” (Heb.12:3)

Because of Jesus and what he did for us, bearing God’s wrath that our sins deserve, he must increase and we must decrease. More of Jesus, less of me. In that you will find joy.

### **(3) Are We Jealous of Others?**

The chief sin of the disciples of John the Baptist was pride and jealousy. They were concerned that they were not getting enough credit for God’s work. They wanted to be in the spot light so they got upset about the fact that Jesus’ ministry was now taking precedence over John’s.

John’s disciples were not the only ones who had this problem. The disciples of Jesus had it too.

The twelve often concerned themselves about who would be first in the Kingdom of God and they once- ironically it was actually John the beloved apostle, the very writer of this gospel!- got upset about someone who was casting out demons in the name of Jesus, who was not a part of the original twelve. To this criticism by the disciples Jesus said, “Whoever is not against us is for us.” (Mk. 9:38-41)

This might sound silly but sometimes this can still be a problem in the church. People will grab for power. People will want all the credit but at the expense of others. Some, just like the disciples, will not want new people in the church, or them to have ministries in the church because of power, jealousy, or pettiness.

This warning against pride and jealousy not only applies to us in our church lives, but also our family and work lives too.

We are called to serve the Lord- not be jealous about other people’s accomplishments or who gets the credit. Christ must increase, we must decrease.

More of Jesus, less of me. This is the way of our Lord.

Amen.