

John 3:22-30 "I'm Not the Bridegroom"

JOH 3:22-30 "After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized. 23 Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized. 24 (This was before John was put in prison.) 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 - well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him." 27 To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. 28 You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ 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."

Up to this point in chapter three Jesus has been talking to Nicodemus. In our text this morning the scene changes to where Jesus is now traveling throughout the Judean countryside as he goes out to smaller villages and towns to meet the common people of the region.

And in this we see that Jesus is just as concerned for the leaders of Israel, as seen in Nicodemus, as He is of those who come under their leadership.

But, what we see in our text this morning is a return to John the Baptist as it relates to an apparent problem with some of his disciples. But what is interesting in verse 22 is that Jesus takes up the ministry of John the Baptist as He now calls people to repentance through this baptism.

And keep in mind that this baptism is not what we might call "Christian baptism." It is not a baptism associated directly with the shed blood of Christ. This baptism is described in a number of places in the New Testament as a baptism of repentance.

MAR 1:4 "And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching *a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*"

LUK 3:3 "He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a *baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*"

ACT 19:4-5 "Paul said, "John's baptism was *a baptism of repentance.* He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." 5 On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus."

Keep in mind what the word baptism means. Essentially it means three things:

- 1) Union with something or someone.
- 2) Fellowship with someone.
- 3) Identification with something or someone. UFI.

The context will determine what any particular baptism is describing. For example when the disciples came to Jesus and asked to be set up in a special place in heaven with our Lord this is what we read in Mark.

MAR 10:37-40 They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory." 38 "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or *be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?*" 39 "We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, 40 but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."

What baptism is Jesus describing here when He says, "you will be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" Well, we know it's not the baptism in the Jordan because that baptism took place in the past at this point. The baptism Jesus refers to is a future baptism. But He's not going to be water baptized again.

So, what baptism is He referring to? The context of Mark 10:37-40 specifically refers to the cup Jesus is going to drink. And so, the cup and the baptism are identical.

Well, what cup is Jesus talking about? That cup has to do with accomplishing the Father's will. And what cup is that?

MAT 26:39 "Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

Later in the gospel of John Jesus points out to Peter the necessity of drinking this cup.

JOH 18:11 "Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"

In our text Jesus is saying that the baptism with which He will be baptized is the same baptism His disciples will experience. In other words, just as Christ will be put to death for doing the Father's will, so too will His apostles be put to death for doing the Father's will in the name of Christ.

They will have a union with Christ in that sense. They will share the fellowship of suffering as did Christ. They will be identified with the Lord Jesus in that they too are accomplishing the ministry of reconciliation.

And so, simply because the word baptism is used in any particular verse does not necessarily mean we are talking about water baptism as we understand it. However, in our text we are talking about a particular water baptism which happens to be associated with Jewish purification rites.

This particular baptism, being a baptism of repentance, is associated with the Jews and the Mosaic Law. It is a baptism, or washing, which has more to do with being ceremonially clean.

But, when such a washing or baptism is done in faith, it is the faith of the person placed on God's provision, not the physical water, which is considered as righteousness. And so, just as Abraham believed God and he was considered righteous, so too, all who received this baptism of repentance by faith in the promises of the Redeemer, they too were considered righteous.

But back to the idea of Jesus involving Himself in John's ministry of baptism of repentance, we see that our Lord has placed His full approval on what John is doing by now joining him as He reaches out to the people of Judea.

Now, in some of your translations it appears that Jesus Himself was actively baptizing people.

The NASB puts it this way. "After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing."

The KJV says, "After these things came Jesus and His disciples into the land of Judea; and there He tarried with them, and baptized."

But the fact is that Jesus Himself did not apparently baptize people, but rather involved His disciples to perform this baptism on the people. We know this according to the apostle John in the next chapter.

JOH 4:1-2 "The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, 2 although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples."

Because Jesus was placing His approval on this ministry of repentance it could be said of Him that He was baptizing when in fact He was simply instructing His disciples to do it on His behalf.

As to why He didn't personally baptize people it may very well have to do with the fact that this was not His personal ministry. His ministry was not one of mere repentance, but one of sacrifice. He wasn't merely calling people to repent, He was the means by which they would be saved. Remember, He is the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world.

But in allowing His disciples to baptize He was saying Amen to John's ministry which was a precursor to accepting the Messiah, Jesus.

And back in our text John the Baptist is also reaching out to people with the good news of the Messiah as he is preparing the way for Jesus in his ministry.

JOH 3:23-24 "Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized. 24 (This was before John was put in prison.)"

Apparently John and Jesus were in different locations of Judea while they brought this message of repentance to people. And you'll notice in verse 24 that it states that this was before John was put in prison.

The reason for this footnote is that this shows us one of the earliest accounts of the ministry of Jesus. In all of the other gospels we pick up the ministry of Jesus after the imprisonment of John. This account shows us that Jesus was active in reaching out to the people before John's imprisonment.

But the crux of the context here at the end of chapter three has to do with the reaction to the ministry of Jesus Christ by certain Jews who apparently aligned themselves with John the Baptist.

JOH 3:25-26 "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 -well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him."

Now at first glance we might conclude that these disciples of John were simply being loyal and protective. But the question should be raised, protective of what?

The first thing we notice in verse 25 is that there was concern among some of John's disciples regarding the issue of ceremonial washing, or as some of your translations put it, purifying or purification.

It seems that some of these Jews who claimed to align themselves with John were more concerned with the rituals of this washing or baptism than what it represented. Maybe the disciples of Jesus weren't using the same exact formula or the exact same words in their approach to this baptism.

But this really isn't the issue. What is the issue is what is recorded in verse 26.

JOH 3:26 "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 -well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him."

This is the real issue. Some of these Jews who were following John were on this ride for what they could get out of it. Some of them may very well have thought that this is a "happening movement" and we want to be on the ground floor when it begins to take off, because we want to be the one's who are in charge when all of Israel realizes the power of God's servant, John.

They were jealous and concerned that Jesus was going to steal John's thunder, and therefore his power, and they in turn would be relegated to "also ran's" in this particular movement.

And unfortunately, this happens in the church today as well. People who claim to be Christians are often times looking for the "happening place" or "movement" instead of looking for the truth.

They're more concerned with what they can get from such a movement than what they can contribute to the Kingdom of God. And when one movement fizzles out they're out looking for the next one.

And so, the experience and what they want to get out of the experience becomes more important than what the truth is.

This is why we see people flocking to some of the strangest and bizarre movements in the church today. If they were the least bit concerned with the truth of God's word they would be much more grounded in the truth and much more discerning when it came to false teachings and teachers.

It is usually these people who are the most susceptible to what we might call a roller-coaster ride with Christ, where after their alleged spiritual experience they seem to be on top of the world, but the moment a trial comes their way, or if they haven't gotten a recent spiritual fix, they can't seem to cope with life.

There's nothing stable with them because, though they claim Christ as their Savior, they are not standing on the solid ground of the Rock of their salvation. This doesn't mean they may not be saved, but it does mean they don't have the ability to consistently glorify Christ in their walk because it seems Christ is not with them for most of their walk, as they perceive it.

Of course, it has nothing to do with the Lord not being with them, it just means they have placed Him somewhere other than on the throne of their lives because their motivation is more self-oriented, than Christ oriented.

And that is the case here in our text. Notice what they say in verse 26.

"Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan - the one you testified about -well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him."

"That man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan?"

That man? It's obvious that they didn't get it. That man is none other than the Son of God. And as to them admitting that he was the one John testified about; what was John's testimony about that man?

JOH 1:29-30, 32-34 "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of

the world! 30 This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' 32 Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. 33 I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' 34 I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."

What part of this testimony did these Jews not understand?

If this man is none other than the Son of God who came to take away the sin of the world, the same one of whom John says in verse 30 of chapter one, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.', how can any of these Jews then come to John and say that man is getting more attention than you, unless they totally miss the point that this is exactly what is supposed to happen, since Jesus is greater than John?

Again, their motive was not pure. They didn't have eyes to see that the reason John was doing his ministry was to point to the One who would come after him whose sandals John was not worthy to untie, according to his own testimony.

John the Baptist never gave the impression that he was starting some new movement to get attention and power and prestige among the Jews. But these particular Jews saw how they could get something out of this movement and they were not going to sit still and let Jesus take center stage.

And by the way, this does raise a question as to why they didn't go after Jesus if they were more interested in seeking power and position among the Jews as Jesus is now apparently receiving.

I believe they knew that Jesus would not give them such positions. I believe they knew they had a better chance with John whom they thought they might be able to manipulate. It's tragic, but this can be seen in the church at large today as well.

People come into the church trying to position themselves for power. And in many cases they will step on whomever they can to attain such power. And many a leader will roll over for such people especially if these people's bank account is the leading edge of their sword.

This is why we must be discerning and why we must be grounded on the truth, not willing to compromise for anybody when it comes

to advancing the kingdom of God with the gospel of Jesus Christ. And John responds to these Jews with the truth.

JOH 3:27-29 "To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. 28 You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ 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."

John has just said that, 'you guys have missed what my ministry is all about. It's not about me becoming popular and powerful and the leader of some new movement.' And he says something very interesting in verse 27 when he says, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven."

In other words, John is saying that 'God has not given me that role, and since I am a servant sent from God and not from men I do only what God has given me and that is to be a mouth piece and a herald for the One who comes after me.'

Likewise, since Jesus has been given a role from God to be the Christ it only makes sense that He is the One people must now start looking to.

And then John goes on to remind them of their selective hearing. He reminds them that he made it clear that he had no ambition of being a messiah or leader of some new movement with followers who would assume roles of leadership.

JOH 3:28 "You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.'

He is making it clear that these same Jews, who are now complaining about Jesus getting more attention, were there in John's presence when he said unequivocally that he was not the Christ, but was sent ahead of him, that is, ahead of the Christ.

And so, what John has just said is that these people were told that Jesus is that Christ, and yet they're complaining that John is getting a raw deal here because more people are going over to Jesus than sticking with John.

No, John is not getting a raw deal; some of these people think they're getting a raw deal. Oh, the hardness of man's heart. They've been told the truth about their spiritual future and they're

still more concerned with their temporal today. They were fully informed and still they didn't hear because they chose not to hear.

John goes on to explain his position as a herald of God as he rebukes these people for accusing him of something he's not.

JOH 3:29 "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."

John gives them a mini-parable. He compares his role with that of an attendant to the bridegroom. An attendant to the bridegroom only wants to bless the bridegroom and encourage the bridegroom.

The attendant is not one who is elevated to a position of honor on the day of the wedding. The honor belongs to the bridegroom and his bride. John will not try and steal that from the bridegroom, Jesus, as these Jews want him to do.

The analogy John uses is instructive; that of a bridegroom and a bride. Now at first glance we might think that the bride John refers to here is the church, the body of Christ, but that's not the case at this particular point, though the future implications of this analogy most certainly refer to the church made up of both Jew and Gentile.

But keeping the context in mind, Jesus is coming to the Jews. He is dealing with the leaders of the Jews as well as the common man in Israel. He is fulfilling the promise God made to Abraham. And He is fulfilling His role as the husband of Israel.

ISA 62:5 "As a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you."

HOS 2:19-20 "I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. 20 I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the LORD."

ISA 54:5-7 "For your Maker is your husband - the LORD Almighty is his name - the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth. 6 The LORD will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit - a wife who married young, only to be rejected," says your God. 7 "For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back."

It is God's desire to demonstrate to Israel that God has called that nation out to be a faithful wife, and yet Israel rejected her husband, if you will, and John is going to remind them of how God will still be faithful to fulfill His promise to take to Himself a bride that will be composed of both Jew and Gentile as was promised to Abraham.

Unfortunately for Israel they have long since been cut off from the covenant blessings that come with obedience to the covenants given them by God.

**Jeremiah 3:8** <sup>8</sup> "And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce, yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear; but she went and was a harlot also.

But there are promises that that the prophet Jeremiah makes to the house of Israel that deal with a future restoration but it is a restoration unto a new covenant and Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of that covenant and the One who will restore the "Israel of God" unto Himself, which includes peoples from every corner of the earth.

**Jeremiah 31:31-33** <sup>31</sup> "Behold, *days are coming,*" declares the LORD, "when I will *make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,* <sup>32</sup> not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. <sup>33</sup> "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

"I will be their God, and they shall be My people." This is a future promise to the house of Israel which is a prophetic way of describing all people who shall be the people of God.

When Paul wrote to the church of Christ in Corinth, which included both Jew and Gentiles believers, he identified the entire group as those who come under this promise, "I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

**2 Corinthians 6:16-18** <sup>16</sup> Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG

THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. <sup>17</sup> "Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE," says the Lord. "AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAR; And I will welcome you. <sup>18</sup> "And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me," Says the Lord Almighty.

The ultimate expression of this relationship with God and His people is found in the Revelation given to John.

REV 19:5-8 "Then a voice came from the throne, saying: "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!" <sup>6</sup> Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. <sup>7</sup> Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. <sup>8</sup> Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)"

The saints include both Old and New Testament saints, which is to say that God is the bridegroom over all His people, both Jew and Gentile, who have placed their faith in Him alone for their salvation. This makes you and me in Christ His bride.

John the Baptist is saying to these jealous Jews, 'why would you seek the attendant of the bridegroom when you can have the bridegroom Himself? This is why I must decrease and He must increase. This is why you must not think that I'm being slighted or that my ministry is not going to increase.'

That's the point John is making in our text. His ministry was given to Him by God for that very reason. The more successful his ministry became the less it would be needed. Why? Because it would have accomplished what it was set out to do. Point people to Jesus.

In the sense that we are servants of God we too must decrease to the degree that Jesus Christ is the one we point people to, and not ourselves. Being a Christian is not about building a kingdom for ourselves. It's not about creating a place where our legacy is propagated.

It's all about Jesus Christ and being faithful witnesses as He builds His church to His glory. But it's also knowing that He allows us to be part of that process as He encourages us to go forth into all the

world inviting people to be part of that wedding feast as they embrace their bridegroom who has come to take them home.

May Christ increase in our lives. And to the degree that He takes precedence, may our lives decrease. And may we join with Paul.

PHI 3:8-9 "What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ - the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.