

June 23, 2013

Humility of the Bridegrooms Friend

John 3:22-30

BI: True humility comes from the satisfying joy of knowing how privileged we are to serve such a Lord as Jesus.

Introduction:

When we think about the Bible as a whole we understand that it is broken into two major sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament. In today's usage the word Testament refers to a legal document declaring a person's wishes regarding the disposal of their property when they die. The biblical usage, however, while similar, is a bit different. The term "Testament" when used of the Bible speaks to the major Covenants God established whereby He reveals how He will relate to people. The term "Old Testament," then, is really a reference to the Old Covenant, and the New Testament reveals the nature of the New Covenant God has established with men through Christ.

The O.T. speaks of God's dealings with men from the Garden of Eden until the ministry of Jesus Christ. The N.T. speaks of God's dealings with men from the ministry of Christ to the eternal state in heaven when redemptive history will be complete. What we find in the gospels, however, is a period of transition between the two Testaments. The Old Covenant is winding down and the New Covenant is just beginning.

When we come to passages in the gospels that speak about the relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist, we need to understand them within the context of this great transition. John the Baptist is the final prophet of the Old Covenant. Jesus, on the other hand, is the Personification of the New Covenant. John's ministry is temporary. Jesus' ministry is eternal.

We also need to understand that John the Baptist knew that he was the final prophet of Old Covenant times. The reason for his birth and life was so that, as the final prophet of the O.T., he would announce the coming of the One who would establish the New Covenant between God and His people.

You may remember (Luke 1:76-77) that after John the Baptist was born his Father, Zechariah, prophesied saying,

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people in the forgiveness of their sins.

John the Baptist understood his mission. He was to be the forerunner of the Christ. He was to be the one who announced to Israel that her King had arrived. He was to close the store on Old Covenant Times in preparation for the coming of the New Covenant which God would establish through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We need to understand these dynamic as we come to John 3:22-30.

With that in mind, let's begin thinking about what the apostle wants us to learn from this text.

I. The Context of Ministry

1. The apostle starts this section by telling us something about the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus. For some time now John the Baptist had been ministering along the Jordan River baptizing and calling sinners to repent and prepare for the arrival of the kingdom of God. And you will remember that it was John who baptized Jesus and announced to the people that He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. God Himself spoke out of heaven that day and declared that Jesus is His Son, and the Holy Spirit descended on Him like a dove. That was the day Jesus' ministry officially began.

2. After that, Jesus went into the wilderness where he was tempted by the devil 40 days. Then He turned water into wine at the wedding feast, cleansed the temple in Jerusalem, taught and healed many during His ministry there in the capital city of Israel.

3. Now, several months have likely passed and Jesus and John the Baptist are both ministering in Israel. As we would expect, John has continued his ministry of preaching and baptizing in the Jordan. But it may come as a surprise to learn that Jesus is now doing the same thing (Read 22-24).

4. So both John the Baptist and Jesus were calling Israel to prepare themselves for the coming of their King. They were preaching repentance and baptizing people as a symbol of their repentance; although, the apostle makes it clear (4:2) that it was not Jesus but His disciples who were baptizing.

5. The apostle then inserts a parenthetical comment as kind of a “time-stamp” or a historical point of reference. He assumes we have already read the other gospels and that we know John would be arrested by Herod and killed, but this had not happened yet.

6. The important thing to see here, however, is that John the Baptist and Jesus were working side by side. They essentially were performing the same service to Israel, engaging in the same kind of ministry. But what the apostle wants us to see is what John the Baptist thinks about all of this. And he takes us there by allowing us to listen in on a significant conversation among John’s disciples.

7. Read 3:25-26

II. The Threat of Rivalry

1. The Context of ministry leads to the Threat of Rivalry. John’s disciples are getting really concerned about what they see. The Baptist is at the apex of His ministry in Israel. Throngs of people are still coming to the river for Him to baptize. On the other hand, ever since John announced the coming of the “Lamb of God,” Jesus’ ministry has exploded! So much so, in fact, that more people were now coming to Jesus than to John!

2. John’s disciples were not pleased. They see Jesus not as the progenitor of the New Covenant, but as a competitor in ministry. Witness the fact that they don’t even refer to Jesus by name. They simply refer to him as “*He who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness.*” Come on! They know His name. Everyone knew His name by now. The problem was not that they didn’t know Him, the problem was they didn’t like Him? Why? Because He was cutting in on their popularity with the people.

3. *They* had established this new ministry paradigm. *Theirs* were the “cool” church with the trendy, retro, back-to-nature approach to worship by the river. *They* had the copyrights on the mass-baptism approach to ministry. After all, their leader’s last name was... Baptist? Who was this other guy that was stealing their idea and cutting in on the popularity?

4. They didn’t want their leader to take second place behind anyone. So they come to John in a spirit of rivalry, and competition hoping he would do something to set things right. But they were absolutely unprepared for how he would respond.

5. The apostle has laid out the context for ministry and the threat of rivalry. Now let’s see...

III. The Example of Humility

1. Read 27-29

2. Beloved, do you understand that the apostle is wanting us to see? He told us his goal in writing this gospel; it is that we might *Believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing we may have life in His name* (20:31). Why did the apostle include this story of John the Baptist and his disciples? He did it to show us that even though John the Baptist was the greatest man of his time, he went beyond any shadow of a doubt that he was nothing more than a Servant of Jesus. He had come *NOT* to make a name for himself, but to announce to the world that the King of kings, and Lord of lords - God in flesh - had come.

3. What an amazing example of Christ-obsessed humility we find in John the Baptist! Beloved, our

church needs this kind of humility. Our families need to pursue this kind of humility. Our children and neighbors and coworkers need to see in us this kind of humility. So let's spend the remainder of our time thinking about how John the Baptist was able to exhibit such humility.

4. First, John's humility was the fruit of believing in God's sovereignty over all things. (Read 26).

5. You see, John knew that if Jesus was attracting a greater number of followers to himself it wasn't because he was sheep-stealing, or acting dishonestly, or engaging in some kind of hostile takeover. Rather it must be because God Himself was drawing them to Christ to be His followers.

6. Friends, I wonder how many of us cling to the sovereignty of God when it appears someone is getting ahead of us, is being more successful in their work, or being promoted to a higher place. To cling to the sovereignty of God is not a license to be lazy. There is no evidence that John took it that way. Instead, he kept right on being faithful to the ministry God gave him until God called him home.

7. The sovereignty of God should not produce passivity in us, but it should give us confidence that no matter how much fruit is born through our diligent efforts, we will see God's gracious hand in it and not be jealous of others when they seem more blessed than we. It empowers us to rejoice with those who rejoice and bless those who succeed more than us. It's hard to imagine a truly humble person who does not embrace the sovereignty of God.

8. Paul communicated the same thing as John when he asked the church of Corinth, "Who makes you different than anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?" (1 Cor. 4:7). In other words, God wants to live, work, and relate to others *NOT* with any sense of rivalry or jealousy; not constantly comparing ourselves to other people, but with the simple understanding that everything we have in this life is a gift of a loving God.

9. Second: John the Baptist's humility was owing to an accurate sense of self-awareness. Read v. 28.

10. You see, John was humble not only because he embraced the sovereignty of God over his life, but because he understood that he was nothing. You may remember that when John described himself in 1:23 he simply said, "I am a voice of one crying out in the wilderness..." He didn't elevate himself to the position of prophet, or super-preacher, or anything else. He simply said "I am a voice" and nothing more.

11. Jesus tell us as much on John 15:15 when he says, "Apart from me you can do nothing." You see, whenever we succeed at something we tend to conclude that it is because we are so gifted, talented, or experienced. But that's not how John viewed himself. He said, "I have been sent before Him." In other words, I am but a messenger, a mail man, a servant, a nobody who has simply been given the privilege of serving somebody.

12. Once again, this is consistent with the message of the rest of the New Testament. For example, Paul writes in Rom. 12:3 *"For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith."*

13. When Dr. Wayne Mack was here a couple weeks ago Jason and I got to sit in when the interns were asking him questions about life and ministry. At one point he said something about the apostle Paul I hope I never forget. He said, "The longer Paul lived the more humble he became about who he was. The first time he describes himself is in 1 Cor. 15:9 where he says, "I am the least of the apostles." The second time he described himself is in Eph. 3:8 where he said, "I am the least of all the saints." Then, the last time he described himself was in 1 Tim. 1:15 where he calls himself the "Chief of sinners." Beloved, that is humility.

14. So, John the Baptist's humility was owing to his trust in God's sovereignty and his accurate view of his own identity.

15. Third: John the Baptist's humility was owing to his fixation with Christ's glory. (Read v. 29).

16. The Bride and Bridegroom is a familiar O.T. picture that pictures God's relationship with His people. It is the Bridegroom who marries the bride and no one else. The friend of the Bridegroom, was like a modern "best man," but he had more responsibilities than that position has in our day.

17. In Hebrew culture, the “friend of the bridegroom” was called the *shoshben*. He was responsible for asking for the bride’s hand in marriage and for making arrangements with the bride’s father. At the wedding he was also the one charged with the responsibility of bringing the bride to the groom for the formal ceremony.

18. The responsibility of the *Shoshben* at the wedding was pretty simple. All he had to do was lead the bride by the hand to groom. But though his job was uncomplicated, it afforded him the closest proximity to the groom when he joyfully welcomed and received his bride to himself.

19. This was John the Baptist’s job. He was not the groom. He was not the father of the groom. He was merely the “best man” at the wedding. The purpose of his existence was simply to glorify Christ by leading His bride to her at the proper time. This is what his baptism was all about. It was about calling people to repentance and leading them to Christ.

20. John the Baptist didn’t live for his own glory. The entire focus of his life was on glorifying Christ. His greatest joy was not when people applauded him, but when he heard Jesus receiving those whom John had baptized.

21. Author Pink once wrote, “Humility is not the product of direct cultivation, rather it is a by-product. The more I try to be humble, the less shall I attain unto humility. But if I am truly occupied with that One who was ‘meek and lowly at heart,’ if I am constantly beholding *His* glory in the mirror of God’s word, then I shall be ‘changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord’ (2 Cor. 3:18).”

22. You see, the more clearly you see yourself in the light of who God is the less impressed with yourself you will be and the more like Christ you will become. The secret to humility is to turn our eyes away from ourselves and keep them fixed on the glory of Christ.

23. John the Baptist’s humility was owing to his trust in God’s sovereignty, his accurate view of his own identity, and his fixation with the glory of Christ. This is why he concluded (v. 30) “He must increase, but I must decrease.”

24. William Carey was one of the great pioneer missionaries to India and is often referred to as the “father of modern missions.” At the end of his life as he lay dying he turned to a friend and said, “When I am gone, don’t talk about William Carey; talk about William Carey’s Savior. I desire that Christ alone might be magnified.”

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Pulpit Series

Key Terms

I. Background
Historical/Geographical Context

II. John's Testimony:
The Rivalry Temptation

III. The Evangelist's Exposition
Deprecating self & Exalting Christ

John 3:22–30

²² After these things
Jesus and His disciples
came into the land of Judea

came into the land of Judaea,
and there

He was spending time with them
and baptizing. (Jn. 4:2)

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.

³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease.”