

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series – The Gospel of John (SB_JN3B_John the Baptist Exalts Christ)

John 3:22-24 – The Setting

In verses 22-24, we discover that for some period of time, the ministry of Jesus and John the Baptist overlapped. This is interesting for several reasons:

- ❑ Both John and Jesus had large crowds following them at this point in their respective ministries
- ❑ Both are said to have baptized; however, Jesus Himself did not baptize. Only His disciples baptized (Jn 4:2).
- ❑ John's statement in verse 24 that "John had not yet been thrown into prison" indicates that John's readers were very familiar with this fact from either the Synoptic accounts or church tradition.
- ❑ It indicates that the Judean countryside was filled with teaching regarding the kingdom.

John 3:25-36 – John Exalts Christ

John's disciples were perplexed and distraught regarding the number of people who were being drawn to Jesus. Jesus may have been perceived by them to have been just another disciple of John, therefore they were concerned that this other disciple was surpassing John in prominence. Of course, this would make them look smaller or less important.

Principle: A person can be involved in activity that is consistent with the plan of God for his/her life; however, wrong motives can underlie the activity. Examples of wrong motives include approbation lust, power lust, self-righteousness, etc. John's disciples appear to have been motivated by approbation lust and self-righteousness. They longed for earlier days when everyone went to hear John.

Principle: John's reply to his disciples reveals the humility that a truly great person needs to possess. John knew God's will for his life. John had a personal sense of spiritual destiny. A personal sense of spiritual destiny is needed in any believer's life for the following reasons:

- ❑ Spiritual motivation to sustain momentum in the Christian Way of Life
- ❑ Orientation to the spiritual reality of life versus the present and temporal exigencies¹ of life in this time/space dimension
- ❑ Spiritual perspicacity of life based upon faith in the unseen versus a worldly means of perception founded upon empiricism and rationalism only
- ❑ Spiritual vision that aligns the believer with God's plan and purpose for human history
- ❑ A sense of purpose and direction for life that allows the believer to avoid the distractions of the world, the flesh and involvement in religion (vs. spiritual Christianity)
- ❑ Humility – orientation to God's authority in one's life verses one's own authority (e.g. cosmic one involvement by a believer)
- ❑ True capacity for life, love and happiness – the application of the pertinent doctrines to one's life situations so that impersonal love for ALL men and personal love for God is the order of the day
- ❑ Contentment and tranquility – satisfied with one's status in life (Phil 4:11); not restless

¹ Exigencies are the details of daily life that seem to require our immediate attention. Exigent – defined in *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* as "requiring immediate attention or remedy; urgent; excessively demanding; exacting." See William Morris, Editor, *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (New York, New York: American Heritage Publishing Co., 1975), 460.

- ❑ Correct priorities in life
- ❑ Redeeming one's time on this earth
- ❑ Self-discipline
- ❑ Production of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22; Eph 5:9)

John's character – Although our insight into John's character is limited to only a few passages of Scripture, we can conclude that it is very likely that John the Baptist possessed these qualities. In our passage (Jn 3:25-36), we see John demonstrating the following: 1) humility – orientation to God's plan for his life; 2) contentment and tranquility; 3) a sense of purpose and direction – he definitely avoided the distractions of the world; 4) correct priorities; 5) orientation to spiritual reality; 6) personal love for God; 7) redeeming the time – just to name a few. John had a personal sense of destiny and he knew He was not the Messiah/Christ. At no point did John ever demonstrate a desire to seek personal approbation that would have placed him at odds with God's plan for Jesus. Had John sought personal approbation in any way, then his actions would have been tantamount to what occurred in eternity past between Lucifer and God (Isa 14:12-15; Ezek 28:12b-19).

"Purification" in verse 25 refers to water baptism. As we have seen in previous lessons, baptismal rites or purification rites were prevalent in many religions, including Judaism.

The "friend of the bridegroom," the "bridegroom," and "the bride" – John compares himself in verse 29 to "the friend of the bridegroom" and reminds his disciples that he was not the Christ (Messiah), but just one who was sent before Him (verse 28). The friend of the bridegroom acted as the agent of the bridegroom in preparing for the wedding and managing the wedding and the wedding feast to follow. John knew that Jesus was the Messiah, therefore he gladly took a subordinate role just as in a wedding, the bridegroom should be the person of prominence, not the agent of the bridegroom.

It is interesting how prominent a ministry John the Baptist had during his lifetime. This is a fact that is often overlooked. For instance, adherents to John the Baptist's preaching existed in the middle of the 1st Century A.D. as evidenced by Apollos of Alexandria who was ministering in Ephesus and who was evidently led to a belief in Jesus as the Messiah of Israel through Aquila and Priscilla.

Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ. (Acts 18:24-28)

When Paul arrived at Ephesus, he found twelve "disciples" who had not yet received the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:2, 7) and had not even heard of "whether there is a Holy Spirit" (Acts 19:3). When Paul asked them about the nature of their baptism, they replied that they had been baptized "into John's baptism" (Acts 19:3). Paul then led them to understand that Jesus was the person to Whom John's baptism of repentance was directed (Acts 19:4). The result was that they received the Holy Spirit with similar results to the events that occurred at Pentecost, i.e. they spoke in tongues (Acts 19:6). "It is likely that this halfway understanding persisted among John's converts."²

² Frank E. Gaebelin, gen. editor, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976-1992).

There are many references to the “bride” and “bridegroom” analogy in Scripture. While John the Baptist uses the same terminology in this passage, John’s emphasis is upon Jesus as the “bridegroom” and John as the “friend of the bridegroom.” The emphasis is not upon the identity of the “bride.” In other passages where the wedding party analogy is used, the “bride” can be identified as Israel or the Church depending upon the context.³

John’s Testimony Regarding Jesus: In verses 31-36, John the Baptist makes comments regarding Jesus that are very consistent with the Gospel writer’s theme announced in chapter 1 – Jesus as the Son of God pre-existed human history, is divine, and has divine authority.⁴ John the Baptist’s comments can be outlined as follows:

- ❑ Jesus comes from heaven, thus possessed higher authority than John who was of the earth (cf. Jn 1:1-4, 18, 30, 34, 3:13)
- ❑ The superiority of Jesus’ teaching relates to the fact that He came from heaven even though many reject His teaching (Jn 3:32-34 cf. Isa 53:1, 3)
- ❑ It was the love of the Father that motivated Him to endow His Son with such authority (Jn 3:35-36)

This is the only passage (Jn 3:36) in the Johannine writings (i.e. the Gospel and the epistles) in which John uses the word “wrath.” It is not a reference to a sudden outburst of anger. Rather, it is simply a reference to the fact that the unbeliever has not aligned with God’s righteousness by accepting the gift of His Son. Note that the emphasis in this passage is upon the volition of man, rather than an action of the sovereignty of God.

³ See the addendum to this lesson entitled “*An Analysis of the Bride and Bridegroom Motif In Scripture*” for a more extended discussion of this subject.

⁴ It is possible that John, the Gospel writer, is just reflecting upon what he had just written and knew to be consistent with John the Baptist’s life and work. If that is the case, John, the Gospel writer is not quoting John the Baptist directly. See Gaebelein, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*.