

HE MUST BECOME GREATER; I MUST BECOME LESS

John 3:22-36
Key Verse: 3:30

Lesson #8

"He must become greater; I must become less."

John the Baptist was the first witness to Jesus. He set a standard that few if any can match. He was a servant of the word of God; he put his own pride and ambition to death and proclaimed Jesus as one greater than he--one whose sandals he was not worthy to untie. He proclaimed Jesus' eternal being--"he comes after me but he has surpassed me because he was before me."(1:31) When he saw Jesus coming he announced to his disciples, "Look the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." John had baptized Jesus, he taught that Jesus was the one on whom the Holy Spirit came down and remained--the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. He proclaimed Jesus to be the Son of God. At least two of his disciples--Andrew and another disciple--heard his testimony and followed Jesus and found that he was the Messiah, the Christ for whom they had been waiting. Jesus began his ministry in Judea. Soon John would be imprisoned by Herod and would die a martyr's death. Now, for a brief time, Jesus' ministry and John's ministry were going on in the same place, at the same time. They seemed to be competing with each other, but this was actually not the case at all.

1. John's loyal disciples (22-26)

Both Jesus and John preached, "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." Both ministries incorporated baptism, although Jesus did not baptize--his disciples did. (4:2) The Pharisees had been carefully watching both Jesus and John. It seemed to John's disciples that Jesus' ministry was growing and John's seemed to be declining. This disturbed John's disciples. They loved John and were intensely loyal to him, but they did not listen to his teachings carefully. If they had, they would have realized that his whole purpose was to point people to Jesus.

John's disciples and a certain Jew got into an argument over ceremonial washing. Evidently, this was an argument about baptism, for the next sentence tells us that they came to John and said, "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." They were jealous for their teacher. But if they had remembered John's teaching, they would not have been jealous. Good disciples must be diligent to learn--not just humanly faithful. May we learn from God's word and seek to please him--not just enjoy good human fellowship as we live among God's people.

2. The bride belongs to the bridegroom (27-30)

John taught his disciples several important things about being a witness to Jesus. First, he said, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven." He accepted the sovereignty of God in his own life and mission. He acknowledged God's sovereignty in sending Jesus and in blessing his ministry. When we accept God's sovereignty we have no need to compare ourselves with others and no need to be jealous of anyone.

Second, John said, "I am not the Christ. I was sent ahead of him. John was the forerunner. In the prologue the writer says about him, "He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light." John was clear about his own mission. He did not lose the point. Sometimes we lose the point in witnessing to others. We find ourselves trying to make human friendships for our selves instead of making disciples for Jesus.

Third, the bride belongs to the bridegroom. Jesus is the bridegroom. The believers are his bride. The witness, John, is the friend of the bridegroom. He introduced them. But after the wedding, he is not so necessary. So, while the main actor, the bridegroom becomes greater, John, the friend, must become less significant. He joyfully accepts this role, for it means that his ministry is successful.

3. Whoever believes in the Son has life

There is a reason why John eagerly wants his disciples to go to Jesus. John loves his disciples. He wants the best for them. He wanted them to go to Jesus because only in Jesus can they find real life. Look at verse 31. "The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. Jesus comes from heaven. He is the Son of God. He is the one who testifies to what he has seen and heard from the Father. He is the one who speaks the words of God, the one to whom God has given the Spirit without limit. (Read verse 34.) The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. The Son speaks the truth and even though the world does not accept his words, they are truth. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. But whoever rejects--does not obey--the Son will not see life. God's wrath remains on him. (36) John wants his disciples not only to repent of sins. He wants them also to go to Jesus the Son and receive the eternal life which only Jesus can give.

John knows his limitations. He knows why he was sent. He accepts the mission God gave him and rejoices to do his best. He does not aspire to be Jesus.

He is more than satisfied to be John.

Lord, help me to lead those with whom I study to Jesus. Help me to be useful to you in your way, instead of stubbornly trying to follow my own way and being useful to no one. Grant that Jesus may increase and I may decrease.