

## **THE BRIDEGROOM HAS THE BRIDE**

John 3: 22-30 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

The great artist, Leonardo da Vinci, when he completed his famous painting, “The Last Supper,” took one of his friends to view it. His friend remarked, “The most striking part of this picture is the cup. The famous artist took his brush and with one stroke, he wiped out the cup. Then he said, “Nothing in my painting shall attract more attention than the face of my Master.” Da Vinci shared one special longing with John the Baptist. Both of them sought by their lives to attract people’s undivided attention to our Savior. John the Baptist’s constant message was, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” The message God has laid on my heart today before we take the Lord’s Supper is part of John the Baptist’s last testimony which was always and ever pointing to our Lord Jesus.

After Jesus’ night interview with Nicodemus, He departed from Jerusalem after the Passover. Jesus now, with His disciples, for a short time, went into the Judean countryside, and He remained there with them and John 3:22 tells us He was baptizing. Jesus had infuriated the temple authorities in Jerusalem by cleansing the temple. But Jesus had 3+ years of work on earth to do before dying on the cross for us all. Part of the Father’s plan now for His Son was for Jesus to depart into the rural districts of Judaea, near the Jordan River.

John, the disciple who leaned on Jesus’ bosom, admired John the Baptist. This Gospel writer is also called John the evangelist. John the disciple had more to say about this time in Jesus’ life than all three of the other Gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Why? It appears from the eye-witness accounts in John 1-3 that John the Evangelist and disciple was first a disciple of John the Baptist. The stated purpose of John the Gospel writer was to point others always to the Savior as he wrote in John 20:30,31. “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His Name.” Therefore, it is important for us all to note that this part of John’s Gospel is not recorded in Matthew, Mark, or Luke, but only in John. This narrative we have read today relates a problem that John the Baptist faced as his ministry as Jesus’ forerunner was coming to a close.

Today, before we come to the Table of the Lord, I want us all to examine carefully 3 segments of this historical account of John, Jesus’ disciple. These three segments of this account or story present first (1) an interesting, problematic situation that created a problem, (2) the presentation of the problem itself, and (3) God’s solution to this problem. The whole account is very beautiful, but if we fail to see our Savior more clearly as we examine our text, may God wipe away the distractions until we see only Jesus clearly in focus, with everything else as background. As we examine these three segments of this unique account, let’s strive to grasp a clearer focus on our Lord, as John the Baptist is pointing to Him. Let’s examine the situation creating the problem, then let’s focus on the problem itself, and finally, let’s find the solution through the words of John the Baptist for the problem.

## **LET'S EXAMINE THE SITUATION CREATING THE PROBLEM. (I.)**

Look with me at the situation or the plot creating the problem in John 3: 22-24. We read, "After this, (after Jesus' interview with Nicodemus) Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and He remained there with them and was baptizing. John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized (for John had not yet been put in prison)." The problem in short appears to be that some of the followers of John the Baptist and Jesus saw them as rivals or competitors. The very idea of this situation happened in a time not spoken about by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Jesus was baptizing we read in Aenon near Salim. John was also baptizing those who were coming to him not far away. Now the fact that Jesus was baptizing may surprise you, but John 4:1 helps us out to know that in fact, it was Jesus' disciples who were baptizing in Aenon near Salim, and not Jesus Himself. Listen to John 4:1-3. "Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus Himself did not baptize, but only His disciples, He left Judaea and departed again for Galilee."

Now the Word of God is very clear about one matter of baptism in John 3:23. Did you notice why the baptisms were going on in Aenon, near Salim. We read, "John (the Baptist) also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized." Now I strongly believe in immersion and that the mode Jesus' disciples used, and that John the Baptist used, was total immersion and not pouring or sprinkling. However, having established that their reason for being where they were was because there apparently were big waterholes in the Jordan where the River was deep and perfect for baptism. For those of you with visual minds or those of you who have traveled to Israel, Jesus was about 50 miles northeast of Jerusalem or 40 miles straight north of Jericho. So know for sure Jesus was not baptizing, but since His disciples under His authority were baptizing, that's why it was said He was baptizing. Such baptisms by both John the Baptist and Jesus' disciples were baptisms of repentance, preparatory baptisms preparing believer's hearts to receive Jesus, the Messiah. Baptism after Pentecost is different. That baptism like the baptism of Adrian Hale tonight was, and it still is, an outward sign of the cleansing and indwelling of believers by the Holy Spirit. These baptisms now by Jesus' disciples were preparatory baptisms by people repenting of sin and preparing their hearts to trust in Jesus the Messiah.

To clarify the situation more, verse 24 states that all this happened before John was thrown into prison. Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the Synoptic Gospels, have John the Baptist being thrown into prison after Jesus' temptation. We read in Matthew 4:12, right after Jesus' baptism, "Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, He withdrew into Galilee." In Mark 1:14-15, right after the temptation of Jesus, following His baptism by John the Baptist, we read, "Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the Gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel." So this shows us that Matthew, Mark, and Luke, take up the story of Jesus after the arrest of John the Baptist, which was probably somewhere near Aenon, near Salim

where John the Baptist was baptizing. Now in Luke 3:20, Luke tells us many details about John the Baptist's baptizing and just mentions Jesus' baptism along with John the Baptist's imprisonment caught in the middle of it all. Listen to Luke 3:18-22 closely as we read, "So with many other exhortations he (John the Baptist) preached good news to the people. (And be sure this preaching was at Aenon near Salim) but Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison. Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with You I am well pleased."

So we are learning about a situation that happened in a period of time that only John, the evangelist, wrote about. So, what was the situation that precipitated the problem at Aenon near Salim? The situation was that Jesus' disciples and John the Baptist, prior to his arrest by Herod's soldiers, were for a short time, carrying on a parallel ministry of baptizing repentant Israelites who were preparing for Messiah. These two parallel ministries are the precipitating situation that created the problem John the evangelist wrote about. Secondly, what was the problem?

**LET'S FOCUS ON THE PROBLEM ITSELF.** (II.) Look with me at John 3:25-26. We read, "Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, He is baptizing, and all are going to Him." These two parallel ministries resulted in a dispute between an admirer of Jesus, a Jew, and some of the followers of John the Baptist. The implication of verse 25 mentions that the subject appears to have been purification, and apparently, this Jewish follower of Jesus felt that Jesus' baptism was one with a more purifying effect. Coupled with this dispute was the fact that Jesus and His disciples who were baptizing, were drawing larger and larger crowds while John the Baptist's crowds were gradually dwindling. The problem thus finally came to John the Baptist in a bitter complaint by his disciples.

There are a number of interesting factors to consider in this complaint. (1) First, there was a spirit, it appears, of jealousy and anger in some of John the Baptist's disciples that they purposely avoided even mentioning the Name of Jesus. To them, Jesus was becoming their rabbi's rival. Thus, instead of saying Jesus, they said, "He who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, He is baptizing, and all are going to Him." (John 3: 26) (2) To make their point to John the Baptist, they were exaggerating by trying to make John the Baptist jealous as they were, by saying, "All are going to Him." What they were saying in effect was, "Pretty soon you'll be without one follower. These John the Baptist disciples were really upset. (3) Yet, these disciples seemed also to be pleased that John the Baptist had born testimony to Jesus, for they said, "this one to whom you bore witness," may contain a rebuke to John the Baptist as they seem to have been saying, "You brought this problem on yourself." (4) These disciples of John the

Baptist also seem to be implying that Jesus should be beholden to John the Baptist, and that by robbing John of his big crowds, Jesus was being ungrateful to John the Baptist for baptizing Him. In their words, is the main problem. “Is it right for Jesus to rob you of your ministry? How can Jesus who has received so much help from you, John, how can He compete now with you? This is the problem. It is still the problem among believers today—jealousy, and a desire to control, and win, and be in charge, and have the most. Thirdly, John the Baptist’s answer to his own disciples, is the heart of our message now before communion.

**LET’S FIND THE SOLUTION THROUGH THE WORDS OF JOHN THE BAPTIST FOR THIS PROBLEM.** The solution to this jealousy problem, this desire to be the biggest, this desire to control and prove even Jesus is wrong, the solution is found in John the Baptist’s reply. In John 3: 27-30 is the answer. Listen as I read it. “John answered, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before Him.’ The One who has the bride is the Bridegroom. The friend of the Bridegroom, who stands and hears Him, rejoices greatly at the Bridegroom's voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease.” There are 4 parts of John the Baptist’s answer.

First of all **(1) John the Baptist answered with a universal principle.** (v. 27) This universal principle is still true today, which is, “I or you cannot claim any new authority which has not been directly assigned to us.” John was saying that Jesus could not have His new authority unless it was from above. If anyone takes to themselves some authority which they do not possess from God, it will be taken from them and God’s judgment will be on them. Our position, beloved, our calling, our success in life—all of it is a gift from heaven. It cannot be effectively robbed or snatched from another. John the Baptist was saying that if Jesus is winning more followers that he was, it was not because Jesus was stealing from him, but because God was giving that success to Him.

Secondly, **(2) John the Baptist reminded his disciples of his past testimony.** (v.28) He said, “You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before Him.’ These disciples must have forgotten the words of their rabbi. Had they remembered, their jealousies might well have never arisen. John the Baptist was saying, “Don’t you remember when the delegation came to me from the Sanhedrin questioning me as to who I was? What I said then is still true. “I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before Him.”

Thirdly, **(3) John the Baptist used a popular figure of speech to describe his relationship to Jesus.** (v. 29) “The One who has the bride is the Bridegroom. The friend of the Bridegroom, who stands and hears Him, rejoices greatly at the Bridegroom's voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete.” This was for John’s disciples an illustration they could understand, an illustration from the Jewish marriage customs, known perfectly by them. The **shoshben** or friend of the bridegroom has as his duty to arrange the covenant of marriage. He acted for the

bridegroom during the betrothal and he made all the arrangements for the wedding day. It was a position of high honor, and it was given to the bridegroom's chief friend. On the wedding day, the friend of the bridegroom stood beside the bridegroom to serve him and the joy of the bridegroom was deeply shared by the friend of the bridegroom. After the wedding, and all the festivity which far exceeded what we have today, it was the important duty of the friend of the bride to guard the bridal chamber. No false lover was allowed in the bridal chamber; the friend of the bridegroom knew well the voice of the bridegroom. When he heard the voice of the bridegroom, he was glad and him and him alone did this friend allow into the bridal chamber. Then the friend of the bridegroom went away rejoicing for his task was completed. The bridegroom and the bride were now together. Thus John the Baptist was telling his disciples, "The bride belongs to the Bridegroom, not to the friend of the Bridegroom. The friend of the Bridegroom has finished his job which was to bring the bride and the Bridegroom together, and then to fade out of the picture. (In this case, to be put in prison by Herod.)"

Now the disciples of John the Baptist had to understand completely. Now they knew as we must know that John did us an incredible favor. He introduced us to the Bridegroom, Jesus, and we too are His bride. Now that John the Baptist heard the voice of Jesus, and he knew that people were crowding to Him to be His bride, people like you and me, John knew that his ministry was coming to a close. But don't be sorry for John the Baptist. This shoshben, this friend of the Bridegroom now knew his life work was not in vain. He was rejoicing greatly, and his cup of joy was full and running over. When John the Baptist heard that the exaggeration that "all the people were going to Jesus," he wasn't jealous. He just must have wished and hoped and prayed and cried that that exaggeration might come true. Far from bringing out envy and strife in John the Baptist's soul that might have been, these jealous disciples of his had unveiled one of the most-humble souls this world has ever known. His anticipated joy had finally been realized as people now were flocking to his Savior and Lord Jesus Christ.

Fourthly, **(4) John the Baptist concluded his answer to his disciples with one crowning statement that solved their problem and ours too.** We read it in John 3:30. "He must increase, but I must decrease." That's what I desire. Is that your desire? Note John said "must," not could or should or would or might or maybe, but "must." It is God's eternal plan for me and you to diminish while Jesus continues to grow in being followed. Why should crowds flock to John or to me or you? Why should crowd surround the forerunner when his task is accomplished? Of what value is the herald after the King has arrived? John was saying, "My task is presently going to be done, and it was as he was arrested and placed in prison. But John the Baptist knew Jesus' work of winning His bride was only just begun. John never said these words in envy. It was with great joy. Have you and I learned his lesson? It is not for us to attract people, but that is for Jesus Christ. It is not for us that we seek people's loyalty, that is for Jesus. As we look at this crowning testimony, I am taken back to the first time John the Baptist saw Jesus, and to what he said. "Behold the Lamb of God." For those jealous disciples, his first words were now his last ones. Quit looking to me. Behold the Lamb of God!" Amen.