

HE MUST INCREASE, I MUST DECREASE

Introduction

It is easy to criticise the church of Christ on earth. It is not perfect, so the world can still see something of itself reflected there. One of those faults is rivalry. But the world often judges too quickly, and perceives rivalry where it does not exist.

Some of John Baptist's followers did not understand this. They saw Jesus attracting more disciples than John and they complained. They thought John and Jesus were rivals.

This part of John chapter 3 is his answer to that. It has lessons for us.

God is in charge – we are not

John Baptist said, 'A person can receive nothing unless it is given to him from heaven' (verse 27).

Our life is in his hand. King Belshazzar discovered that when he saw the writing on the wall and heard God's verdict from Daniel. So did Herod, when he refused to give glory to God (Acts 12:21-23). This is the case for every aspect of our lives. 'All my days were written in your book' (Psalm 139). It is God who made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, (Acts 17:26).

Whatever position we hold is also in his power. Nebuchadnezzar discovered that when he lost his reason and his throne. That truth features throughout the Bible (e.g. Isaiah 40:23-25). Jesus said to Pilate, 'You could have no power at all against me unless it had been given you from above' (John 19:11).

Every spiritual blessing is a direct gift from God. It is from the Holy Spirit. That includes spiritual life – the new heart promised as part of Messiah's reign. It includes spiritual gifts – John Baptist would not have been a prophet unless God had appointed him.

He was therefore 'a man under authority'. There are two sides to that. John had no authority to say or do anything except what God told him to. The other side is that John's message had all the authority of God.

Whatever authority we have is delegated from God, whether as parents, pastors, or employers. In the church we have the gospel of God, and we have no right to change it.

All this is completely the opposite of the basic assumptions of secular society – that human rights are absolute, and personal ambition should not be hampered. The view presented here calls us to love God; and if we do that, we then have complete confidence in him.

Only Jesus has a right to the church's devotion

Some of John's friends felt he was losing followers to Jesus and in their loyalty to him they were displeased at that. But John knew Jesus was the only one with a right to anyone's ultimate loyalty and affection. John called himself 'the friend of the Bridegroom'.

There is only one Christ, and he should have the devotion of all. He is God, to whom we owe all things; God who is love itself, and infinite wisdom. He is the Mediator, who has become a member of the human race – we can relate to him easily. He has laid down his life in payment of our sins' penalty and calls to us to receive life and forgiveness. Who would not be devoted to him?

The Bible often uses marriage to illustrate the relationship between God and his people. Human history is the story of third parties coming between them, and the reconciliation and repentance that put the relationship right. John was not gathering followers for himself, but for Jesus. It was evidence of success that people left him for Jesus. Therefore, 'He must increase, but I must decrease'.

The culmination of history is 'the marriage supper of the Lamb' (Revelation 19:9). The church is being prepared, in numbers, in character, and in loving relationship.

The church must always be wary of anything that comes between Christ and his people. It may be an authoritarian attitude. It may be carelessness, leading to sin taking hold of his dear people. It may be false teaching, even false 'Christs'.

The task of the church and its ministry is to win people for Christ. Paul said, 'We are ambassadors for Christ' (2 Corinthians 5:20). His concern was to present Christ's Bride the church at the last day, ready for him. John was 'the friend of the Bridegroom'. It is an unspeakable privilege to be involved in the preparation of Christ's Bride for that great day.

Our devotion must be to Jesus Christ

John was the friend of Jesus. He was one of his people. He was one of his servants, involved in the greatest work of all. Jesus' success gave him more joy than anything else. The idea of rivalry was utterly foreign. John knew the time had come for him to take a back seat. And he knew the time was coming when he would receive Christ's reward.

Do we have the same view of things as John did?

Do we see Christ as admirable without comparison? And worthy of all our loyalty, love, trust and praise?

Do we look forward to the time when he will return?

Are we preparing ourselves for it?

And are we trying to bring others to him so they may share the great blessing?

'Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me to give everyone according to his work' (Revelation 22:12).