

John 3:22-36
Jeremiah 33
Psalm 45

“My Joy Is Complete When Jesus Has You”

April 19, 2020

Jeremiah 33 says that the day will come again when
“there shall be heard the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride.”

Throughout the prophets this was a phrase often used in the negative –
because when destruction and judgment came upon Israel,
there would be no weddings.

If there is a war, and all the men are killed, then Jerusalem will have no weddings.
If there is pestilence or famine – and no one is able to provide for a household –
then Jerusalem will have no weddings.

And particularly, when you are exiled from the land –
and you are banished from the city –
then Jerusalem will have no weddings!

But while the city is still besieged by the Babylonians – the LORD says to Jeremiah
that he will restore the fortunes of Judah –
he will bring joy and peace in the end!

That’s why I rejoiced yesterday to officiate at the wedding of Matthew and Naomi!
Even in the midst of a deadly pestilence,
we still heard the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride!

Our Psalm of response – Psalm 45 – is also a wedding song –
a wedding song from the royal wedding –
the wedding song that anticipates the great Wedding Supper of the Lamb!

Sing Psalm 45
Read John 3:22-36

When was the last time you went to a wedding and said,
"Wow, wasn't that a great best man?!"

The best man needs to understand what he's there for!
He is there to give honor to the groom.
He is there to make sure that everything is ready,
and that the groom has everything he needs.

But while it is a great honor to be the "best man",
if you do your job right,
nobody *ever* confuses you with the groom!

Think back to all the weddings you've been to.
Besides your own wedding and those of your family,
can you remember who the best man was?
Hey, the best man is just some guy in a rented tux who gets forgotten.

John knows this.
John knows that he must step aside.
His purpose is complete,
he has heard the bridegroom's voice,
and his joy is fulfilled because the groom has his bride!

Now it is time for him to fade into the background.

And so he bears witness one last time:
John is the earthly man--and he can only speak of earthly things.
He could only baptize with water.
Jesus Christ--the Messiah--is the heavenly man.
And he speaks of heavenly things.

John and all the prophets spoke of the earthly temple and the earthly sacrifices
They could only catch faint glimpses of the heavenly realities.
But JESUS--Jesus speaks of the heavenly temple and the final sacrifice!
He reveals the very words of God because he IS the WORD of God!!
He is the one who comes from above--the man from heaven.

Let me give you a brief overview of where we are.
John 2:13-4:54 is all one continuous narrative.

John 1:1-18 gives us the introduction to John's gospel
John 1:19-2:12 sets forth the first week of the new creation,
culminating with the first sign that Jesus performs,
turning water into wine,
in the anticipation of the wedding supper of the lamb of God.

Now John 2:13-4:54 sets us up for Jesus' second sign (4:54).

As we have seen, John sets up his whole gospel around a number of feasts.
In 2:13 we hear that Jesus cleanses the temple at the time of the Passover.
In 4:45 we hear that the Galileans welcomed Jesus
because of what he had done at the feast.
And Jesus' second sign is also performed in Cana (4:46),
all of which ties together chapters 2-4

The first half of John's gospel is oriented around seven signs,
each of which happens in connection with a feast.

The narrative of chapters 2-4 is moving us from the first sign (turning water to wine) to the second (the healing of the official's son).

In this narrative, John is showing that Jesus is the man from heaven, the one who is the heavenly temple (2:13-22), the one who brings the heavenly birth (3:1-21), the one who establishes the heavenly worship (4:1-45).

1. Who Do You Belong To? Baptism and Purification (v22-25)

²² After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. ²³ John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized ²⁴ (for John had not yet been put in prison).

²⁵ Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification.

In our text, John the Baptist is continuing his ministry.

After baptizing Jesus, he continues to baptize and make disciples.

Some of these disciples get into a discussion with a Jew about purification.

That is not surprising.

Baptism is a rite of purification-of cleansing-

and so it is understandable why a controversy might erupt.

After all, Jesus appears to be encroaching on John's turf.

Isn't John's baptism sufficient?

Why is Jesus "making and baptizing more disciples than John"? (4:1)

Well, think back a couple weeks –

Do you remember Jesus' first sign.

He turned water into wine.

But not just any old water-he had them fill six stone jars used for purification.

Jesus takes the old water of purification and transforms it into the wine of rejoicing.

When John's disciples come to him and complain about Jesus,

John reminds them of the wedding at Cana.

They expect that John will be upset that Jesus is "stealing" his disciples!

But John isn't troubled at all!

John understands his role.

He is the best man--but he is not the bridegroom.

John baptizes with water – but Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit.

We heard Jesus say last time that we must be born of water and the Spirit.
The outward sign – the earthly sign – of water is important,
but it is important because it points to the heavenly reality of the Holy Spirit.

I suppose one benefit of this time that we are apart from each other
is that we are being reminded of how the earthly and the heavenly
are so closely connected!

This “virtual” communication is still *earthly*.
We may be doing it in a disembodied way.
You do not see my face – you do not hear my voice –
you only see and hear a digital representation of me.

And worst of all – you are stuck with merely a digital representation of *me*.

The church is more than a digital representation of her pastor!
The church is the bride of Christ!
the people of God!

As a pastor I am called to be a best man.
I am called to be “the friend of the bridegroom”
Like John, I don’t want you for myself –
I want you to be with Jesus!

We see this clearly in how John responds to his disciples in verses 26-30:

2. “He Must Increase and I Must Decrease”: the Bridegroom and the Best Man (v26-30)

²⁶ *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.”* ²⁷ *John answered, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’ 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. ³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease.”*^[i]

Elsewhere, in Matthew 11:11, Jesus says that John is the greatest among those born of women.
But the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

John was the last of the Old Testament prophets.
And he was the greatest – not because of his accomplishments,
but because of his calling.
He was called to be the one who not only pointed to the Messiah,
but to be the best man for the Messiah,
to be the one who prepared the way for the Messiah to receive his bride.

If you have ever had the honor of being a best man,
then you have tasted of the joy that John experienced.
As the best man, it is your task to be a servant.
In the days and hours leading up to the wedding,
you are the one who ensures that the groom has everything he needs.

But once the bridegroom stands there with his bride at his side,
your job is finished.
He must increase, and you must decrease.

Notice how John begins:

"A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven." (3:27)

All that we have comes from God.
God has called you to a certain place-a certain task.

John did not envy Jesus.
He had been given the task of preparing the way for the Messiah.
Therefore he rejoiced in accomplishing that task.

Too often we wish that God had given us a different task.
We complain that we are not suited to what God has called us to do.
John has no such complaint.
His ministry is fading-Jesus is making more disciples than he is.

But he is not concerned for himself and his "career."
He knows that
"A person cannot receive even one thing
unless it is given him from heaven."
And just as the best man rejoices at the coming of the bridegroom,
so also John rejoices at the coming of Jesus.

After all, the whole point of John's ministry was nothing other than Jesus.
Yes, he was called to baptize-but why?
To prepare the way for Jesus.
Yes, he rebuked the Pharisees and called people to repentance-but why?
To point the way to Jesus.

He must increase, and I must decrease.

Everything in John's ministry was oriented to Christ
and what the Messiah would do.

If that was the calling of the greatest of the Old Testament prophets,
how much more is that the calling of those who are "in Christ"?

The most dangerous temptation for a pastor is to start thinking that this is *my* congregation.

You are not mine.

You belong to Jesus – and *he* is your bridegroom.

I am to be “the friend of the bridegroom” –
the one who brings the bride to her husband.

There is a great line in C. S. Lewis’s *That Hideous Strength*,
where a young woman who is in the process of coming to faith in Christ
says to Ransom that she is not yet sure that she believes in God,
but she believes in Ransom.

And Ransom replies,

“This is the courtesy of Deep Heaven: that when you mean well,
He always takes you to have meant better than you knew.
It will not be enough for always.
He is very jealous.
He will have you for no one but Himself in the end.
But for tonight, it is enough.”

As a pastor, I have seen this happen many times.
Sometimes all a person can do is believe in me.
That will not work in the long run!
I am *not* Jesus.
But sometimes that is where Jesus starts.

Every parent starts off that way.
Our children believe in us.
Our calling is to lead our children to Jesus.

Because all of us are – by nature – “earthly.”
And this is the heart of John’s point in verses 31-36.

3. “He Gives the Spirit without Measure”: the Heavenly and the Earthly (v31-36)

³¹ *He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all.* ³² *He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony.* ³³ *Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true.* ³⁴ *For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.* ³⁵ *The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand.* ³⁶ *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.*

These verses may be part of John the Baptist's speech,
or they may be the apostle John's commentary on John the Baptist's speech.

It really makes no difference.

The point at the heart of John's message in John 2-4
about the heavenly ministry of Christ.

Jesus is not only the one who is the heavenly temple (2:13-22),
he is not only the one who brings the heavenly birth (3:1-21),
he is not only the one who establishes the heavenly worship (4:1-45),
but he is all these things because he is the one who comes from heaven.

Jesus told Nicodemus that we must be born again – born from above (3:3).

How can we be born again from above?

Jesus told Nicodemus that he is the one who descended from heaven (3:13).

It is only if Jesus comes from above that we can be born from above.

It is only if God becomes man that man can have eternal life.

In verse 31 we are told that Jesus comes “from above.”
That’s the same word found in John 3:3 –
when Jesus said we must be born “again” (or born “from above”).

Nicodemus rightly understood the word to mean "again,"
but he only understood half of the point.

You must not only be born again,
but that second birth must be a birth "from above."

God must give you a “heavenly understanding.”

Jesus is the one who comes from above.

John contrasts Jesus and John the Baptist by saying,
"He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way.
He who comes from heaven is above all."

John the Baptist-the greatest of the OT prophets-is described as an earthly man.

All the law and the prophets speak from the earth.
Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah, Isaiah, and John the Baptist are all earthly.
They are from the earth.
They are of the earth.
They speak with earthly voices.

Jesus is above all, because he comes from heaven.

He speaks with a heavenly voice, because he alone of all the human race,
speaks of heavenly things as one who has seen and heard them himself.

Moses spoke of heavenly things with an earthly voice.
The earthly tabernacle was but a picture of the heavenly temple.
The earthly sacrifices prefigured the heavenly sacrifice.

I sometimes wonder what you are hearing...
When I use the language of "earthly" and "heavenly,"
what do you hear?

This is not a contrast between the "real" and the "ideal."
The heavenly realm is not an abstract idea, but a concrete historical reality.
“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”

And in Jesus Christ that heavenly realm has burst into the earthly.

Also, the "earthly" is not evil.
We saw a few weeks ago that "flesh" is not evil.

Flesh is certainly weak.
It is impotent when it comes to the coming of the kingdom.

As 1:12-13 says (read)
“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name,
he gave the right to become children of God,
who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh
nor of the will of man, but of God.

And yet the very next verse says:
And the Word became flesh.

The heavenly became the earthly – and in joining himself to this earthly flesh,
he has revealed his glory.

But it is clear that John does not consider the "earthly" to be evil,
because he considers John the Baptist to be "earthly"!
For that matter, Jesus tells Nicodemus
that his teaching that we must be born again from above,
is "earthly" (read 3:12).

Earthly things have to do with that which pertains to the earth.
And even salvation happens on earth.
The entire revelation of the OT was earthly.
But Jesus has come to reveal the heavenly source of those earthly things.
Jesus has come to be the place where earth and heaven meet.

But earthly people cannot receive heavenly things.

John says (verse 32) that Jesus bears witness to what he has seen and heard,
yet no one receives his testimony.
The problem with the earthly is that it is weak and impotent.
Earthly eyes cannot see heavenly things.
Earthly ears cannot comprehend what Jesus is saying.
Or as John put it earlier,
"the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not understood it."

Apart from the grace of God, no one understands the heavenly things that Jesus says.
But, "whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true."
How do you receive the testimony of Jesus?
"For he whom God has sent utters the words of God,
for he gives the Spirit without measure."

Jesus has received the fullness of the Holy Spirit.
And Jesus now gives the Spirit to his disciples without measure.

This is a remarkable statement.
In the OT the Holy Spirit was only given to the leaders of Israel.
But now the Spirit will come upon the whole people of God.
The Holy Spirit will open the eyes of the blind,
and allow earthly people to behold the glory of the Son of God,
the man from heaven.

"The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand.
Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life;
whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life,
but the wrath of God remains on him." (3:36)
John concludes with a clear statement
of the unequal parallelism between salvation and damnation.

John had said earlier in verse 18,
"Whoever believes in him is not condemned,
but whoever does not believe is condemned already,
because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God."

Salvation is an act of God in a way that damnation is not.
God has not done anything to bring about the condemnation of the wicked.
We sinned against him.
We deserve his judgment –
and he *did* nothing to produce that situation.
But God has done *everything* to bring about the salvation of his people.
He sent his Son into the world, that through his death and resurrection,
we might believe in him and have eternal life.

John looks at the human race and sees that all deserve wrath and condemnation.
Now that God has accomplished the salvation of the human race,
through the work of Jesus Christ,
anyone who does not believe in Jesus is condemned already;
anyone who does not obey the Son shall not see life,
but the wrath of God remains on him.
God's wrath was upon you before Jesus came,
if you refuse to believe in Jesus,
then that wrath remains on you.

Our Confession expresses this by saying:
"By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory,
some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life;
and others foreordained to everlasting death." (CF 3.3)
Predestination to life and foreordination to death are parallel,
but they are not equal.

Predestination to life came at the price of the life of the eternal Son of God;
foreordination to death is simply a legal pronouncement.

That's why I call it an "unequal parallelism."

But even so, this message of judgment isn't very popular these days.
People don't like to hear that God's wrath is upon those who do not believe in Jesus.
But as we seek to minister the gospel of Christ to this community,
we must never forget this.
Yes, we must be charitable in our judgments of others.

If a person says they believe in Jesus,
we should treat them as one who believes in Jesus!
(Which means that we should encourage them in their faithfulness to Christ,
and even rebuke them if they are not bearing fruit)

As we think about what life will look like in the coming weeks and months –
as we walk and live in the midst of a deadly pestilence –
there will be those who want to detach the earthly from the heavenly:

“Stop being so heavenly minded – what matters is life here and now!!”

And yes, we can work together with all those who want to build a healthy community.
And while we should be gracious in our dealings with such people,
we should be equally insistent that the gospel of Jesus Christ
demands the response of faith and obedience.

Notice how John puts it:

"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life;
whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life."

Faith is contrasted with disobedience.

John cannot imagine faith without obedience.

And the primary act of obedience to Christ
is to obey his first and most basic command:
to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Faith without obedience is not really faith.
If you believe in the Son of God,
then you have been transferred from this earthly kingdom
to the heavenly kingdom.
You are no longer who you once were.
You have left the darkness and have come into the light.

But faith must not be confused with obedience.
Those who seek to earn favor with God have missed the point of evangelical obedience.
As John has said earlier,
"A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven."
Eternal life is a gift from God,
received solely by faith.
Without faith it is impossible to please God,
but with faith, God is already pleased.

The Word has become flesh.
The glory of heaven has been revealed in the midst of our earthly lives.
And now the Spirit-filled Christ has given of his Spirit to us.

Do you believe this?