

4. I must decrease

JOHN 1:19-28 TO FULFIL ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS

John the gospel writer was a disciple of John the Baptist before he became a disciple of Jesus (**Jn 21:20-24**). His gospel centres on John the Baptist's role as a forerunner or "witness" to Christ (**Jn 1:6-8**). The Pharisees sent an official delegation of priests and Levites to question John as to who he was (**Jn 1:19-28**).

John's response was to firstly tell them who he was not. He was asked if he was Elijah, as many expected Elijah to come (because of **Mal 4:4-6**). They asked him as to why he was baptising. His response includes a statement that gets to the very heart of why he came. That is to proclaim the Messiah: "Among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." (**Jn 1:27**)

The next day John sees Jesus and says, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (**1:29**) A sudden and direct statement. It is likely that Jesus had already been baptised by John, but was not known to the delegation who had travelled from Jerusalem after this. This is consistent with John's words in **1:26-27** where John simply makes the point that the Pharisees did not know him. So John's gospel begins its record of John the Baptist after Jesus' baptism, but John the Baptist recalls this event as he presents the baptised Jesus to the people. John was recognized as a prophet (**Mt 21:25-26**). John's testimony of Jesus was therefore an early foundation for people responding to Jesus.

In **John 1** and **2** there appears to be 7 specific days of preaching. It has been suggested that the wedding on the seventh day is a reminder of the marriage of the lamb ushering in the kingdom age on the seventh millennium. When it comes to baptising Jesus, John is reluctant. **John 1:33** reveals that Jesus being Messiah was unknown to John until the moment of his baptism:

Matt 3:14-15 John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.

John 1:33-34 I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptise with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptises with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.

No matter if John knew Jesus beforehand or not, by the time such a confession was made, it would be clear to John the incredibly beautiful Godly character of Jesus. Jesus eased John's concerns, saying "thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." (**Mt 3:15**) This is very important. Though Son of God, he too was man:

Hebrews 2:14 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil. **4:15** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Romans 6:5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

John responds by baptising Jesus. God responds with a public demonstration of His approval as the Holy Spirit descends on him.

JOHN 1:29-42 THE LAMB OF GOD

God's voice is heard, surely with great emotion: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." (**Mk 1:11**, cp. **Isa 42:1**) John's reference to the "lamb of God" in **John 1:29** takes us back to the law of Moses. The offerings under the law were not adequate to take away our sins (**Heb 10:1-4**). Jesus fulfilled and surpassed the law. In **Exodus 12** the Passover lamb resulted in blood painted on the door posts to save their firstborn. In **Genesis 22** Abraham prepares to offer his son Isaac, a chapter we should read with **Psalms 22**, a Psalm cited at Christ's crucifixion (**Mt 27:39-43; Mk 15:29; Jn 19:23-24; Heb 2:12**). We see in the life of Abraham a man who was willing to give his "only begotten son" thus entering into the very feelings of God Himself. John's last mission was to turn attention away from himself to the Messiah. **John 3:23-36** reveals John's mindset when he knew his purpose was complete. He entirely emptied himself of selfish ambition.

JOHN 3:23-36 THE FRIEND OF THE BRIDEGROOM REJOICES

John's preaching in the wilderness heightened expectations of the coming of Messiah. Daniel's 70 weeks prophecy would have been on their minds (**Dan 9:21-27**). Jesus returned from his 40 days in the wilderness and came back to John (**Jn 1:35-36**). Following John's words, the disciples John and Andrew now leave and follow Christ. This is exactly what John wanted (**Jn 1:15-18**). **Jn 3:23-30** then describes events where John's disciples were struggling with the fact that others were baptising in the name of Christ and that John's work was diminishing. John replies:

John 3:29-30 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.

John's response is one of humility, a fundamental quality (**Col 3:8-17**). John says he is the "best man". The fact he rejoices greatly is highly significant. It is based on a beautiful Old Testament principle of the marriage of Christ to his bride. **Psalms 45** is the marriage Psalm (cited in **Heb 1:8-9**). The title of **Psalms 45** is *Shoshannim* (or "lilies" ESV) a unique word normally translated "lilies" and from a root word meaning to be *bright, cheerful, to greatly rejoice*.

The only *lilies* in the Psalms are in the titles of **Psalms 45** and **69**. Of the other 13 times *lilies* are found in the OT, **12** relate to Solomon - 4 times in his temple (**1 Kgs 7:19,22,26; 2 Chr 4:5**) and 8 times in **Song of Songs (2:1,2,16; 4:5; 5:13; 6:2,3;7:2)**. Solomon's temple (as with the tabernacle before it) pointed forward to Christ, his bride and the garden of Eden restored. **Song of Songs** similarly tells of Christ's bride (the ecclesia) as the *paradise of God*, the perfect embodiment of the fully grown *incorruptible Word* (**1 Pet 1:23**).

The final occurrence of the *lily* is in **Hosea 14:5**. The context is Israel's Second Exodus (**2:14-15; 3:5; 14:4,7**), with the *still small voice* seeing Yahweh reunited with His bride, the nation of Israel. No wonder Jesus uses *lilies* (in **Mt 6:28; Lk 12:27-32**) to teach of God's overshadowing care for us, saying it is God's good pleasure to give us the Kingdom! If God rejoices to give us the Kingdom, how much more must we rejoice by bringing others to Christ!



Many Scriptures speak of joy and rejoicing in the Kingdom (e.g. **Psa 19:5; 35:9; 40:16; 68:3; Isa 35:1; 64:5,18,19; 66:10,14**). Also of believers rejoicing greatly in God's Word revealing His Son (**Psa 119:14,162**). **Psalm 45:14-15** shows bridesmaids rejoicing greatly at Christ's marriage. **Song of Songs** tells of the rejoicing of bridesmaids and groomsmen at the marriage of the beloved to his bride. Here is the secret to the theme *More of Christ, less of me*. If we really appreciate, love and rejoice in the exquisite beauty of Christ and the coming glories of the Kingdom, we will very happily and joyfully relinquish personal ambition and present worldly gain. A deep appreciation of Christ as the heavenly bridegroom led John to exclaim, "He must increase, but I must decrease." Surely John's mind must have also been in Scriptures such as these:

Isaiah 61:10-11 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations. **62:5** For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you. (ESV)

The bride of Christ is one of the most central themes of the Bible, starting in **Genesis 1-3** and concluding in **Rev 21-22**. Without it, the concept of marriage would not exist. It forms a vital part of the fabric of God's plan and purpose with believers. Some key verses are **Gen 2:21-24; Song 4:7-15; 5:1; Mt 22:2; 25:1-13; 2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:22-33; Rev 19:7; 21:2,10; 22:17**. As the second Adam, Christ gave his life for his bride, beginning with his side being pierced (**Jn 19:34**). This should elicit in us an emotional response to his love.

JOHN 3:27-36 I MUST DECREASE – JOHN'S IMPRISONMENT

John's words to his disciples in **Jn 3:27-36** are his last words before he is imprisoned. Herod regarded John as a just man but was not willing to change his life (**Mk 6:20**). **Mark 6:14-29** tells the dreadful story of John's death (as does **Mt 14:3-12**). Persecution can purify character in faithful believers (**Mt 5:11-12; Rom 5:3; 2 Cor 4:17; 2 Cor 7:10; 2 Tim 3:12; Jas 1:2-3**). Herodias was the Jezebel of John's day. Herod's foolishness is a powerful lesson for us to reject the party culture of our world (**Isa 5:11-16,22-23**). Herod, like Ahab, was man who knew the truth, but who refused to change his life to conform to God's ways (cp. **1 Kgs 21:25-29**). What a contrast to the faithful prophet John who stayed faithful unto the end! (**Mt 16:25**)

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