

John the Baptist – Best Man or Groom

By Rev. David Johnson

Two men, friends their whole lives, encounter the same woman. Independent of the other, they each begin to build relationships with the young lady. They both invest time, energy, and resources into the pursuit of the woman.

But this is a fickle woman; a lady who hasn't always shown wisdom or decorum in the relationships she pursues. She is drawn to the rebels – those content to live lifestyles far from the restraints of acceptable society. But yet, down deep within her heart, she knows that true happiness can only be found in the arms of a loving, faithful husband.

In the end, only one can have her hand; only one can capture her complete attention. But which will she choose? Will the lady be satisfied with “polite affections” ...or be tempted away to the mystery and allure of the rebel?

A similar thing happened as part of the plot in Jane Austen's story *Sense and Sensibility*. We recently watched the 1995 movie based on this story, and I was struck (as I always am), with how someone can be tempted towards impropriety and indiscretion, when there is a wholesome and sensible option right before them. But understanding the condition of the human heart goes a long way in answering those questions.

It also helps to understand that this is often the description of Israel through much of the Old Testament. The people of Israel were loved by a heavenly Father who would do anything – and give anything for them. But she seems “hell-bent” on pursuing the rebels, the ones who continue to show a propensity for independence and disregard for heavenly decorum. In fact, the book (and prophet) Hosea, is specifically written to confront Israel's adulterous motivations, while describing God's unending love in the face of Israel's betrayal.

Repeatedly, God speaks through his prophets about the pain and insult of Israel's betrayal as they would pursue the false gods of its neighbors. He would punish them, but then turn from His anger and reach out in mercy once again. This would happen over and over again as Israel continued to show its lack of respect and faithfulness to God. However, as many times as this occurred, it never seemed God ever ran out of love for them. Not that there weren't consequences for Israel, mind you. But it just never seemed to change the love God felt for Israel, nor change His plan of redemption in the incarnation of His Son Jesus Christ.

We see this heart brought into a New Testament conversation happening between John's disciples and another Jew, who was apparently a follower of Jesus.

John 3:22 After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing. **23** John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and {people} were coming and were being baptized--

Jesus and His disciples came into a region where John was already baptizing, along the Jordan, and South of the Sea of Galilee. He wasn't trying to set up a competition or anything antagonistic. It was due to the simple fact that there was a lot of water in that area.

While there, some of Jesus' followers began getting into it with John's disciples. It seemed they were having a dispute about purification, or baptism. This encounter raised a competitive attitude in some of John's followers.

John 3:26 And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him."

Now, from our western perspectives, we understand the problem all too well. Competition! And the answer? Begin a well-measured smear campaign, or beef up our on-air presence and plan a general media blitz? Nope, John would have none of it.

You see, John had the edge. He came onto the scene first and had already established a reputation as a bold speaker with a solid following. He could have fought for his share of the lime-light. He had every “right” to fight for his “bride.” But instead, we see one of the most humbling, and challenging passages in Scripture.

John 3:27 John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven. **28** "You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent ahead of Him.' **29** "He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made full. **30** "He must increase, but I must decrease.

John knew better. This was the time for him to fulfill all of the prophecies that had preceded his birth. In fact, the answer he gave his followers at this moment would either negate or validate his entire ministry. This situation would prove whether he was truly an ally of Christ or His enemy. Just as the apostle John would write later in 1 John 1, so also now John the Baptist insisted that the promotion of Christ brought him more joy than the promotion of self.

John 3:29 "He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made full.

The amazing truth, underlying all of this, is that the “bride” being contested is not worthy of the love of either “groom.”

Is 29:13 ¶ Then the Lord said, "Because this people draw near with their words And honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned {by rote,}

**Matt 15:8 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS,
BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME.**

That is the message of this wonderful Christmas season. Our heavenly Father has identified the only acceptable Groom for this wayward woman. It is His only Son Jesus; the only one who could care for this lady with the kind of unselfish, self-sacrificial love it would take to win and keep her. And it is at this time; a time when we are distracted chasing after other “baals” like materialism and entertainment, that He comes in the deepest humility. Yes, John recognizes the futility and senselessness of pursuing what has always been Emmanuel’s Bride.

John 3:31-36 "He who comes from above is above all, he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. 32 "What He has seen and heard, of that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. 33 "He who has received His testimony has set his seal to {this,} that God is true. 34 "For He whom God has sent speaks 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 "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

Those are the words of a worthy best-man, who knows better than to seek the affections of the Bride-to-be.