

The Bridegroom – *John 3:22-36*

Introduction – In his book, *“The Pleasures of God”* and in the chapter titled, *“The Pleasure of God in His Son,”* John Piper writes, *“Imagine being able to enjoy what is most enjoyable with unbounded energy and passion forever.”* God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son (3:16). God also so loved His Son that He gave Him all things (3:35). John the Baptist joins in the Father’s delight over the Son as he watches Jesus’ mission flourish (3:29). In his mind, he is the friend of the bridegroom, rejoicing to see the perfected bride presented to her Groom, and cries out, *“this joy of mine is fulfilled.”* This love the Father has for the world, for the Son, and His delight in His Son, is all something that we are brought into as we come to abide in Christ and He in us (John 17:26).

Disputes about Purification (vv22-28) – For the final time in this Gospel, John the Baptist testifies concerning Jesus (1:7, 15, 19, 29, 36). Sometime after the event with Nicodemus, Jesus and His disciples went out into the Judean countryside where Jesus remained with them (v22). Jesus was baptizing there (his disciples were actually doing the baptizing, see 4:2) while John the Baptist was baptizing in an area called Aenon. Many of John’s disciples were leaving him and going to Jesus which led to this dispute (vv25-26).

The Pharisees, priests, and Levites, were already suspicious of John and his baptizing (1:19, 24-25), but with Jesus baptizing, it appeared more and more that Judaism was being threatened. In 2:1-12, the water-purification rites were being surpassed by the new wine of Jesus. The temple was to be surpassed by the Messiah who would be the new mediator (2:13-22). The new birth by the Spirit would set aside all the rites to salvation established by the Pharisees (3:1-21). And now, Jesus’ baptism was surpassing John’s, *“...behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him”* (v26). John answers that this was exactly the mission he was sent to accomplish (vv27-28).

The Friend of the Bridegroom (v29) – In Jewish weddings, it was the friend of the bridegroom (known as the “shoshbin”) who protected the bride and brought her to the groom’s home for the wedding ceremony. The groom was the destination and the best man’s duty was fulfilled when the wedding took place with much rejoicing. John likens himself and his ministry to that of the shoshbin and rejoices that his followers are being brought to Jesus. John first rejoiced while he was still in his mother’s womb (Luke 1:44). Now, this joy has been fulfilled.

The Bridegroom – John is not picking that illustration out of thin air. The scriptures are filled with the picture of the relationship between God and His covenant people as a husband-wife relationship. *“For your Maker is your Husband”* (Isaiah 54:5, also Ezek 16:8). Israel’s idolatry is often pictured as covenantal adultery (Jer 3:6-8) and Hosea speaks of a new marriage, the taking back of an adulterous wife (Hos 2:1-23). Remember, we have just been with Jesus at a wedding (John 2:1-12). The groom is responsible for the wine and it turns out Jesus is actually the one supplying the best wine. Well, in Isaiah 24:5-9, rebellious Judah is out of wine and there is no rejoicing. But when God returns to them, the best wine appears in celebration (Isaiah 25:6). Amos 9:11-15, quoted in Acts 15:16-18, describes the new tabernacle of David raised up, and the wine flows again in celebration. And as we have seen, the bride is the New Jerusalem, the church, who is brought to the Bridegroom (Rev 21:2-3).

There is one other subtle point being made here. Applying these Old Testament images to Christ, Jesus is being declared to be Yahweh, the God of Israel, Israel’s Husband and God our Maker (Isaiah 54:5). Of course, this is why John testifies, *“He must increase, but I must decrease”* (v30).

The Father’s Love for His Son (vv31-36) – This is John the Evangelist’s commentary on the testimony of John the Baptist. Because Jesus has come from heaven, His heavenly testimony is above all (v31). No one is able to receive His testimony on their own (v32, 3:11). But when the Spirit works through Jesus and His testimony is received, this certifies that God is true (vv33-34). The Father loves the Son (v35) and this will be unpacked throughout the gospel. This love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father is eternal life and the Person and life-giving work of the Spirit Himself.

The Father is well pleased with the Son (Matt 3:16-17, 17:5). The Father gives glory to the Son because He loved Him before the foundation of the world (John 17:24). The Father loves the Son because He lays down His life to take it up again (John 10:17). *“The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand”* (3:35, Psalm 2:7-8).

Eternal Life: The Enjoyment of God with Unbounded Energy and Passion Forever (v36) – Consider the last half of the verse first: “*and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.*” This is parallel to the second half of 3:18. Failure to trust in Jesus Christ is as much disobedience as it is unbelief (Rom 1:18-21).

Now the first half: “*He who believes in the Son has everlasting life.*” Hear the Word, believe it, and you receive that perfect love, which is eternal life in the Spirit. Do not trivialize eternal life. It is so much more than simply living forever. It is life that is full, overflowing, wine on the lees, eternal intimacy and bliss. “*Imagine being able to enjoy what is most enjoyable with unbounded energy and passion forever.*” That is what the Father is eternally enjoying with His Son. And that is what He has invited us in to enjoy with Him.

Dave Hatcher – November 21, 2021