

**Series Title: “John’s Gospel of Jesus: God in Flesh”**

**Today’s Title:**

***“He Must Increase, But I Must Decrease”***

Scripture Reading: John 3:22-30

Text: John 3:30

**Introduction:** (Illustrations from Knight, p.173)

After America had won its freedom from England under the brave leadership of George Washington, the Speaker of the House of Burgesses extolled Washington for his courage and sacrifice. Washington, at the conclusion of the speaker’s eulogy stood up to make some response. He was overcome with confusion and modesty. His face flushed a deep red and he could not say a word. Instead of being proud, he was humbled by the gracious words of the Speaker. The Speaker then said, “Sit down, General Washington! Your modesty and humility are equal to your valor, and that surpasses the power of language I possess.”

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- Andrew Murray

*“Just as water seeks to fill the lowest places, so God fills you with His glory and power when He finds you empty & abased.”*

**Premise: *God’s Best Road is our Greatest Fulfillment***

**Outline:**

**I. Dealing with the Sin of Competition**

**II. Delighting in the Spirit of Custodianship**

**III. Dancing in the Sweetness of Companionship**

**I. DEALING WITH THE SIN OF COMPETITION**

vv.22-26

**A. When comparisons are made, envy can enter in**

Note: John's disciples were content until someone

else evaluated "successful" ministry

1. Envy begins to develop when the work of John and of Jesus is placed above the person of Jesus Himself
2. Envy continues to build when the struggle for personal prominence eclipses our individual ministry
3. Envy is magnified through argumentation over specific doctrines of personal preference

c/w I Timothy 6:3-5

c/w Galatians 5:16-26

**B. When the purpose is the same, there is no battle**

(Illustrations from Spurgeon, 2,200 Quotations, #1472 and #1181)

*The church of Christ is always quarreling, but did you ever heart that the devil and his confederates quarrel? They are so united that if at any special moment the great prince of hell wishes to concentrate all the masses of his army at one particu-lar point, it is done to the tick of the clock, and the temptation comes with ifullest force just when he sees it to be the most likely that he will prevail. If we had such unanimity as that in the church of God, it we all moved at the guidance of the finger of Christ, if all the church could move in one great mass to the attack of a certain evil, how much more easily might we pre-vail! But alas, the powers of hell far exceed us in unanimity.*

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*Your main and principal motive as a Christian should always be to live for Christ. To live for glory? Yes, but for his glory. To live for comfort? Yes, but be all your consolation in him. To live for pleasure? Yes, but when you are merry, sing psalms, and make melody in your hearts to the Lord. To live for wealth? Yes, but to be rich in faith. You may lay up treasure, but lay it up in heaven.*

**C. When the numbers game begins, everyone loses**

v.26c "...and all are going to him."

Note the example of a typical criteria for evaluating

a healthy or unhealthy local church. Since 1998 a movement was begun in Germany by Christian A. Schwarz

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to evaluate the biblical growth and vitality of local churches. This movement is called Natural Church Development. Eight key qualities that are always present in healthy, growing biblical churches were identified:

1. Empowering Leadership.

*“As this base of spiritual maturity increases, effective pastors and leaders multiply, guide, empower and equip disciples....”*

2. Gift-oriented ministry

*“The Holy Spirit...gives to every Christian spiritual gift(s)....Church leaders have the responsibility to help believers to discover, develop and exercise their gifts....”*

3. Passionate spirituality

*“Spiritual intimacy leads to a strong conviction that God will act in powerful ways.”*

4. Functional structures

*“The Church...requires numerous systems which work together to fulfill its intended purpose.”*

5. Inspiring worship

*“Inspiring worship is a personal and corporate encounter with the living God. Both personal and corporate worship must be infused with the presence of God resulting in times of joyous exultation and*

*times*

*of quiet reverence.”*

6. Holistic small groups

*“Holistic small groups are disciple-making communities which endeavor to reach the unchurched, meet individual needs, develop each person according to their God-given gifts, and raise leaders to sustain the growth of the church.”*

7. Need-oriented evangelism

*“Need-oriented evangelism intentionally cultivates*

*relationships with non-Christian people so they can become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ who are actively participating in the life of the church*

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*and community.”*

8. Loving relationships

*“Practical demonstration of love builds authentic Christian community and brings others into God’s kingdom.”*

Note: I agree with the preceding principles.

However, when our beloved Bible Fellowship Church established a Board of Church Health, we digressed to a numbers orientation:

Consider the following legislation:

**504-1.2** Any congregation that reports any one of the following criteria will allow the Board of Church Health to initiate discussion with that Particular Church.

1. Three consecutive years where attendance declined more than 5% per year.
2. Three consecutive years of declining offerings.
3. An Elder Board that has declined to fewer than two lay elders.

Consider the following:

1. As missionaries are being sent out from a local church the numerical accounting shifts from here to there.
2. When economic times are flourishing, offerings may abound. When recession or depression occurs, mutual sharing does not necessarily equate an unhealthy church simply on the basis of high or low offerings.
3. While it is good to have a full slate of elder leadership, there may be times when gaps exist; sometimes due to the need for personal revitalization, family crises, or a planned local church self-evaluation

## **II. DELIGHTING IN THE SPIRIT OF CUSTODIANSHIP**

vv.27-28

### **A. The believer rejoices in his stewardship**

First Corinthians 4:1 tells us to be “stewards of the mysteries of God.” If you have ever been on a ship, you know what a ship’s steward is. Or if you have ever been on an airplane, you know what a steward or a stewardess is. That person does not own the airplane or anything on the plane. The company owns everything, but he or she is entrusted with its care. That steward has been given the responsibility of taking the goods that belong to a higher authority and dispensing it to the people for their benefit. That is a steward – on an airplane or ship – and in the spiritual realm as well.

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In the movie *Papillon*, the main character was a criminal who was imprisoned for life for crimes against the French state. The movie portrayed the dreams he had while in prison. In one dream, he stood before a tribunal for a crime. He pleaded with the judge that he was not guilty of the crime for which he was being tried. The judge replied that he was not being tried for that crime, but for a crime that is the most heinous crime of the human race. Papillon asked what crime it was. He replied, “The crime of a wasted life.” Papillon wept, “Guilty, guilty.” The judge pronounce the sentence of death.

c/w I Corinthians 4:1-7

**B. The believer’s full attention is upon his Master**

v.28 *‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’*

- Hymn by Isaac Watts, #319

*Now to the Lord a noble song;  
Awake, my soul, awake, my tongue;  
Hosanna to th’ eternal name,  
And all his boundless love proclaim.*

*See where it shines in Jesus’ face,  
The brightest image of his grace;*

*God, in the person of his Son,  
Has all his mightiest works outdone.*

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*The spacious earth and spreading flood  
Proclaim the wise, the powerful God,  
And thy rich glories from afar  
Sparkle in every rolling star.*

*But in his looks a glory stands,  
The noblest labor of thine hands:  
The pleasing luster of his eyes  
Outshines the wonders of the skies.*

*Grace, 'tis a sweet, a charming theme;  
My thoughts rejoice at Jesus' name;  
Ye angels, dwell upon the sound;  
Ye heavens, reflect it to the ground.*

*O, may I reach the happy place  
Where he unveils his lovely face,  
His beauties there may I behold,  
And sing his name to harps of gold.*

### **III. DANCING IN THE SWEETNESS OF COMPANIONSHIP**

vv.29-30

#### **A. The bridegroom's friend longs to hear his voice**

- A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, pp.72-74

*What then is genius? Could it be that a genius is a man  
haunt-ed by the speaking Voice, laboring and striving like one  
possessed to achieve ends which he only vaguely understands?  
....The Voice of God is a friendly Voice. No one need fear to  
listen to it unless he has already made up his mind to resist it.  
The blood of Jesus has covered not only the human race but all  
creation as well. "And having made peace through the blood  
of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by  
him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in*

heaven.” *We may safely preach a friendly heaven. The heavens as well as the earth are filled with the good will of Him that dwelt in the bush. The perfect blood of atonement secures this forever.*

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*Whoever will listen will hear the speaking Heaven. This is definitely not the hour when men take kindly to an exhortation to listen, for listening is not a part of popular religion. We are at the opposite end of the pole from there. Religion has accepted the monstrous heresy that noise, size, activity and bluster make a man dear to God. But we may take heart. To a people caught in the tempest of the last great conflict God says, “Be still, and know that I am God,” and still He says it, as if He means to tell us that our strength and safety lie not in noise but in silence.*

c/w Psalm 29:1-11

- Charles Haddon Spurgeon on Psa. 42:1-2 “*As the dear pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.*”

*“As after a long drought the poor fainting hind longs for the streams, or rather as the hunted hart instinctively seeks after the river to lave its smoking flanks and to escape the dogs, even so my weary, persecuted soul pants after the Lord my God. De-barred from public worship, David was heartsick. Ease he did not seek, honor he did not covet, but the enjoyment of commun-ion with God was an urgent need of his soul; he viewed it not merely as the sweetest of all luxuries, but as an absolute neces-sity, like water to a stag. Like the parched traveler in the wild-erness, whose skin bottle is empty, and who finds the wells dry, he must drink or die – he must have his God or faint. His soul, his very self, his deepest life, was insatiable for a sense of the diving presence. As the hart brays so his soul prays. Give him his God and he is as content as the poor deer which at length slakes its thirst and is perfectly happy; but deny him his Lord, and his heart heaves, his bosom palpitates, his whole frame is convulsed, like one who gasps for breath, or pants with long running. Dear reader, dost thou not know what this is, by personally having felt the same? It is a sweet bitterness. The next best thing to living in the light of the Lord’s love is to be unhappy till we have it, and to pant hourly after it – hourly, did I say? Thirst is a perpetual*

*appetite, and not to be forgotten, and even thus continual is the heart's longing after God. When it is as natural for us to long for God as for an animal to thirst, it is well with our souls, however painful our feelings. We may learn from this verse that the eagerness of our desires may be pleaded with God, and the more so, because there are special promises for the importunate and fervent."*

**B. The wedding isn't for the friend, but for the bridegroom**

- Matthew Henry

*He compares himself to the friend of the bridegroom, who attends upon him, to do him honor and service, assists him in prosecuting the match, speaks a good word for him, uses his interest on his behalf, rejoices when the match goes on, and most of all when the point is gained, and he has the bride. All that John had done in preaching and baptizing was to introduce him; and, now that he was come, he had what he wished for: The friend of the bridegroom stands, and hears him; stands expecting him, and waiting for him; rejoices with joy because of the bridegroom's voice, because he is come to the marriage after he had been long expected. Note, first, faithful ministers are friends of the bridegroom, to recommend him to the affections and choice of the children of men; to bring letters and messages from him, for he courts by proxy; and herein they must be faithful to him. Secondly, The friends of the bridegroom must stand, and hear the bridegroom's voice; must receive instructions from him, and attend his orders; must desire to have proofs of Christ speaking in them, and with them; that is the bridegroom's voice. Thirdly, The espousing of souls to Jesus Christ, in faith and love, is the fulfilling of the joy of every good minister. If the day of Christ's espousals be the day of the gladness of his heart, it cannot but be of theirs too who love him and wish well to his honor and kingdom. Surely they have no greater joy.*

**Conclusion:** (Illustration from Nelson, p.461)

After Abraham Lincoln had defeated Stephen A. Douglas for the presidency, the two were together on the east portico of the Capitol for Lincoln's inauguration. The President-elect was introduced by Senator Baker of Oregon. Lincoln stood beside him, carrying the manuscript of his speech, a cane, and his tall silk hat. As he made ready to speak, he looked for a place to

put the hat. Douglas quickly stepped forward, took the hat, and returned to his seat. “If I can’t be President,” he said to a cousin of Mrs. Lincoln, “I can at least hold his hat.”

**Premise: *God’s Best Road is our Greatest Fulfillment***