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The Witness of John the Baptist John 3:22-36- Manuscript

The Return of the King

In J.R.R.Tolkiens classic trilogy "The Lord of the Rings", The author in his final book "the return of the King" introduces various plots, one of which pertains to the conflict between the steward of the Gondor, and the rightful ruler of that kingdom. For many hundreds of years the kingdom of Gondor has been without a king. The leadership of the kingdom has fallen to a line of stewards, who were supposedly holding the kingdom in trust until the true King returns. One of the main subplots is the coming return of the King of Gondor, and the unwillingness of the steward to release his authority to the true king. The story is one of jealousy and power gone amok.

How Jealousy was in the Bible

Sadly this story is not unique, even within the biblical setting we often find those who are tasked with serving, or being stewards of God's gifts, find themselves falling to pride and jealousy. We discover the classic example in the book of Exodus, Moses having lead the people of God out from under the authority of the Egyptians find himself challenged by his sister. In the most stressful situations, Moses experiences attacks from those who should have been most supportive of him. in this particular instance, Miriam, the sister of Moses, is eventually rebuked for her sin. She, however, is not alone in biblical history acting in this manner. We find the servant of the Elisha seeking to use the power that was given by God to his master for his benefit and financial gain (2 Kings 5:20ff). The prophet in not fooled, we find that far from being rewarded the servant becomes leprosus. God it acutely aware of the depravity of the human heart now that it has been affected by sin.

"It is interesting to note that four of the greatest men in the Bible faced this problem of comparison and competition: Moses (Num. 11:26–30), John the Baptist (John 3:26–30), Jesus (Luke 9:46–50), and Paul (Phil. 1:15–18). A leader often suffers more from his zealous disciples than from his critics!"

Warren W. Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 297.

The fall of Lucifer and jealousy in the Garden

The first sins were those committed by Lucifer, the greatest of all Angels created. His role is meant to be the guardian within the garden of Eden. Something happens, which challenges his viewpoint of who he is. Pride, then jealousy, enter his heart. In this manner he sinned against God, not content with his downfall, he seeks to bring down God himself. Unable to do so, Lucifer targets the object of God's affection, humanity. Acting as a conduit for temptation, Lucifer prompts the newly created Adam and Eve to join him in his path of rebellion. History records the ever-increasing effects of the sinful human heart upon the world. God's spirit, which once resided with Adam and Eve, allowing hope for everlasting life, now departs, leaving humanity in a state of spiritual darkness, corrupted by sin, with no ability to solve this situation by themselves. It is interesting to consider what prompted Lucifer and his fall from grace. One suggestion is that Angelic beings and humanity are radically different, although both created by God, only humanity is made in God's image. Lucifer, witnessing the creation of humanity in Adam and Eve, sees for the first time his differences compared to humanity (Eze 28:12-19 records Lucifer's pride in the garden). Instead of appreciating the profound and personal relationship Adam and Eve could have with God; as they are in God's image, Lucifer's pride leads him to become jealous of humanity.

How the account was left with Nicodemus

In the previous part of this particular recording of Jesus life, John the apostle noted the interchange between Nicodemus and Jesus, in this discussion Nicodemus was left with the choice, to live in darkness, or to approach the light and be known. At this stage of the account, we do not know the outcome of the situation, only that Nicodemus has been challenged to accept Jesus testimony about coming from heaven to earth to show people the way.

Why the argument about Purity

John the apostle now returns to the figure, ministry and testimony of John the Baptist. The Baptist has already proclaimed Jesus is the Lamb of God, it was this very testimony that led John the apostle to leave the ministry of John the Baptist, to follow Jesus. It is sometimes hard to draw deep character assessments based on so little information that we have,

but it is worth considering, the John the apostle was willing to risk everything to follow Jesus. Other disciples of John the Baptist, were not so brave. Having recorded a discussion between the spiritual leader Nicodemus, representing the faction of the Pharisees, and Jesus, John the apostle now records an argument between a Jewish person and the disciples of John the Baptist about the ceremonial cleansing. To put this argument in context, John the apostle records the events of Jesus baptising people. In fact, people now have a choice, do you go to Jesus and be baptised, or do you go to John the baptist? While many people are still coming to John the Baptist, others from going under the leadership of Jesus. Into this mix, John's disciples were challenged about the purpose of ceremonial cleansing.

This took place at Aenon.

"Aenon is a name based on the Aramaic word for spring. The exact location is uncertain, but tradition suggests the site is about six miles south of Beth-Shan or Scythopolis, just west of the Jordan River. The precise location of Salim is also unknown."

John D. Barry et al., Faithlife Study Bible (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), Jn 3:23.

Jealous of disciples

Regardless of the details, the outcome was that John's disciples began to question what they were achieving in light of Jesus's ministry. It appears they demonstrate jealousy of the ministry that Jesus is doing, and bring their concerns to John the Baptist for support. John's reaction is not one they expected. John uses the illustration of the bridegroom and best man. In European culture, there is often a perception that if the bridegroom fails to turn up the best man must step in. This is not the same in Jewish culture. In Jewish culture, the best man by taking the role was denoting himself as a person who would never marry the bride. By using this illustration, John the Baptist is saying clearly to his followers that he never will hold any greater authority than he presently does. He further elaborates that the joy he feels is from seeing the task he has been given done well, which was to announce the lamb of God and the coming of the kingdom of God through the person of Jesus Christ. In fact, he has demonstrated contentment in his ministry and task in comparison and to the person of Jesus.

God knows the sins of the human heart, which is why in the 10 Commandments he instructs us not to covet the goods, possessions, relationships of other people. In fact, we are called to be content with the lifestyle that God has given you.

it is worth considering that

"It is a covetous mind that leads to theft." and that "Stealing is the physical expression of a heart that covets. Contentment is the true cost of these sins." There is a deep spiritual element in that "Stealing takes what others have in an attempt to make them yours, Coveting takes your contentment and hands it to Satan making it his."

Why John the Baptist was so great.

" Covet nothing, crave nothing and celebrate whatever comes your way this is the way of contentment"- Daniel Levin

By casting himself in the role of the best man at the wedding, John the Baptist had found contentment in his role and calling. He did not desire greater things for himself, having rightly understood the tasks set before him, in its enormity and complexity, to make straight the path for the one coming after him. John goes on to instruct his disciples that for true completion of his work to be done, Jesus must become greater, and John must become less. With this expression of humility, John experiences the joy of the kingdom.

"John the Baptist had already testified that he had seen the Spirit descend and remain on Jesus (1:32–33), in fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy (Is. 11:2; 42:1; 61:1); the same truth is repeated in new form."

D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 213.

Water AND Spirit the need to acknowledge all our pride, bad as well as what we think of as Good

To highlight this to his disciples, John acknowledges his shortcomings, stating that he only knows things from below not above. While it is true that John the Baptist spoke of the things of God, he spoke with the "veiled eyes", and wisely realises his knowledge in comparison to that of

Jesus is of no consequence. Jesus speaks to Nicodemus and tell him he comes from above, no response from Nicodemus is recorded at this time, yet within the same chapter, John the Baptist declares clearly that Jesus has come from above, acts accordingly, and declares his joy. John the apostle, led by the Holy Spirit, has provided two characters, Nicodemus and John the Baptist to highlight the difference between darkness and light.

Jesus had spoken to Nicodemus about being born again with water and Spirit, John the Baptist, whose whole ministry was associated with water, confirms the words of Jesus, where every other prophet experiences the Spirit of God within set limits, John the Baptist declares Jesus is limitless. In a text associated with Jesus baptising, John the Baptist is recorded as declaring that water alone is only part of the story, to truly understand the word of God one needs the baptism of Jesus, that is of his Holy Spirit coming. It is also worth noting that Jesus has been given everything before "proving" to the world he is worthy, a perfect example of how the Father trusts the son!

We need to testify publicly to our belief in Jesus Christ, in so doing, we acknowledge the worst parts of our life, and in repentance, call for God's help through his chosen Messiah, Jesus, his son. John the Baptist tells us that only by affirming the testimony of Jesus do we step from the wrath of God to his peace.

"Those who receive His witness and act on it know by personal experience that His witness is true (John 7:17). Our Lord's teachings are not to be studied intellectually, separated from everyday life. It is when we obey His Word and put it into practice that we see its truth and experience its power."

Warren W. Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 298.

Practical

"The word must is used in three significant ways in this chapter. There is the "must" of the sinner (John 3:7), the "must" of the Saviour (John 3:14), and the "must" of the servant (John 3:30)."

Warren W. Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 298.

How are we serving

"Our gifts and opportunities come from God, and He alone must get the glory."

Warren W. Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary, vol. 1
(Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 297.

What type of stewards are we being? Are we making our talents available to bring them under the leadership of others, to bless others?

It starts with how we view our best things. Often, when we come to faith, we come understanding that our brokenness has prevented us having a right relationship with God. We finally "get" that the bad things, the selfish things, the sinful things of our life need covering over, and we need a fresh start, a new life. Coming to this point in our life can take many years. What is more surprising is the understanding that it is not just the things we consider sinful in our life that we need to repent. It is things that we consider ourselves "good at" are also corrupted by sin. It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking we need God to take care of the "bad" stuff, but the "good" stuff we can handle without him. A friend put it this way

"We may acknowledge ourselves to be sinners, but we might then think or say, "Well, I'm not as sinful as"

Sin is akin to pregnancy. No woman can become partially pregnant, or a "little bit pregnant". Likewise, there is no partial sinner. We may not sin in every area of life, but the slightest small sin brands us – and that is how it is!"

Even the best of things before we knew Christ have been tainted, corrupted, by sin. They all need to be handed over, the things we early recognise as sinful, the things we thought were ok. If we can do this, we can overcome the pride in our own capacity; we can acknowledge that we need Christ for our entire life, not just the perceived bad bits, this, in turn, can let us call on the power of the Holy Spirit. We can ask for his cleaning, the declaration that we are "sinners now declared saints", and we can call on His power for service.

How we become a servant/ Steward

Knowing what we are serving for goes a long way to understanding how to find contentment in what we are doing, or in the role that God has called us.

God entrusts all parts his body, his church, with gifts for service. One is not more important than another but may be more prominent.

Stewardship entails honestly recognising what gifts God has given to us, on an individual level, but also as a team. We need to consider what is the purpose of the group (church body), then the team (subsections of ministry within the church) then our role within that. Leaders aim to foster an atmosphere of encouragement and openness, giving guidance to the purpose of any individual ministry, showing how people within that ministry contributes to the aim of the wider body of faith, in return they should be able to expect support in the areas they have asked for.

We should be prepared to come with this question on our lips, "How can I help."

Serving in the right place at the right time, being content with what we have, this then will Joy in the return of the King.