

7. John 3:22-36

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Getting started

In the reading today, Jesus is referred to as the 'groom'. Where else do you find the image of Jesus as the groom, and his followers (and later the church) being the bride? (Matthew 25: 1-13; Luke 5:34-35; Ephesians 5:25-27 and several times in Revelation 18-22) What impression does this create of the relationship between Jesus and his followers?

Observation

1. What type of dispute do you think could arise over John's baptism? (It may have been a dispute between John's rite of purification, and Jewish practices.)
2. The Jew seems to be trying to diminish the Baptist's ministry (e.g. not 'everyone' was flocking to Jesus as still many were going to John). How does the tone of 'the Jew' contrast with the Baptist's response about grace and dependence?
3. What is the role of the best man (the friend of the groom)?
4. In verse 34, what is the connection between Jesus speaking God's words, and Jesus having the Spirit without limit (a better translation than 'without measure')?
5. How does Jesus having the Spirit without limit, contrast with all other prophets that had gone before Jesus?
6. In what ways is 'the One' (Jesus) from above? In what ways is he above all?
7. What might Jesus have 'seen and heard', as the only Son of God?
8. What is God's wrath? (It is the *personal* response of a holy God, who will do anything consistent with his character to spare people who trust him.)

Interpretation

1. Should we only baptise when there is plenty of water (verse 23)? (Compare this with Acts 2:41, when about 3,000 were baptised in Jerusalem, which notoriously had a limited water supply, and Acts 8:26, where a baptism occurred in the middle of a desert.)
2. Why should we accept John the Baptist's testimony of Jesus speaking truth about God? (John the Baptist is presented as a prophet, that is a messenger from God.)
3. This is a harder question: how does the parable of the bride and groom show John's understating of Jesus as the Messiah? (There are many OT passages that talk about the faithful people of Israel being the bride of the Lord (Isaiah 62:4-5; Jeremiah 2:2; Hosea 2:16-20) Jesus is showing how he fulfils those prophecies.)

4. In what ways is verse 35 true, given that verse 16 says God gave his one and only Son over to death?
5. John 3:16 is often seen as the central truth of the Christian gospel. How is this reinforced, and expanded, in verses 31-36?
6. How does this passage build our understanding of Jesus?

Implications

1. How happy should we be about other churches (including those close-by) growing greatly in numbers?
2. Verse 36, like 3:16-21, appears to present a binary choice: eternal life or God's wrath and condemnation. How might we speak these words of truth to the world? What has worked for you, and what hasn't?

Prayer suggestions

1. For joy and contentment in what God enables and wills you to do.
2. That Christianity will be seen by the world to be a relationship of joy with a loving God.
3. For those known to you who are not yet assured of avoiding God's wrath.

Notes:

The commentator, Don Carson, notes this is the fourth successive section to point out the ways Jesus surpasses Judaism. Jesus provides new wine that was better than ritualistic purification. Jesus displaces the temple, and points to the way Jesus is the place we meet God, or the ultimate point of mediation between humans and God. Jesus fulfils the prophesy of 'water and spirit, in the OT, and proves in his death to be the 'ultimate antitype' of the snake 'lifted up' in the dessert. And John surpasses John the Baptist and his rite of purification. Keep this in mind as you move into the next chapter where the uniqueness of Jesus has effect outside Palestinian Judaism.

This gospel is the only one that mentions that Jesus baptised. In 4:2 it is made clear his disciples did this.

The other gospels start Jesus' public ministry after John the Baptist was arrested. John explains his ministry started before that arrest.