

## Evotional

**Sermon title: "John's farewell."**

**Bible passages: John 3:22-36.**

**Speaker: Neil Durling.**

**Date: 15.3.15.**

### **Message:**

**Baptism into (22-26):** Both John and Jesus have a rural, rather than an urban ministry at this stage. John is in Samaria; even now he is preparing the way for Jesus to enter that region in chapter four. "... a certain Jew" (may be a follower of Jesus) wants to know whose baptism is valid because Jesus is eclipsing John. Commentators aren't clear what the ceremonial washing is referring to in this text. I'm glad the Church has moved on from arguments about the basics of baptism and communion, aren't you?! It also makes me smile that John's disciples don't even remember Jesus' name as they moan that people are leaving John to follow him!

**Best Man (27-29):** John shows no jealousy whatsoever. In fact, he affirms his subordinate position. "I can't give what I don't have", he says, in effect. He can't give eternal life. John turns his disciples' complaint back on them: "You know that I said I wasn't the Messiah!" He then tells them a parable about a wedding and reminds them that the Bride (the Church) would have been a gift from the father (God) to the Bridegroom (Jesus). The Bride isn't a gift to the Best Man (John). John is the Best Man, and in Jesus' time he was a witness at the wedding. His main job was to provide proof that the couple had consummated their wedding at the end of the seven days of celebration. He would show the bed-sheet to the crowd. The Best Man was a highly honoured position that involved much joy (mentioned twice here). John is providing proof that Jesus has married his bride (both Israel and the Church are called this: Hosea 2:19-20 and Ephesians 5:32). Jesus is the Messiah.

**Become less (30):** Even in the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century some people didn't get this: Apollos of Alexandria, who ministered at Ephesus, was one of this company. Aquila and Priscilla later instructed him on the ministry of Jesus (Acts 18:24-26), and when Paul arrived in Ephesus he found others who held the same belief. Paul brought them to a full understanding of the work of Jesus (Acts 19:1-7). There was rivalry amongst 1<sup>st</sup> century Christian workers as well (1 Corinthians 1:11-12, Philippians 1:15-17; 4:2-3). I love The Message translation of this verse: "This is the assigned moment for him to move into the centre, while I slip off to the sidelines." This is John's last appearance in this gospel... "I MUST become less" he says; this is part of God's plan. John's ministry was to reveal Jesus. So is ours; we must become less.

Gerard Sloyan wrote: "There has never been a follower of Jesus who has not at some time been tempted to displace him."

Interestingly, Jesus became the greatest through becoming less on the cross...

**Blessed by (31-36a):** This paragraph could be the author's reflection on what he has just written. The phraseology fits more comfortably with the style of verses 16-21 than with John the Baptist. He is basically reminding us that Jesus is superior to John in every way, although John is still important. We have eternal life through Jesus. Please note that John uses the word "has". We have eternal life now, not just when we die.

**Beckoned by (36b):** Don't you wish John had finished before this part of verse 36? There is a dividing line and we choose which side of it we stand. "Rejects" means "disobey" and is only used here in this gospel. It suggests that disbelief is an act of will to refuse Jesus' claims. And, sadly, God's wrath remains on those who reject Jesus. This is the only place in this gospel and John's epistles where this word is used. It isn't a sudden gust of passion or a burst of temper. God isn't easily angered or vindictive. Rather, it is the settled displeasure of God against sin. It is a divine allergy to sin. If we hate sin (child prostitution, gossiping, greed, etc.), why shouldn't God? These people aren't suddenly condemned, rather, their position and relationship to God simply remains unaltered. The sad reality is that, for some, nothing has changed despite all that Jesus has done for them. The language of this final verse is absolute. It conveys the seriousness of a faith decision; everything is at issue, everything is at stake. At first glance this can seem oppressive but, ultimately, it is liberating. If we accept Jesus we are set free to live with him at the centre!

### **Questions:**

1. Have you been baptised? If not, why not? If yes, what are your memories of that event?
2. How do you act like a Best Man/Woman to Jesus in bearing witness to him?
3. "There has never been a follower of Jesus who has not at some time been tempted to displace him." (Gerard Sloyan). How are you tempted to displace Jesus?
4. Practically, how can we become less so that Jesus becomes greater?
5. How does verse 36b sit with you?

### **Prayer:**

Dear Jesus, please help me to become less so that you become greater. Amen.