

Jesus Deserves All the Attention

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*He must become
greater; I must
become less.*

JOHN 3:30

He must increase, but I must decrease” (KJV). I remember hearing this verse as a child and imagining Jesus growing bigger and bigger while John the Baptist shrank! The context of John’s statement clarifies his meaning: John’s disciples have told him that “everyone is going” to Jesus, so John declares, “He must become greater; I must become less.”

John’s ministry began before Jesus’ did, so John watched the number of Jesus’ followers grow from zero to a lot more than John had. This could have been heartbreaking, because “the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem” had been going out to the wilderness to see John (Mark 1:5).

The Gospel of John, however, consistently depicts John the Baptist merely as a witness—one who bears



testimony—to the identity and greatness of Jesus. Each portion of today's two passages shows John explaining who he is and isn't or who Jesus is. Jewish leaders from Jerusalem question John about his identity, and he denies being any kind of Messiah. He is just preparing the way for the Christ. Yes, he has a ministry of water baptism, but his status is greatly inferior to that of the coming one. John points out Jesus as God's sacrificial lamb, who will take away the sins of the world, and who will immerse people into the power of the Holy Spirit.

Later, when Jesus' followers have eclipsed John's in number, John insists this is fully appropriate. He likens himself simply to the best man in a wedding, where Jesus is the groom. John's analogy in 3:29 is striking, particularly when we understand its cultural context. Ancient Jewish custom

called for the best man to wait outside the bedroom when the bride and groom consummated the marriage. Traditionally, the groom would shout for joy to confirm their new marital intimacy, and the best man would share that joy.

The Christian life is all about deferring more and more to Jesus, the Mighty God. A generation later, Paul would say in Philippians 1:18 that "the important thing is that in every way . . . Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice."

I have recently retired and need to learn this lesson more than ever. Being in the limelight is not the point. Humbly magnifying Jesus is. I need to shrink.

Meditate on John 1:19-34
and 3:22-30.

Consider what John the Baptist's example shows us about who Jesus is. How is John's posture instructive for your own spiritual life? How might you "become less"?