

## Friends of the Bridegroom

### Introduction

This morning we consider John the Baptist's reaction to the fact that Jesus and his disciples are growing in popularity.

For some time now, John the Baptist has been the primary prophetic voice.

But now, the people who were coming to his baptism are going to Jesus.

As John speaks to his disciples' concern, he focuses on the fact that the ministry he received from God was a certain kind and it has run its course.

He and they must be content with that.

At the core of John's explanation is an emphasis on reception.

He is able to be content with his ministry waning because he simply receives as a gift from God.

This is the posture he wants his disciples to take up and it is the posture that we should learn from John the Baptist.

As such, I've divided my sermon into two parts:

1. The first part is to receive your life as a gift.
2. Second, receive Jesus as the gift of eternal life

### Receive Your Life as a Gift

Last week, when I preached on the discussion between Jesus and Nicodemus, I spoke about how there was a live question in the air amongst God's people at the beginning of the gospels.

"Is now the time that God is going to restore the kingdom?"

This was especially the case, when John the Baptist showed up on the scene.

People were asking "Is this the one who will restore the kingdom."

John, as we will see this morning, states plainly that he is not the one, but rather, he bears witness to the one.

This tension comes up in verse 26 when John's disciples come to him in and say,

#### **John 3:26 ESV**

"Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him."

John's disciples are concerned because the crowds that were streaming to John are now going to Jesus and becoming *his* disciples.

John's disciples are worried about this, but John is not, and in verses 27-30 he lays out to his disciples how they should understand what is going on.

And as John does this, we should all be learning to embrace our own limitations.

For as we learn to do this, we will, like John will see our joy complete.

Unless it is Given Him from Heaven

John responds to his disciples by saying that, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.”

John understands and embraces what so many of us resist and are slow to embrace:

### **Life is a gift!**

As Paul says in [1 Corinthians 4](#), “What do you have that you did not receive?”

Or, as James writes in [James 1](#), “Every good and every perfect *gift* is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”

John the Baptizer understood that his life and his calling are what God had given him.

It was not his calling to be the Messiah, but rather, to receive that which God has called him to; to *bear witness* to the Messiah and to prepare the way for the Messiah.

When John says that “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven” he is saying that one can only truly *be* that which God has given to him.

To try and become what God has not given you is an exercise in folly.

However, to have a receptive posture, to receive what God has given you, is the humble calling of each man.

The Bridegroom & the Friend of the Bridegroom

John the Baptist illustrates this by describing himself as the friend of the bridegroom and Jesus as the bridegroom.

In Jewish custom, this friend — the *shoshbin* — was the one who made the practical arrangements for the wedding of his friend, the bridegroom.

The job and calling of the *friend* of the bridegroom is not to have the bride for himself, but to prepare the wedding so that the bridegroom might be married to his bride.

John the Baptist knows his calling.

He is not called to be the bridegroom to the bride but rather to prepare the wedding for the true bridegroom, Jesus.

So, while John’s disciples are concerned to see people going to follow Jesus, John rejoices.

### **John 3:29 ESV**

<sup>29</sup> The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete.

Because John the Baptist is able to receive his life as a gift from God, he embraces the limitations of his office.

He does not seek to be that which he is not.

Rather, he embraces his role as the friend of the bridegroom who prepares the way for the bridegroom.

And he realizes that, when the bridegroom shows up, it is time for him to decrease so that Jesus can increase and receive his bride.

### The “Gift Nature” of Reality

If you expand this theme it drives at a foundational truth:

Life, at the most fundamental level, is a gift.

But, it is a daunting and risky gift, as all the best gifts are; and all too often we miss this.

We go about our lives taking it all for granted, missing the truly astonishing gift that each of our lives are.

In his wonderful book, *Notes From the Tilt-a-Whirl*, N.D. Wilson points out the obvious but often missed truth that each of our lives are a statistical miracle.

Considered simply from the perspective of human procreation, he points out that the fact that *you* are here, against all odds.

The number of completely unique individual humans who could have existed *instead* of you is staggering to think about.

And yet, despite the fact that there are billions of others who could be here instead of you, you are all too often prone to complain and mope because things haven't gone the way you wanted them to.

This is because you have forgotten that your life is a gift from God!

God wanted *you* to exist, as you are, completely unique.

And he gave this life to *you* as a gift.

As Wilson says,

We are all lottery winners. We are the chosen ones. We are the ones who get to participate in this whole thing.

You are to receive your life from God with gratitude.

You should seek to embody the words of George MacDonald:

I would rather be what God chose to make me than the most glorious creature that I could think of; for to have been thought about, born in God's thought, and then made by God, is the dearest, grandest and most precious thing in all thinking.

Each of us must learn to receive our lives and callings in the way the John the Baptizer received his own; as a *gift*.

And as we receive our lives as a gift, we should seek to use our gifts in the service of God's kingdom and our neighbors as the Apostle Peter wrote in [1 Peter 4](#),

**1 Peter 4:10 ESV**

<sup>10</sup> As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:

But receiving your life, and stewarding it faithfully, still leaves you facing a deeper problem — one that John the Baptists' disciples themselves couldn't solve...

Receive Jesus as the Gift of Eternal Life

You are to receive your life as a gift but you know that this gift of life is both incomplete and marred.

Theologians and Biblical scholars alike have noted how, even before the fall, the Bible present a greater state of glory that humanity was destined for.

The gift of life was to grow from one degree of glory to another.

But not only did Adam fail to enter into that glory, the gift of life itself was marred by the Fall.

So there is a tension to the Christian life.

On the one hand, you *must* receive the life God has given you with gratitude, it is a gift from your good and perfect heavenly Father.

And yet, you know that your life is beset by the sin of your own flesh, the temptations of a fallen world, and the attacks of the spiritual forces of darkness.

What's more, even without these consequences of sin, you would still long for greater and greater glory from God.

The glory of the Gospel is that *both* of these tensions find their resolution in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And these themes come to the fore in the description of Jesus in verses 31-36.

Jesus is the one who comes from heaven and is above all.

He bears witness to what he has *seen* and *heard*.

He is sent of God and he utters the very words of God, for he has the Spirit without measure.

He is beloved of the Father and he holds all things in his hands.

And whoever believes in him, the Son of God, has eternal life.

But those who do not obey him remain under God's wrath.

Unlike John, who bears witness to the coming messiah, Jesus is the messiah and bears witness to God who sent him.

John baptizes with water, but Jesus has the Spirit without measure and will baptize his disciples with the very Spirit of God.

Jesus is beloved of the Father, and he holds all things in his hands and he gives eternal life to whoever believes in him.

Your sins need to be forgiven and Jesus came to deal with the consequences of man's rebellion against God on the cross.

But it is also true that Jesus came to bring humanity into that *greater glory* that Adam himself never fully enjoyed.

John here describes it as *eternal life*.

When the Scriptures speak of *eternal life*, they do not merely speak of life that is everlasting.

Eternal life isn't merely a matter of quantity.

No, eternal life is a qualitative difference.

To enjoy *eternal life* is to enjoy the very life of God.

To be brought up into the life and glory of God that was always the goal of human existence, even before the Fall.

So when John speaks of Jesus with such high language in these concluding verses, he does so to draw out the reality that Jesus, the Son of God, is the one who will bring fulfillment to our deepest longings.

The Fulfillment of All Your Desires

All your longings for glory aren't wrong, but they may be misplaced and disordered.

But, in Christ they can be properly *reordered*.

Jesus offers you the fulfillment of these longings in the right way.

Your desires, which are so often distorted by sin, try to resist what God *has* given you.

But these desires are reformed in Christ.

In Christ, not only do you learn contentment with what God has given you, you also receive far more than you could have ever asked for or imagined.

So the call to you this Lord's Day is to believe in Christ, and receive eternal life in him.

You cannot receive even one thing unless it is given you from above.

But consider the way John describes Jesus — he *is* given to you *from above* and all things have been given into his hands!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN!