

Text: John 3:22-36

Title: "Believe that Jesus is the Christ because He is the Bridegroom"

Time: 3/3/2024 am; 3/10/2024 pm

Place: NBBC; VCBC

Introduction: Some of you were able to attend the Hobi-Smith wedding ceremony over Christmas. That was a blessed day for our family. The ceremony was held at the Tilton School, where their chapel building was once the First Free Will Baptist Church of Canterbury, built in 1852. Evidently, the building had been moved at some point from Canterbury to Tilton.

One of the features of the architecture, which became helpful to the wedding ceremony, was the series of steps that ascend up to a large platform at the front of the church. As my son Kent and his groomsmen filed in, they made a line starting with Kent on the platform, and then with Brandon, his brother and best man on a step lower, and so on down the line.

But imagine with me what would it have been like, if as Caroline, Kent's bride, came down the isle accompanied by her dad, Brandon suddenly decided that he wanted to stand on the platform and have Kent on the lower step. Perhaps we could imagine that he simply wanted to appear taller in the wedding pictures. That would have been a very awkward wedding ceremony. We may have needed a do-over.

Our passage describes a similarly awkward dispute (vv. 25-26). John's disciples were troubled after disputing with a Jew or two from Jerusalem about baptism and its relation to Jewish purification. It seems they had lost the argument.

We are not told how the argument went exactly, but perhaps a clever lawyer from the Pharisees had mentioned to these followers of John that his baptism was temporary and illegitimate, even contradictory, because the Christ John preached

was doing His own baptizing. Perhaps they said something like, "Our Jewish purification rites have been the tradition of the fathers for centuries, and now you upstarts are getting upstaged by the very One you were promoting."

In any event, John's disciples fear that they are no longer going to be on the platform. John explains to them that Jesus is the Bridegroom who belongs there, and that he, John, is merely the friend of the Bridegroom. Just like Brandon was very happy to let Kent have his day and to do all he could to help make his brother a happy bridegroom, so John the Baptist rejoiced greatly that the Bridegroom Jesus was finally getting His bride, the people of first century Palestine.

We have noticed before that John claimed to be the voice of Isa. 40:3, "that crieth in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way of Yahweh, make straight in the dessert a highway for our God'" (John 1:23, 3:28). John was the voice, and so Jesus is Yahweh and God. Here John calls Jesus the *Bridegroom* of God's people, an identity possessed only by Yahweh according to the Old Testament.

Isa. 62:4-5, "Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married. For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee."

Jer. 2:2, "Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown."

Hos. 2:19-20, "And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment,

and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord.”

And what the Old Testament says about Yahweh’s believing Israel, the New Testament also says about Jesus’s true churches today:

2 Cor. 11:2, “For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.”

Eph. 5:25-27, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”

Rev. 21:9-10, “And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.”

And so the Apostle John tells us in this passage, that we must believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and have life in His name, because John the Baptist proclaimed that Jesus is the Bridegroom. Notice with me three things about Jesus, the Bridegroom.

I. The Bridegroom has given His bride an important symbol (vv. 22-26).

Illustration: One of the duties Brandon had on the day of Kent’s wedding was to keep track of the wedding ring and to make sure it was available when needed. The wedding ring

does not make a couple married; the covenant of holy matrimony, the “I dos”, does that. But the wedding ring was an indispensable symbol of the Hobi-Smith wedding day, and it would have been tragic had Brandon somehow lost track of it.

Application: Just like we as God’s people have a Bridegroom in our Savior, Jesus Christ, so also we are those to whom our Bridegroom has given an important symbol, the symbol of baptism. Like a best-man keeping watch over a wedding ring, John the Baptist was baptizing those who would be followers of Jesus Christ. Although Christ Himself did not baptized anyone (4:2), His disciples did what John did. Welcoming the symbol of our marriage to Christ is an indispensable part of our identity as the Bridegroom’s bride.

Two things are clear about baptism in this passage. First, it is clear that baptism is the ordinance by which people knew who was willing to be identified as the Bridegroom’s bride. Individuals know who is following Christ in this context because they were being baptized.

Illustration: Many kids today are experiencing a crisis over their identity. I was told that there was a meeting in our town about a girl who wants to use the boys’ bathrooms in our school. She is confused about her God-given identity as a girl.

That is a sad state of affairs, to be sure. And yet, I have seen a similar identity crisis when it comes to Jesus’s bride’s willingness to wear the symbol of her marriage to her Bridegroom. It seems that many professing believers do not want to be baptized and become members of a local church.

At best, that is an identity crisis. At worse, it is an indication of a deeper problem. At least a girl who wants to act like a boy is still really a girl. What must we say about a Christian who wants to act like an unbeliever when it comes to baptism? We are left with the question, “Is he really a believer?”

A second clear truth about baptism in the passage concerns its mode. John the Baptist baptized near the Jordan River “because there was much water there” (v. 23). In other words, you need enough water for baptism by immersion. That is simply what the word means – *to dip* or *to immerse*. Even the Greeks fully immerse their babies in infant baptism, because that is what the Greek word means.

Our local church lacks baptisms, and it is not because we lack the water. Let’s pray that revival would come to hearts and that many would want to identify as the bride of the Bridegroom through their baptism. He has given her this important symbol of His covenant of marriage to His bride.

II. The Bridegroom has received all the glory from heaven (vv. 27-30).

Illustration: Photos are, of course, an important part of the wedding day. When you open a well-done wedding album, there is no confusion about which guy is the bridegroom who married the beautiful bride, nor should there be.

Application: John wants no confusion in regard to Jesus as the Bridegroom of His people. Commentators agree that John’s words to his disciples end with his statement in verse 30, “He must increase, and I must decrease.” The rest of the chapter is John the Apostle’s commentary on the meaning of this history. My Greek Lexicon [BAGD] pointed out that the terms the Baptist used for *increase* and *decrease* often refer to brighter or dimmer light. Back in verses 19-21, light is referred to five times. Here, it is John’s humble desire that Christ’s light shine brighter and that his own light would be dimmer by comparison.

Illustration: A good analogy for the diminishing of our light is the light of the moon. When night has fallen over the earth, the moon’s light shines brightly, but its light is really the light of the sun. But then what happens at dawn to the light of the

moon? When the sun comes up to extinguish completely the darkness of the night, the light of the moon recedes into the background and becomes unnoticeable. What little light the moon could muster to lessen the darkness of the night has been displaced by the glory of the daytime sun, which has completely swallowed up the darkness of the night.

That is what John the Baptist wanted to have happen in his gospel ministry. It is what each of us should desire as individual servants of Christ. We have the privilege of serving the Lord in the time, the place, and under the circumstances of the Lord's choosing (v. 27). But Jesus is the Christ, not we (v. 28). He is the Bridegroom to whom the bride belongs, not we (v. 29). It is necessary for people to see more of Him and less of us as we serve Him (v. 30).

Illustration: I had breakfast with a pastor friend who told me they baptized ten new disciples of Christ the previous Sunday morning. Our last Sunday morning, we did not. What happens under those circumstances? The glory of the Bridegroom has shined brighter in the churches of Christ. How should I feel about that? John tells me – the friend of the Bridegroom, who stands with Him and listens to Him, rejoices to see Him glorified in this way. He must receive all the glory on earth, because He has received all the glory from heaven.

III. The Bridegroom has spoken from heaven and must be believed (vv. 31-36).

Illustration: My son's big day over Christmas happened because two people said *yes* to him. Kent asked Caroline's dad for permission to propose to her, and he gave permission. Then Kent proposed to Caroline at Camp Northfield (on a beautiful day of New Boston rainbows), and she said *yes*.

Application: John wraps up this passage by explaining the Bridegroom's proposal. In this regard, it is different from

Kent's proposal in important ways. First, it is not an earthly proposal (v. 31). Scientific reductionism believes that everything real is earthly, that nothing real is heavenly. The Bridegroom, to the contrary, is the one coming from above. It is not just that He came, but also that He is still coming in an important sense as John writes His Gospel. He is coming with a proposal to you and to me here this morning as we read it.

Unfortunately, many have refused to listen to His proposal (v. 32). This in spite of the fact that to listen to Him is to own that God is true (vv. 33-35). This is a proposal that God the Father has said *yes* to. One *yes* still remains, however (v. 36). Will you become a part of the bride of Christ? Will you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and have life in His name?

Conclusion: Verse 36 includes a detail I would like us not to miss as we conclude this morning. The phrase *believeth not* is actually *obeyeth not* in the original language. We could translate the verse, "He that believes on the Son has everlasting life: and he that disobeys the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him."

We often think of our unbelief as our passive, natural, default, and excusable response to the proposal of the Bridegroom to come to Him for salvation. God does not see it that way. He sees this refusal as willful rebellion and disobedience.

The Apostle Paul is very clear about this: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men; who hold [down] the truth in unrighteousness. Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:18-20).

It takes willful suppression of truth and disobedient commitment to disbelieve, to refuse the proposal of the Bridegroom for salvation. As such, unbelief is an offense deserving of the wrath of God. This wrath abides on the disobedient unbeliever, and yet His mercy holds that wrath back this morning with the Bridegroom's gracious and loving proposal: "The one believing on the Son has eternal life."

Will you say *yes*?

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*