

He Loved Me . . .

He Loves Me Lots

The Gospel of John

Text

John 3:22-36

Topic

John the Baptist tells his disciples that he must decrease and Jesus must increase

Title

"Please Decrease Me, Let Me Go"

*Voiceless it cries,
Wingless flutters,
Toothless bites,
Mouthless mutters.*

Lord of the Rings fans know the answer to the riddle from Bilbo's game with Gollum. The answer is *Wind*.

How about this one:

*Alive without breath,
As cold as death;
Never thirsty, ever drinking,
All in mail never clinking.*

The answer is *Fish*.

We can make a riddle from our text:

*Ever the groomsman,
Never the Groom.
Increasing never,
Decreasing ever.*

The answer is *John the Baptist*:

1. He calls himself the "friend of the Bridegroom," i.e., the groomsman (v29).
2. He says of Jesus, "He must increase, but I *must* decrease" (v30).

We will concentrate on *decreasing* and *increasing*. I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 You Find Joy In An Ever Decreasing Life**, and **#2 You Find Joy In Ever Increasing The Lord**.

#1 - You Find Joy In An Ever Decreasing Life (v22-31)

"Downsizing" is described as moving out of a larger home and trading it for a smaller space.

Christians are using the word to encourage living more minimally. One site said,

Our culture celebrates excess, so as Christians we need to think counter-culturally. Whether we are candidates for the television show Hoarders, or simply surrounded by too much stuff, there are advantages and blessings in downsizing our possessions.

Like so much advice we get, it concentrates on physical and material changes, *not* spiritual ones.

"Decreasing" is *spiritual* downsizing for the sake of people seeing Jesus increase.

Decreasing can be best understood by observing the man who invented “He must increase, but I must decrease.”

Joh 3:22 After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized.

Joh 3:23 Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized.

In chapter four, we will learn, “Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples” (v2). John the Baptist had identified Jesus as the One who would baptize “with the Holy Spirit” (1:33). The baptizees might have concluded that being dunked by the Lord was Spirit baptism.

It was not. Their baptism was for repentance, to prepare to receive the Holy Spirit and enter the Kingdom of God on Earth.

“There was much water there” indicates total immersion. They were immersed to signify a complete cleansing of the whole person through repentance and faith.

John the Baptist’s example of decreasing starts with a person recognizing that they must repent and acknowledge they are sinners in need of a complete supernatural cleansing by God.

(Quick note: None of the baptisms in these verses is Christian immersion baptism commanded by Jesus following your receiving Him).

Joh 3:24 For John had not yet been thrown into prison.

This is a timestamp. It helps harmonize the Gospels. These baptisms took place before any events recorded in the other three Gospels.

Joh 3:25 Then there arose a dispute between *some* of John’s disciples and the Jews about purification.

Translators say that “Jews” is singular. It was “a *certain Jew*” disputing about “purification.” The certain Jew may have argued along the lines that there were already plenty of purification rituals in Judaism.

Outward rituals, rites, and rules cannot cleanse your heart or add to your righteousness. We shouldn’t think of Jesus as our coach, trying to bring out the best in us. He doesn’t blow a whistle and say, “Drop to your knees and give me 20 minutes of prayer.” You might start the day that way, but it doesn’t add to your righteousness if you do.

Jesus is all your righteousness.

When you pray, make sure it is because you want to talk to your Friend, not to achieve a spiritual milestone.

Joh 3:26 And they came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified - behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!”

John the Baptist was not a trained “Rabbi.” It was a title of respect. His theology had been forged in the desert, waiting with the Lord.

Typically we accuse the disciples of John the Baptist of jealousy. Maybe, but I don’t think so.

John’s ministry was fading; it was ending. They would close up shop, dissolve the corporation. His disciples had the very natural reaction of wondering if it had been worthwhile.

It is not uncommon to wonder if your service means or meant anything. The great apostle Paul had doubts about his work in the city of Corinth. The Lord appeared to him, encouraging him to endure by telling him, “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city” (Acts 18:9-10).

Christians like to cite the phrase, "as unto the Lord." It is a paraphrase for something a more encouraged Paul wrote to the Colossians, "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ" (3:23-24).

You cannot measure your spiritual service for the Lord from the physical results.

Jeremiah's ministry spanned the rule of five kings of Judah. The Jews persecuted him.

He apparently had only two converts: Baruch, his scribe, and Ebed-Melech, an Ethiopian eunuch who served the king. Do we consider him a third-rate prophetic hack?

Many of the prophets were failures if you judge them by their results.

You are going to be measured by things unseen to anyone besides Jesus. Turn your evaluation inward, not outward. Don't judge the success of others.

Joh 3:27 John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from Heaven.

Our description of decreasing isn't following an alliterated outline. We are not getting a list of successive steps; we see it in action, lived out by the man who mastered it. John the Baptist's statement is a pillar of decreasing.

What have you been given? The answer is, *Everything*. The very breath in your lungs is a gift from God.

We must recognize there is nothing about ourselves that makes us deserving; serving God is mercy extended to us by grace.

Joh 3:28 You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before Him.'

John the Baptist created the popular meme, "There is a God, *and you're not Him.*"

I don't particularly like ministry descriptions. John the Baptist had a simple one I do like: "I have been sent before [Jesus]."

We have been sent *after* Jesus to share the Gospel.

Joh 3:29 He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.

The church will be called "the bride of Christ," *but it did not exist before Jesus' resurrection.*

Israel is the bride in this illustration. John the Baptist described the promised Kingdom of God on Earth as a wedding feast. It was the best way he knew to convey the absolute "joy" he felt serving the Lord. He took the fact his service was ending as a good thing.

John the Baptist was "the friend of the Bridegroom." We'd call him the best man. Not the modern best man who plans a degenerate bachelor's party.

The Jews have a name for the role of best man; it's *shoshben*. One site described him saying,

The shoshben would carry messages back and forth from bride and groom, and would also man the gate where the bride would be. He would be the one trusted to be with the bride and then listen at the gate for the groom to come. When he heard the groom's voice, he'd let him in. He was the best, closest friend of the groom, which would also make him the most trusted friend of the bride aside from the groom.

There are so many precious illustrations in the Bible to help us understand what it means to be a believer in Jesus and walk with Him. Today we add to that list the understanding that you are the Lord's *shoshben*. Not only in your duties, *but in your joy*.

John the Baptist rejoiced with joy. He focused only on increasing the Groom.

Joh 3:30 He must increase, but I *must* decrease.

Churches often, as they say, "cast vision" for what they want to accomplish. Christians choose what they call a "life verse," either for life or life in the new year.

"He must increase, but I must decrease," was the visionary life verse of John the Baptist. It would be good for us to cast vision by adopting it ourselves.

There are riddles to resolve in your walk with Jesus:

- You must decrease to increase Him.
- "Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for [Jesus] will find it" (Matthew 16:25).
- "The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (First Corinthians 1:25).
- "He who is least among you all will be great" (Luke 9:48).

Lightning McQueen balked at Doc's advice that on a dirt track, "If you go hard enough left, you'll find yourself going right."

Lightning sarcastically replied, "Thank you. Or should I say 'No thank you,' because in opposite world that really means 'Thank you.' "

Our new life in Jesus is meant to be radical. To decrease, you must embrace God's opposites. We don't live in opposite world, but the world does *oppose* us. Jesus does not increase if we act like the world.

Joh 3:31 He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from Heaven is above all.

John the Baptist may have said this, or it may be a commentary by the apostle John.

Either way, it is good to remember God has a much better vantage point.

When the dwarves were lost in Mirkwood Forest, Bilbo climbed a tree to get a better look from above. We can't see the forest for the trees. We need God's look from above.

Jesus "comes from above... from Heaven." We, like John the Baptist, are "of the Earth." The Lord sees ahead if the signage along the path you are on is "Bridge-out," or "Hairpin Turn," or "In Case of Rapture this Car will be Unmanned."

Joh 3:32 And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony.

"No one receives His testimony" in the MSG version reads, "No one wants to deal with these facts." The apostle John was referring to the official rejection of Jesus by the leaders of the nation. They refused to deal with the fact that Jesus did the works of the promised Messiah.

Decreasers must deal with the "Deadly D's" - discouragement, defeat, difficulty, depression, downheartedness, disappointment, dejection, despondency, despair, demoralization, etc.

Consider this exhortation when you find yourself crushed under the weight of a Deadly D. *You are forgetting your position and are like a shoshben grumbling and complaining that he does not get more attention at the wedding than the Groom.*

The "D's" a decreaser faces are met by living to please the Lord, not other men. It is in Him we find our joy.

John the Baptist was a decreaser *and* a downsizer:

- For a time before his ministry launch, and afterward, he lived in the desert.
- He wore rough clothing
- He ate locusts dipped in wild honey.

Going farther back in his life, he was a Nazarite from birth.

The Nazarite vow restricted your life in various ways, e.g., you could not partake of anything related to grapes, and you could not cut your hair.

Do you need to downsize? Maybe. Jesus sees ahead.

We all need to be decreasing.

#2 - You Find Joy In Ever Increasing The Lord (v33-36)

John the Baptist believed that he could increase Jesus. You can't add anything to Him. You *can* give testimony about Him, telling the world Who He is and what He has done.

Joh 3:33 He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true.

You sometimes need a certified copy of a document to attest to its genuineness. Typically it is done with a seal of some kind. When you receive Jesus, He 'certifies' you by giving you His "seal."

The apostle Paul said, "having believed, you were **sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise**, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory." (Ephesians 1:13-14).

Spirit-sealing is invisible, but you make it visible by your testimony and your changed life.

Joh 3:34 For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure.

The word "sent" reminds us that a few verses earlier, we were told, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whoever/whosoever/all/anyone who believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (v16).

On Earth, Jesus had God the Holy Spirit in a "measure" unlike anyone before. Jesus promised to baptize us with the Holy Spirit in full measure:

- The baptism of the Holy Spirit places the believer into union with Christ and into union with other believers in the body of Christ at the moment of salvation (First Corinthians 12:12-13).
- Simultaneously, God the Holy Spirit takes up permanent residence in you as His Temple on Earth (First Corinthians 6:19).
- You can ask for, and receive, His enabling at any time (Luke 11:9-13).

I probably need to brush up on my Green Lantern memory, but I remember that periodically they need to recharge their power rings.

Christians think that way about God the Holy Spirit. They think they need to pray, or fast, or give, or come forward, to get recharged.

God the Holy Spirit is a Person and as deity He cannot diminish.

Joh 3:35 The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand.

That sentence provides a concise summary of the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

Joh 3:36 He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

The apostle John is an evangelist. This is his challenge, his altar call. He calls upon his readers through the centuries to *receive* or *reject* Jesus:

- Believe, and you are guaranteed “everlasting life,” in *quantity* and *quality*.
- Do not believe, and the “wrath of God” abides on you.

The wrath of God is His just judgment upon sin. We are all sinners. God’s wrath is upon us and will remain unless we believe Jesus to take it upon Himself for us. Do not believe and you face judgment for your sin all alone.

I’ll leave you with an easy riddle to ponder:

*A heavenly Father,
No heavenly mother.
An earthly mother,
No earthly father.
Born older than my mother
And as old as my Father
Who am I?*