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INCREASING DECREASING ??

You've seen it happen. Someone soaks up the limelight -- for a while. Then their star seems to fade, and another person gets all the attention. That's what happened to John the Baptizer. You see it unfold in John 3:22-36. People are now flocking to Jesus instead of him. John's response? JOY.

That's right, he talks about the joy of "serving the bridegroom." And that's an illustration anyone can relate to. Rejoicing not in your role as best man or maid of honor, but in the bridegroom Himself. Perhaps you read recently about "the wedding photos that shocked the Internet." Right in front of the bride and groom at their reception, some guy proposed to his girlfriend. John the Baptizer says such a *faux pas* is unthinkable for him, because he is there to serve the honored person, not to steal the limelight.

Learn the important lesson of verse 2: "**A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.**" Mark well the humility of John the Baptizer. It's a sentiment similar to Paul in 1 Corinthians 4:6-7, "*What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?*" Yes, you may have worked hard to make the most of natural gifts or opportunities. But in the end, ALL your abilities and achievements are the result of God's gifting to you.

So give honor to God, not yourself. And God's gifts always come for God's purpose. When His objectives become your goals, then you will truly accomplish what you were made for. John says, "**You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before Him.**" Luke 1 records remarkable prophecies about John. Jesus said in Matthew 11:11, "*Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.*" But of himself, John made no grandiose claims. He knows he is only an emissary, not the royal head of the kingdom.

Mark well his next words and commit them to memory: "**Jesus MUST increase, and I must decrease.**" This emphatic language says there's no other way. This is God's divine design. And it's dangerous for you as a disciple of Jesus. Because YOU must decrease, and He must increase. When you are born again from above by the Holy Spirit, you will have that same attitude of gratitude that puts Jesus first. Ephesians 2:8-10 explains, you've been saved by grace through faith FOR the purpose of doing the good works God has planned for you to do for Him. Here are three ways you decrease so He increases.

- 1 - Acknowledge** that everything you are and have comes from God - for HIS purposes. He has a plan for you. And it's all from Him - FOR Him. It's all about His plan, by His power, for His purpose.
- 2 - Admit** you are not God, but his servant. Recently a Christian leader from Nigeria observed three kinds of people: those who believe in God, those who do not believe in God, and those who think they are gods. He was speaking about politicians - but it's a word to the wise for all of us!
- 3 - Apply** yourself to earnestly fulfill YOUR role in the Bridegroom's plan. You're not the center. You're His servant and witness - inviting others to the wedding feast of the Lamb, which awaits all who trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior. Live for Him and serve Him by His power within you.

All this is part of the picture of baptism, which John was called to do. It portrays dying to self and living for Jesus, by the power of His new resurrection life living in and through the believer. Jesus must increase and you must decrease. No longer living according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. How? By daily reading the Bible, being in constant prayer, gathering to worship and learn with God's people, going out to serve Him, and especially by telling others about Him. All in the Spirit's power. And it will show up in how you treat your spouse, family, co-workers, neighbors, and strangers. You, as a servant of Jesus.

What about the decrease? In Mark 6 John was arrested and beheaded. That's a decrease! Speaking the truth cost his life. Verse 34 says Jesus Himself is the one God sent, "**who utters the very words of God, for He gives the Spirit without measure.**" This powerful proclamation echoes John 1, that only Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit. It is He who empowers you -- to decrease so Jesus will increase.

Then verse 36 says "**whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God remains on him.**" This sobering repeat of John 3:16-21 reminds you that the call of God to believe in Jesus is both an invitation AND a command. Jesus IS the life and light of mankind. All who trust Him are transformed by the Holy Spirit, saved from sin and self. And the Bridegroom gets you ready for His eternal "wedding feast of the Lamb" in eternity to come!