

Discuss:

Changes in leadership and responsibility can prove difficult at times. In other cases, they can be occasions for joy and celebration.

Think of one or two major changes you have witnessed in any context (at home, work, church, etc.). Perhaps you were directly involved. How did it go? What factors contributed to the outcome?

The Joy of the “Shoshbin”:

The opening chapters of John’s Gospel are rich with images and allusions to marriage. The first signal comes with Jesus’ opening miracle, as he provides an abundance of new wine at a wedding in Cana. It’s as if we are being told, “One who has the power to renew Israel’s covenant with Yahweh has arrived!”

Near the end of chapter three, John the Baptist’s disciples express some displeasure about this turn of events. Their followers are leaving to follow Jesus. In response, John resumes the use of marriage metaphors. He likens Jesus’ ministry to the arrival of a bridegroom. *Israel’s* bridegroom.

For his own part, John will assume the role of the bridegroom’s friend. At weddings in ancient Israel, the groom selected a close companion to be his “shoshbin”- the rough equivalent of a contemporary “best man”. The “shoshbin” had several significant responsibilities. Pastor John Ortberg writes:

“The shoshbin... would often invite the people. He would accompany the groom to the ceremony. Then he had one last responsibility. On the final night of the wedding, he would stand guard over the tent where the bride waited for her groom. It would be dark, but the shoshbin recognized the groom’s voice when he heard it. So the shoshbin would stand aside, get out of the way. The groom would go into the tent and know the joy of claiming his bride. The friend of the groom had a different joy, the joy of serving the one he loved.”¹

As John the Baptist says of his privilege, “The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete.” (John 3:29)

¹ Taken from John Ortberg’s book *Life Changing Love*.

A Closer Look:

- 1) What is the nature of the dispute recorded in verses 25-26. What attitudes or assumptions might have fueled this argument?
- 2) Look at John's response to this in verses 27-30. Circle any key words that describe John's relationship with Jesus. Share with the group what you circled and why.
- 3) Verses 31-36 highlight why Jesus' ministry must "become greater". What does John's testimony here say about who Jesus is? Try making a "bullet point" list.

Making it Personal:

- 1) John describes his calling as one who listens for Jesus' voice so that he may be filled with joy at his coming. How do you personally practice listening for "the voice" of Jesus? How has that brought joy to your life?
- 2) In order for Christ to become "greater", John accepts that he must become "less" (v.30). Take a few minutes to prayerfully consider whether there are areas you need to become *less* so that the measure of Jesus' Spirit may become *greater* in your life.

The Passage: John 3:22-36

John 3:22 After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized. 23 Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were coming and being baptized. 24 (This was before John was put in prison.)

25 An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing. 26 They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—look, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him."

John 3:27 To this John replied, "A person can receive only what is given them from heaven. 28 You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him.' 29 The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. 30 He must become greater; I must become less."

John 3:31 The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. 32 He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. 33 Whoever has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. 34 For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. 35 The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. 36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.