

***He who comes from above is above all***

It's not easy to be upstaged by someone else; harder still if they take away your work, friends, supporters and clients. Few find it in themselves to rejoice in such circumstances, and John's remaining disciples are no exception. They expect John to be upset too. Not only has he lost disciples to Jesus (1.37), he



is now losing *all* (perhaps an exaggeration) his clients as well. But John does not share their disquiet. Not only does he rejoice greatly, but he describes his joy as complete. This is truly dying to self, and doing it to glorify Jesus.

What motivates John is the sure knowledge that both his and Jesus' ministry are from heaven (27), meaning the results are also from God. The fact that people are turning away from him to Jesus is evidence that his own ministry is now bearing fruit: his calling was always to point people to the one coming after him. John's success does not lead to self-aggrandisement but to further self-effacement, "he must increase, but I must decrease."

In the same way that John the Gospel writer added his own commentary to Jesus' words to Nicodemus, so here (31-36) he expands upon the Baptist's response to his disciples. The reason Jesus is greater than the Baptist is that he is from heaven, whereas John is from the earth (31). These words remind us of the meeting between John's mother Elizabeth and Jesus' mother Mary when the two men are still in the womb. Elizabeth, the older woman, humbly acknowledges that Mary's child is the greater: he is her Lord, having been conceived not of the will of man but under the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1.39-45). Just as he leaped for joy in Elizabeth's womb at his own first meeting with Jesus, so now John rejoices greatly at the welcome news of others

streaming to him.

Twice the Gospel writer declares that Jesus has come from above, from heaven, and is above all (31). The fact that John does not include a birth narrative has been called upon by sceptics as evidence that he knew nothing of it, which in turn supports their theory that Matthew and Luke invented the whole thing, and that Jesus' birth was just a normal human one. But everything we read here testifies that John not only knows that Jesus' origin is divine - unique among all men, but that he regards this as absolutely central to understanding who Jesus is. No one else can utter the words of God, only the one who has come from him (34, cf. 13). This places Jesus above every other prophet, of any other religion.

To believe the testimony of Jesus, necessarily including his claim to divinity, is to believe in God, and that he is true, resulting in eternal life. To not believe and obey that testimony is an affront to God, the consequence of which is truly fearful (36).

### **To ponder**

When we pray Wesley's covenant prayer we pray "let me be put aside for you." Are you ready for that?

### **To pray**

Heavenly Father, help me so to submit my life to you that I care nothing about what earthly rewards I receive, and draw no comparisons with others. May I, like John, decrease so that you might increase. I ask in Jesus' name and for your glory. Amen

### **Reflections**