

I want to begin this morning with a brief survey. I'm going to present you with a series of alternatives—represented by pictures on the screen—and I want you to choose which of the two alternatives you would prefer.

- If given the choice would you prefer one cookie or a stack of cookies?
- If given the choice would you prefer 1 \$100 bill or stack of \$100 bills?
- If given the choice would you prefer a small house or a larger house?
- If given the choice would you prefer a small closet or a large, walk-in closet?
- If given the choice would you prefer to fly economy or to fly first class?

I'm sure you know where I'm going with all of this...when pressed, more often than not, we want **more**, not less. We want:

- more choices
- more money
- more time
- more sleep...*just ten more minutes!*
- more vacations
- more freedom
- more influence
- more success
- more recognition

We want more square footage, not less; we want more leg room, not less. Why is it that we can be quite content with what we have, *until* we realize that someone else has **more**? *If* I could score that goal, get

that promotion, take that vacation, wear that name-brand, *then* I'd be happy. *All I'm asking for is a little bit **more**.*

I grew up in the 80's, and it was during this era that infomercials been to infiltrate television. The Ginsu knife was a marketing success! With it you could slice bread so thin that you could almost see through it, it was so durable you could cut through a tin can, use it to chop wood, and still have a sharp enough edge to slice through a tomato.

How much money would you pay for a knife like this? But just wait, there's **more**...they'll also throw in a fork you can use for carving meat, a 6-in-1 kitchen tool that peels and slices. And that's not all, there's **more**, they'll even throw in 6 precision steak knives, and a spiral slicer. I had never heard of spiral slicer, but the moment we saw it, we knew we needed one.

Sadly, our family never ordered the Ginsu miracle set; we had to make do with regular bread knives, steak knives, and potato peelers; I'm still in therapy because of it.

We like our all-we-can-eat buffets and our Super Big Gulps—because Big Gulps aren't nearly big enough.

We live in a culture of excess; we are being told, everyday, that we need **more** in order to be happy. **More** is good. **More** is better. How much is enough? **Just a little bit more.**

The irony is that we live at a time—and in a place—where, per capita, we have more excess and luxury than any other people in history. And sadly, this **more** has not led to satisfaction; we are

perhaps **more** stressed out, jealous, and unsatisfied than previous generations. If **more** is good, **more** is better, why are we so miserable? Perhaps because “**more**” overpromises and underdelivers?

This morning, I’m going to continue in our preaching series through the Gospel of John, and once again we come face to face with John the Baptist. When the Baptist first arrived on the scene, we saw him pointing away from himself to Jesus, and now, in his last appearance in John’s Gospel, he doing the same thing—directing people’s attention to Jesus.

If you have a Bible with you, let me encourage you to turn with me to John 3:22-36; if you are using the blue Bible, located in the seat rack in front of you, you can find her text on page 862.

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.”

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.”

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.

Vs. 22-26 set the stage, and the rest of our text can be divided into two sections—vs. 27-30, and 31-36. I want to deal quickly with vs. 22-26, before dealing with the two major sections.

1. Vs. 22-26: An argument erupted between the Baptist’s disciples and an unnamed Jew over matters of ceremonial washing. We aren’t told the exact nature of the argument, only that it was tied to ceremonial washing.

But after reporting this dispute, the Baptist’s disciples raise a concern of their own. Jesus’ star was on the rise. The crowds were shifting their attention from John and his disciples to Jesus—vs. 26 sums up their perspective: “*everyone is going to Him.*” This was a both a statement of fact, and, a statement that revealed hurt, resentment, and frustration. They had been the hottest ticket in town; as the crowds gathered in numbers, John’s disciples felt important, valuable. They

had hoped their ministry would continue to grow—they wanted **more**—but with the arrival of Jesus, they began to experience “**less**”.

The goal is to get to the top and stay at the top. When interest begins to fade, in who we are, or what we can offer, we re-invent ourselves in order to stay relevant. This is how it works in business. If you can't keep up with the trends, and meet the needs of consumers, you're destined for the recycling bin; as in business, so in life.

2. Vs. 27-30: Into this way of thinking, in vs. 27-30, John Baptist speaks a contrary word: “*A person can receive only what is given them from heaven.*” Stop for just a moment, to consider John's words...do we actually believe him?

The whole thrust of our Western culture works in the opposite direction. Every day we are bombarded with the idea that there is no God, and in a world without God, we are encouraged to create ourselves, and the world around us. Most Westerners believe that by an act of one's will—the application of one's intelligence, creativity, and perseverance—we can be who we want to be and accomplish whatever we set our mind to. There is no heaven, and there are no limits.

“*A person can receive only what is given them from heaven.*” In one respect, this reply explains everything. In John's waning influence, God was at work; similarly, in Jesus' growing influence, God was at work. John had what God had given him, and no more; Jesus

had what the Father had given Him, and no less.¹

John the Baptist went on to clarify what he meant. Vs. 28-29, “*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.*”

John wasn't trying to make a name for himself, or to “build his own brand.” Here in vs. 28, the Baptist reminds his disciples that this was always the goal, to point away from himself to the One sent by God to rescue and save. John's role was to get people ready for Jesus, the Messiah.

Rather than angling to get back in the spotlight, John experienced joy in watching Jesus take His place. John uses the illustration of a “best man” at a wedding. In Jewish tradition, the “best man” handled many of the wedding details, including, bringing the bride to the groom.² The best man knows that he is the best man, not the groom; the bride doesn't belong to him, and the wedding day isn't “his day”. The best man plays his role and then stands back, full of joy as the bride and groom take centre stage.

One of the themes running throughout the Old Testament is that of Israel as bride and God as groom. Isaiah 54:5 says, “*For your Maker is your husband—the Lord Almighty is his name*”. Isaiah 62:5, “*As a*

¹ Leon Morris, *The New International Commentary On The New Testament: The Gospel According To John*, 212.

² Morris, 213.

young man marries a young woman, so will your Builder marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.”³

In John’s analogy, Jesus is the groom, with humanity as His bride. John was a witness to what God was doing through Jesus and he refused to let his ego get in the way. Typically, as one’s influence fades, pain, jealousy, or a competitive spirit, grows. In John the Baptist we see quite the opposite.

John knew the joy of playing his role and fulfilling God’s purpose. In doing what God called John to do, he experienced a joy and satisfaction that he couldn’t have known otherwise. John had a front-row-seat to watch God’s salvation work itself out—through Jesus, in the world. John’s disciples expected their master to be gutted by news of Jesus’ popularity; in truth, this is what John hoped would happen.

Morris writes, “The last words of the Baptist to be recorded in this Gospel form surely one of the greatest utterances that ever fell from human lips. It is not particularly easy in this world to gather followers...But when they are gathered it is infinitely harder to... firmly insist that they go after another. It is the measure of John’s greatness that he did just that. Jesus, he says, ‘must’ become greater...It is never the part of the servant to displace the Master. This lesson is something that must be learned in every age.”⁴

³ C.f. Jeremiah 2:2; Ezekiel 16:8; Hosea 2:19-20; etc.

⁴ Morris, 214.

⁵ Greg Ogden and Daniel Meyer, *Leadership Essentials*, 47.

Application: It’s important to recognize that the way John’s words apply to himself is markedly different from the way they apply to us. “*He must become greater, I must become less*” was a vocational choice for John; his role in redemptive history was to prepare Israel for the coming Messiah. None of us are faced with John’s choice, because none of us stand where John stood.

If we take John’s example and words more generally, he didn’t allow his temporary popularity to create a false sense of self-importance.⁵ Instead, John found joy in aligning his life with God’s purposes.

illus: There are many ways that the pursuit of “more” can play itself out in your life; there are many ways that it can play itself out in mine. If I were to let ego, pride, or the pursuit of “more” drive my life, *I may accomplish more but experience less satisfaction.*

Before I began to work here at North Shore Alliance, I was working for a large church in Calgary; when I left the church it was roughly 4 times the size of this church. Perhaps you’ve come to believe that pastors are so spiritual that they are immune to the impulse of “more;” I promise you, nothing could be further from the truth.

For a pastor, the desire for “**more**” is frequently tied to all the same markers that businesses measure—more people in the pews, more money in the offering plate, more ministries, more staff, more influence, more impact. Preaching to thousands, leading a team of

hundreds, being recognized nationally, having a global impact—this is the **more** that beckoned to me.

But one day in December of 2005, God spoke to me about resigning—it was time to leave my post in Calgary. The question is, why would I leave when everything was going so well? When I told my Sr. leaders that I was leaving, one of them said to me, “*Mark, if you just stay with us a little longer, one day all of this will be yours.*”

A person can only receive what is given them from heaven. Which is to say, I am not self-made, nor am I meant to live a self-directed life. For Jesus to “increase,” and me to “decrease,” requires me to let go of the reigns. It means giving Jesus full access to the focus, direction, priorities, pursuits, and loves of my life. Hear me when I say this—the degree to which you align yourself with Jesus, will determine the degree to which you experience joy. Joy comes in alignment with the Father’s will. And so we pray, *Father, your will be done, on earth, in my life, as it is in heaven.*

When our life is aligned with God’s, we experience joy and freedom. Joy, in knowing that we are living out God’s purposes in the world, and freedom to be ourselves instead of wishing we were someone else. The joy God gives makes it possible to know someone who has been given “**more**”—more money, time, gifts, or influence—and to still live free from a spirit of jealousy. John knew this joy, I’m growing in this joy, and the Holy Spirit can impart this joy to you.

In John the Baptist we see both *less and more*. Less jealousy, pride, and competition; more joy, freedom, and peace. Joy comes through alignment with Jesus’ purposes—our lives in sync with His.

3. Vs. 31-36: The words contained in vs. 31 and following come from John the Gospel writer, not John the Baptist. John—the Gospel writer—picks up on what the Baptist says and does in order to turn our attention to Jesus. Remember, John writes his Gospel so that we might “*believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing [we] may have life in his name.*”⁶

John refers to Jesus as “*the one who comes from above;*” this is a reference to His heavenly origin—Jesus is fully human *and* fully God. Because Jesus is from above, He speaks with God’s perspective and authority. John the Baptist, though important and valuable, is from below, and is therefore limited in knowledge.

Vs. 32: But in spite of this fact, people reject Jesus’ testimony. One author writes, “John has already made it clear in this chapter that we must all be reborn. In our natural condition we will not accept Christ’s witness. The world, as a whole, is not interested in the truth that Jesus came to bring.”⁷

vs. 33-34: To affirm Jesus, and His words, then, is to affirm God Himself—because Jesus is God, He speaks the words of God. As God, no one else can reveal truth like Jesus can; as a Human, no one else can represent us to God in the way that Jesus can. Jesus isn’t one

⁶ John 20:31.

⁷ Morris, 217.

prophet among many, and He doesn't reveal one path among many. The truth Jesus speaks stands above every other truth claim. The way Jesus provides is the only way to God. The life Jesus offers is the only life that will last forever.

In vs. 34 John tells us that the Father has given the Spirit to Jesus without measure; there was nothing in Jesus to limit the Spirit's access or power. This perfect communion between the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit guarantees the truth of His words.⁸

vs. 35: *“The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands.”* And therefore, we can trust Him in every situation, with everything that we are and have.

vs. 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.”*

Once again, John calls his readers to put their trust in Jesus Christ for He alone can rescue and save. John goes so far as to lay out the matter in black and white terms, for there are only two alternatives: those who embrace Jesus experience eternal life, those who deny Jesus will experience separation from God.

In many respects, for those who place their trust in Jesus, death is like a door, leading from this life into a life of perfect communion with God and others that will never end. But not all who die will

experience this perfect communion: *“whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.”*

D.A. Carson writes, “God's wrath is not some impersonal principle of retribution, but the personal response of a holy God who comes to his own world, sadly fallen into rebellion, and finds few who want anything to do with him.”⁹ God's wrath has less to do with anger and more to do with justice. If He is going to set things right, everyone and everything that stands against His purposes must be dealt with.

And here's the thing, no one has to experience God's wrath, He doesn't want anyone to come under judgement—that's why He sent Jesus to rescue and save. There is a choice to be made, a choice for you to make—life or death; separation from God, or, the experience of His embrace. *Which choice will you make?*

Worship: One Thing

Prayer/Final Blessing

⁸ Morris, 218.

⁹ D.A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According To John*, 214.