

**REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE : SUNDAY EVENING 24 JULY 2011**  
**INDUCTION-SERVICE REV. C. VREY**  
**THEME :**  
**CHRIST JESUS ALWAYS FIRST!**

**Sing before:** Scripture Versification 15-7:1,2 [Revelation 3:7-13]

*Let us commence this meeting with God by declaring openly to one another and to God:*

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Beloved grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

**Amen**

Psalm of praise: Psalm 48:1,5

**Prayer:**

- **Doxology**
- **Worship**
- **Confession of sins**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Gratitude**
- **Prayer for the need of the congregation of the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises**
- **General prayer**
- **Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.**

**Amen**

Psalm 45:1,9,10

**Scripture reading:** John 3:22-36

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

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

**24 For John had not yet been thrown into prison.**

**25 Then there arose a dispute between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purification.**

**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!"**

**27 John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven.**

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

**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.**

**30 "He must increase, but I must decrease.**

**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.**

**32 "And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony.**

**33 "He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true.**

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

**35 "The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand.**

**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."**

**Scripture text:** John 3:27-30

**27 John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven.**

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

**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.**

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Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

We humans have the natural nature of focussing the attention onto ourselves. Because they like attention, some people do it purposefully. Others do it with exaggerated humbleness because they do not want to remain unnoticed. This tendency is part of the original sin. Notice what children, aged around three to four years old, do when they discover that adults like what they do. The moment they know that they are the focal point of attention, they will continue doing whatever amuses the adults.

This is a disposition that has already occurred in the humans of the Biblical times. Cain could not bear the Lord accepting Abel and his offers, and rejecting his. Joseph's brothers were green with envy because their father openly loved Joseph more than them. Joseph, in his turn, enjoyed considering himself more important than his brothers was and relished telling them about his dreams. Saul became exceedingly up in arms because better songs of praise were sung about David than about him, who was king of Israel.

Till today this disposition remains with mankind. Children, who grew used to having their way when they were small, will as adults, also often want their own way. They do not like to be thwarted. They want to have the final say. They want to have the best work, own the largest house and the most expensive car. Should they not be able to acquire it and everybody's attention is not focused onto them, they feel out and depressed or do all sorts of things to belittle and humiliate those who are more successful than them.

The devil really likes this human tendency. This tendency of people to be the focal point of everybody's interest has already caused a lot of mental anguish. We are of course aware of all the grief this disposition has caused in Biblical times. And Satan also planned using this disposition in aid of preventing the arrival of God's Kingdom.

John the Baptist was not well loved by the Jews. Brothers, sisters and children, most of them Jewish, did not like John at all. In the first instance he went around preaching that people would convert, then God would forgive their sins and that they should be baptized. To convince the Jews they were God's chosen people and that they should come to conversion was something they did not easily accept.

And then to also tell them that they should be baptized as confirmation of their conversion was, not because it was something unknown to them, but in fact because they knew it, something ridiculous to them. When a heathen adopted the Jewish faith he was first baptized before being circumcised. By this baptism received by the heathen he acknowledged leaving behind his heathen faith and idolatry in aid of serving the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob. Because of this understanding of the baptism, many Jews were not agreeable in heeding John. They, in fact, were not heathens but Jews!

Not long after John started his teachings Jesus appeared on the scene. About forty days after being baptized by John, Jesus also commenced preaching. To the amazement of many and to the dismay of the Jews, Jesus' sermons followed the same lines of John's preaching. Jesus also called the people to conversion. And then it became known that Jesus and His disciples were baptizing people.

It was here that the Satan had the idea that he could, due to the Jews' dissatisfaction about both John's and Jesus' sermons and baptisms, prevent the installation of God's Kingdom on earth. A Jew had an argument with the followers of John about the purification. What exactly they had to say to each other is unknown to us. We can at least deduct, because it also indicated purification, that the baptism practiced by John was mentioned in this discussion. It was exactly here where the devil, by this argument of the Jew, planned to cause a dispute between John and Jesus. The Jew commented that Jesus has also started baptizing people. We, at any rate, know that in fact it was not Jesus baptizing, but His disciples doing it under His command.

To the followers of John it did not matter whether Jesus was baptizing or not. What bothered them was the fact of Jesus doing it on His own. Therefore they approached 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!"** From these words we deduct that they considered John more important than Jesus. They called John "Rabbi" and did not even mention the name of Jesus. According to their viewpoint Jesus, because John also baptized Him, should have rather become a follower of John. To these followers John was the one everybody should look up to, and not to Jesus. Now they wanted John to do something about this matter - it just could not be tolerated!

In contrast to what his followers wanted, John rendered an answer by which the spotlight was not directed onto him, but fully onto Jesus Christ. John's answer is the utmost example of how everybody spreading God's Word must humble him or herself and elevate Christ. The world does not revolve around the person preaching, but around Christ who should be preached. Listen to this tetramorous answer by John -the first part of the answer: **A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven.** John's answer really differs from what the Satan wanted. He does not fly into a temper filled with jealousy. He accepts God's decision. Nobody can do the work done by Jesus unless it is granted to him from heaven. And John knows that the heavenly Father Himself installed Jesus as the Christ. The day He was baptized he (John) saw the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus. Therefore He also has the authorization to call people towards Him, to teach about the kingdom of God and to baptize them.

Beloved, this religious persuasion of John should be the same to every believer. We may never be jealous about somebody else, should the Lord have granted those person greater abilities or more influence than to us. The Lord grants through the Holy Spirit His gifts as He wants and knows what is good and right. Therefore we may never consider Him to be unjust or partial.

Because the Lord granted to him from heaven to do it, John, at any rate, knew that he was a prophet and a preacher. The Lord who grants His gifts can also revoke it when He knows that the specific servant has completed his work. Should Jesus then have a grater image and more followers than John, it is because his work, as the one whom had to prepare the way for the Lord, is now nearing completion. Because the Lord blessed John's work, his work was valuable as the way was now readied for Jesus to install the Kingdom of God.

Brothers, sisters and children, it is only through the Lord's grace granted to us that He showed us who we are and that we do the work we do. By the grace of the Lord you are now the church he made out of you. And to the Lord alone goes the praise and gratitude for Him choosing to use me, a sinner, to work in this congregation of Him, for as long as He wants. All of us are only servants to the Kingdom of God and Jesus determines where and for how long each one of us will work. And it is the responsibility of every servant to cause the spotlight to fall onto Jesus the Saviour of the church, and never onto himself.

In the second part of the answer John calls upon his own testimony: **"You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before Him.'**

Neither the continual bickering of the priests or the flattery of his own followers caused John to depart from his testimony about Jesus. He kept to it that he is not the Christ, but only the one sent before Him.

By means of this answer John points out to his followers that they did not listen very well. They themselves state that John preached about Jesus. Now, in fact, John is reminding them about that testimony. When you remember what I said about Jesus, then you will realize how wrong you are in your arguments. Did I not tell you that I am not the Christ? How can you then hold me above Him? As I have told you that I am just the one sent before Him, how can you now

find it so strange that I yield to Him? Should Jesus now start having greater acclaim it thus means that I have completed my task.

Beloved, what a moment of richness in comfort this must have been to John. He was sent before to prepare the way for the Lord. And now he learnt that the Lord Jesus indeed has begun preaching. Apart from these few followers of John who had the wrong image of him, many people understood that there was no competition between John and Christ. Jesus, because He came from the heavens above, is much greater than John is. John belongs to earth and is not even worthy of taking off Jesus' shoes. Thus John has deep internal peace. He did not deceive the people. It is only these few who still are under the wrong impression about the position of John in relation to Jesus. Therefore he again reiterates to them that he is not the Christ, just the one sent before Jesus.

Beloved congregation, every minister has the sole task of pointing the people towards Jesus. Never may his followers be more than the followers of Jesus. May the Holy Spirit prevent and convert every minister should he desire a greater image than Jesus. There should be great joy to every minister when people, due to his imperfect words, arrive at the Lord Jesus.

Brothers, sisters and children, from the third part of the answer it is in fact very clear that John was not disappointed or had any regrets about what was taking place. On the contrary he said that he was bursting with joy. He explained his joy using a beautiful example.

He, John, is not the bridegroom. He is just a friend of the Bridegroom. Jesus is the Bridegroom and the bride belongs to Him. John's followers said that everybody is going to Jesus. John confirms that this is what should at any rate happen. To who else should they go? Because He is the Bridegroom, He has the right of drawing people towards Himself. When John introduces Jesus as the Bridegroom of the bride the words of the Old Testament are echoing whereby Israel is named as the bride of God. With Jesus named as the bridegroom you cannot but else notice the Godliness of Jesus. Indeed, Jesus is the Son of God who, so that His bride, the church, may realize how much He really loves her, became a human.

It is true that John baptized the bride with water. But it is not the water that cleanses the bride from her sins. Jesus Himself cleanses His bride because He baptizes with the Holy Spirit, which He received without any limitation. And He grants His Spirit to all whom He atoned for on the cross. Therefore the church must be called the church of Jesus Christ and may never be called the church of John. He, because He paid in full with His precious blood for His Church, is the Bridegroom of the church.

As friend of the Bridegroom can and may John never focus the attention onto himself. By his teachings and baptism he introduced the people to Jesus. By his teachings he related how good a Bridegroom Jesus is. Jesus will take His bride for Himself and will, through His Spirit, wonderfully beautify her. She will have no stain nor wrinkle because He wants to bring her facing His Father in the heaven and knows that His Father will only be satisfied with something 100% perfect. The people bowing to the Lord Jesus will never ever regret it. They can be assured of a relationship that will never be broken by Jesus. He will never disappoint them nor break their hearts.

Brothers, sisters and children, it is a very great privilege that the one who has the order to preach may be called a friend of the Bridegroom. May the Holy Spirit control every other minister, and me, in such a way that Jesus would always be taught as the Bridegroom. May you, because He is your Saviour and Redeemer, always observe and follow Him.

Seeing that Jesus is thus the Bridegroom of the church, it cannot be anyway else. Christ must always increase and John must decrease. The increase of Christ's greatness is not something that must just be accepted because nothing can be done about it. Although Jesus' increasing is unavoidable it is something that must be accepted and awaited with the greatest of joy. Therefore John is filled with joy, because Jesus, the Lamb of God, is increasingly gaining His rightful place amongst the people readying themselves for the arrival of the Lord.

The fact of Jesus increasing is what was awaited right from the start. Through Him the Kingdom of God unquestionably broke into this shattered world. What the followers of John are now observing is nothing in comparison to what still is to happen. It is not only the chosen amongst the Jews that will be the Kingdom of God. Through the proclaiming of Jesus Christ the Kingdom of God will expand over the whole earth, because from every nation tribe and language there are people belonging to Jesus Christ and who will become, and be the Kingdom of God. All over the world Jesus Christ will have a great following.

Whatever honour and praise we render onto people, it must necessarily diminish and become faint in the light of Jesus Christ. Nobody is ever greater than Jesus. In fact, the Father loves His Son Jesus and handed everything to the hand of His Son.

We all are in the hands of Jesus. And what a comforting privilege it is to be allowed to be in the hands of Jesus. They are hands that were pierced because He bought us for Himself. They are hands that bled because He loves us to the utmost. Therefore we can know that we are forever safe in His hands.

In this life matters do not revolve around us. No matter how important the work we do is, we always remain only the servants of our Lord Jesus Christ. May He, through our work and words, always be put first. May we always become smaller behind Him, because it is only through Him that one day we may face His and our Father to praise and glorify Him till eternity.

**Amen!**

Closing prayer.

Closing Song: Scripture Versification 15-7:4,5,6 [Revelation 3:7-13]

The Lord bless and keep you, the Lord make his face shine on you, the Lord turn His countenance to you and give peace.

**Amen**

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 24 July 2011  
 Scripture Modern King James Version