

"He must increase"

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The disciples of John were jealous for his sake, and felt that a wrong was being done him in that the multitudes were now flocking to Jesus, instead of to him. But no trace of jealousy was awakened in his breast. He likened himself to the friend of the bridegroom who found his joy complete in the happiness of the one whom he had served. Then he said of Jesus, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

At first thought it seems as though that was the most easy and natural thing in the world for John to say. We think of the difference between Christ and John,—the latter a mere man, and the former the Son of God,—and it seems very easy to say, **"He must increase, but I must decrease."** We imagine that we should have said the same thing, not realizing that **the answer of John furnishes one of the grandest instances of preferring another above self that there is on record.** Consequently we lose the lesson that we should learn from it.

Let us not forget that Jesus was here on earth as a man. He was man then, as He is even now in heaven "the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). To all appearances He was only a man. Nothing in His outward appearance, nothing that could be discerned by the senses, indicated that He was "God with us."

John was a great prophet, and he had preached to many thousands. Now Jesus comes, another great prophet, and He has the ears of the people. The disciples of John could see no difference between John and Jesus—no reason why John should not have the same power and influence as Jesus. Even John, who knew that Christ was preferred before him, had not seen Him except as a man among men. Nevertheless his word was, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

This marks the true follower of Christ. "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Your name give glory" (Ps. 115:1).

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee," is more than mere rhyme to the Christian. Self-effacement, that only Christ may be seen, is true Christianity. **Christ must be lifted up, and self must be abased.**

Now as one thinks of Christ in glory, the leader of a host of heaven, it seems as though one could not think anything else than that He alone should be exalted. But Christ does not yet appear to us in glory. The saints who in glory shall give honor to Christ alone, will

have learned to do the same to Him in His humiliation. There is something intensely practical in being able to say, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

"The Word was made flesh." Christ has forever identified Himself with men. Their cause is His. Whatever good or ill is done to men He counts as being done to Him. (Matt. 25:35-45). The man who turns the poor beggar away with harsh words, sees nothing but an insignificant man; but Christ says that He is the one who is slighted. The one who in the kindness of his heart receives a needy wayfarer, does not realize that he is sheltering Christ; but so it is. **Christ has so completely identified Himself with humanity, that no act can be done to a fellow-man without being done to Him. Our treatment of our fellows shows exactly how we would treat the Lord Himself. Not only so, but it shows how we do treat Him.**

Now let us say, "He must increase, but I must decrease." What does it mean? It means to "be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another" (Rom. 12:10). It means obedience to the exhortation, "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself" (Phil. 2:3). It means the regarding of others just as though we could see "the Lord of glory" standing in their place.

There is wonderful help for us in putting ourselves actually in John's place as regards our fellows. When tempted to envy another; when the thought is suggested that another has more honor and attention than we have, and that he even has it at our expense, what a blessed peace and content comes to us when we put Christ in his place, and say from the heart, "He must increase, but I must decrease." It must be so; it is absolutely necessary, from the very nature of things, that Christ be exalted above us. It should be a pleasure to us to acknowledge that fact, since our fullness of joy is found only in His supremacy over all. Remembering this, and also that He identifies Himself with every man, becomes delightfully easy to say of our brother who has more honor than we "He must increase, but I must decrease." Then instead of the demand of unrest that continually gnaws at the hearts of those who are ambitious, "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7). **Then indeed will Christ be lifted up even in us**, and we ourselves shall be made sharers of His exaltation.

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