

The Baptizing Christ – Luke 3:15-18

Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis

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I. INTRODUCTION

Have you ever known a person in your life whose wisdom and grasp of an interesting subject kept you on the edge of your seat hungry for what they were going to tell you next? I've shared with you in the past about a person who was like this in my life, my high school teacher, Mr. C. I talk about him so much that one of these days I'm going to have to put his picture up so you can put a face with the name. Mr. C. was one of those people who possessed incredible wisdom and had a knack for sharing it in an exciting and interesting way. One his favorite topics was the end times. He love to analyze Scripture and current events to get insight into the possible timing of the great tribulation and Christ's return. He had studied it intensely and was always on the lookout for clues and insights about things happening in the world that might match up with Scripture. As he presented to us what he'd discovered in Scripture and possible applications to things currently happening in the world, he created within myself and many other people excitement and anticipation that Christ's return could be very near.

In fact, he was so convincing that there was a point where I was certain Christ was going to return before I made it through my 20's. Mr. C.'s wisdom and insight and grasp of God's Word drew me in and left me in a state of expectation and about Christ's soon return. The only problem was, his applications to current events were not airtight and since I'm still here at age 45, he was a bit off on his timing. You see, Mr. C. was just a man like you and I, and though he was very wise and godly and God used him powerfully in my life and the lives of many other people, he suffered from the limited and cloudy perspective all human beings have, no matter how wise and insightful they are. When compared with the wisdom and knowledge and perspective of the God of the universe, Mr. C. was not even close.

This is much the same situation we have as we return to John the Baptist today in Luke chapter 3, verses 15 through 18. Go ahead and turn there in your Bibles, if you would. John the Baptist was a very impressive man, strange though he was, and he spoke God's words of wisdom boldly and courageously. In fact, Scripture

tells us that he was a prophet operating in the spirit and power of that famous prophet from the past, Elijah. And God was using him powerfully to call people to true repentance as they confessed their sins and were baptized by him for forgiveness of sins. And as John fulfilled God's call on his life, he left people in a state of expectation about what God was about to do...he left them wondering if perhaps he himself was the Christ, the Messiah, the promised Savior of the Jewish people. But in our passage today, John makes it clear that in spite of all this, he's just a man and is nothing compared to the coming Christ.

Let's begin by reading Luke chapter 3, verses 15 through 18:

15 Now while the people were in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he was the Christ, 16 John answered and said to them all, "As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17 "His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." 18 So with many other exhortations he preached the gospel to the people.

May the Lord bless the reading of his Word and prepare our hearts to understand it by the power of his Holy Spirit.

II. JOHN'S BAPTISM COMPARED TO THE CHRIST'S (Luke 3:15-18)

We see in these verses that excitement was building, anticipation was growing, and people were getting the clear sense that God was on the move through this peculiar man named John. We're told that all people were wondering in their hearts if John actually might be the Christ himself. John apparently wasn't oblivious either to this speculation on the part of the people, and he decided to answer with words the question they were all asking in their hearts. And he did this by comparing the baptisms he was performing with the baptisms the Christ would perform and comparing his power with the power of the coming Christ.

The coming Christ is mightier than John

Let's deal with the comparison of power first. As impressive and godly and bold and courageous John the Baptist was from a human perspective, when compared to the Christ, guess what? There was no comparison. John describes himself as not even worthy to untie the sandal of the coming Christ. If you think about it, untying a sandal would probably be one of the most humbling tasks a person could do for a king, but John recognizes that even doing that simple and humbling job for the Christ was way beyond his pay scale.

Consider this: a person more fully surrendered to God and walking in his purposes cannot be found than John the Baptist. And yet even he is not worthy to untie the sandal of the coming Christ. We see here that even though John was walking closely with God and in step with his purposes, he had no illusions that he was worthy of God's favor or was in any way comparable to the power and majesty of the coming Christ. By God's grace John was operating in true humility that didn't try to steal any glory from God, but instead pointed all people to the Christ rather than himself. And John understood that the coming Christ was not going to be just an extra-powerful prophet with a strong dose of the Holy Spirit. Instead, he recognized that the Christ would be someone all-together different, mightier and more powerful by far than any human being, so much so that even a very godly person would not be worthy to untie his sandal.

John only baptizes with water

John also helped the people understand that he was not the Christ, by comparing the baptisms he performed with the baptisms the Christ would perform. John performed water baptisms. He invited people to repent for forgiveness of sins and then be baptized in the water as a picture of the washing away of their sins. But his baptisms were just that: a picture. There was no magic in his baptisms. God was doing the forgiveness of sins as people repented, and the baptisms John was performing were just a physical picture of what God was doing spiritually for them on the inside. John's job was just to prepare people's hearts through repentance for the coming of the real baptizer, the Christ.

The coming Christ baptizes with the Holy Spirit and fire

In sharp contrast to John's water baptisms, the coming Christ would baptize with much more than just water. The Christ would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. John baptized with water picturing the forgiveness and washing away of sins God was granting as people came to him in true repentance for their sins. In contrast, the coming Christ would baptize with the Holy Spirit, actually granting the forgiveness himself, bringing life out of death and placing the Spirit permanently inside human beings.

You might say that John was much like someone who drives a person to the doctor's office for surgery and takes them where they need to be. He was helping them get ready for surgery. But in no circumstances did he perform the actual surgery himself, and if he had tried the results would have been terminal. John's job was just to get people ready for surgery and deliver them to the surgeon, and even that was done only in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Christ would be the actual surgeon who alone could perform the surgery successfully.

So notice that the coming Christ would baptize with two things: with the Holy Spirit and with fire. These are actually two separate types of baptism that Jesus performs. Let's deal with Holy Spirit baptism first. What does it mean to be baptized with the Holy Spirit and how do we choose that option? Well fortunately, Scripture gives us a very clear picture of the Holy Spirit baptism that the Christ performs. If we move forward in time a bit, Jesus, whom we now know is the Christ, spoke of this coming baptism by the Spirit just before he ascended to heaven after his resurrection from the dead. Listen to what Jesus says to the apostles in Acts 1, verse 4 to 5.:

4 Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

This baptism with the Holy Spirit that the Christ would perform, as spoken of by John in our passage today, was coming within just a few days after Christ's ascension. And it came in the first part of Acts chapter 2 during the Jewish festival of Pentecost, when those who had already believed in Jesus received the

Holy Spirit, and his first arrival was shown with tongues of fire distributing themselves among the believers and as he caused them to start speaking in other languages. These were the first baptisms in the Holy Spirit that Jesus performed and all those who had already believed in Jesus Christ were baptized this way.

Now as the other people standing around saw the miraculous thing that was happening and heard Peter's speech about Jesus Christ and his work on the cross, they asked Peter, "What shall we do?" What's the take-away for us? Listen to what Peter said in Acts 2:38-39 about they should do and how they could also receive the Holy Spirit:

8 Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 "For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself."

Peter's message was clear: To be baptized by Jesus Christ with the Holy Spirit, repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Now we know from many other passages of Scripture that Peter didn't mean here that water baptism itself saves a person and brings baptism by the Holy Spirit. Instead, it's repentance and belief in the name of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord that brings salvation and baptism with the Spirit. Water baptism is simply a picture and a testimony to others of what God does at that moment of repentance and faith in Jesus, bringing people from spiritual death (under the water) to spiritual life (out of the water); washing away their sins; and baptizing them in the Holy Spirit.

And notice that forgiveness of sins and baptism with the Spirit through repentance and faith in Christ is for all people: ***"...for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to himself."***

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord, repenting of their sin and believing in Jesus death on the cross for our sins and resurrection from the dead, is forgiven of their sins and baptized by Christ with Holy Spirit. New spiritual life is born and the Holy Spirit comes to take up permanent residence in us.

Now some will argue that all believers in Christ receive the Spirit at salvation, but that baptism with the Spirit is a separate occurrence that always includes

speaking in tongues. But consider what Paul says in speaking to all the believers in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 12, verse 13. He says:

13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

ALL true believers in Jesus Christ, ALL true members of the body of Christ have been baptized by one Spirit...past tense...have been baptized. We've also ALL been made to drink of one Spirit...past tense as well. Jesus, the Christ, baptizes with the Holy Spirit all who repent and believe in him at the moment of salvation, when they cross over from spiritual death to spiritual life and the Holy Spirit moves in to stay.

All will be baptized by the Christ

But back in our Luke passage, John also mentioned another type of baptism that Jesus performs...a baptism with fire. Because the reality is, all people will be baptized by the Christ, either with the Holy Spirit now or with fire in the future. You may have noticed that John used a very vivid description of the Christ holding a winnowing fork which he's using in the harvesting of wheat. John describes him as thoroughly clearing his threshing floor, gathering the wheat into his barn, but burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Just a little background here on the traditional process of threshing and winnowing wheat might be helpful. The threshing floor was the place where the harvested wheat, including the straw and the wheat head, was taken in order to separate the wheat grain from the rest, which was known as the chaff. Winnowing was the process of separating the wheat grain from the chaff. In ancient times winnowing was typically done in the evening when the wind was more likely to be blowing. An article on www.bible-history.com describes the process this way: "When the grain and straw, not as yet separated, are thrown into the air, the wind causes the mass of material to fall as follows: Since the grain is the heaviest, it naturally falls [first]. The straw is blown to the side into a heap, and the lighter chaff and the dust are carried beyond into a flattened windrow."

So with this threshing and winnowing analogy, John gives us a picture of the coming Christ who will baptize people with either the Holy Spirit or with fire. Baptism with the Holy Spirit is associated by John with the development of wheat grain, which will one day be separated from the chaff and gathered into the Christ's barn. Baptism with fire is associated with what happens to chaff after the winnowing process of wheat; it's burned up with fire. John was hinting here of the very different roles the coming Christ would have at his first coming, versus his second coming at the end of all things. The Christ was coming now to offer salvation and baptism with the Spirit to all who would repent and believe in him. But he would one day come again in his full power and majesty as the righteous Judge to baptize with fire all those who have rejected his Holy Spirit baptism. And that will be a day of unquenchable fire, referring to the terrifying reality of hell for all those who have not taken refuge in the Christ. Jesus later specifically connected that phrase "unquenchable fire" to hell in Mark chapter 9, verses 43 to 48.

John's message was clear. I am not the Christ. I am simply the messenger, the one appointed by God to prepare the way for the coming Christ who will go way beyond my water baptism to baptize you with either the Holy Spirit or fire. It's time to choose your baptism. And depending on what you choose, you can either be wheat gathered into God's barn or chaff burned with unquenchable fire. John didn't shy away from difficult truths. He preached the gospel boldly to all who came to him and the gospel he preached was all about Jesus Christ and how people would respond to him.

III. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

Fortunately, most of you here today have already decided on your response to Jesus Christ. You've decided that you'd rather be a grain of wheat gathered into God's barn than chaff burned in unquenchable fire. By God's grace you've engaged in repentance and faith in Jesus Christ's death on the cross for your sins and resurrection from the dead and he has baptized you with the Holy Spirit. Do you know what that means for you today?

It means that your sins have been nailed to the cross and forgiven forever (Colossians 2:13-15). They're part of your old life now and can never separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus your Lord

(Romans 8:38-39). Don't ever let the difficulties of life lead you to doubt God's steadfast love for you.

It means that because you're in Christ there is therefore now no condemnation or wrath waiting for you now or in the future (Romans 8:1-2). There's the discipline of your loving Father who will do what it takes to keep you on the good path that leads to life, but there's no wrath or judgment or waning of God's love for you (Hebrews 12:7-11).

It means that you have God himself in the person of the Holy Spirit living inside you right now; experiencing your struggles right along with you; groaning with you in the hard times of life; communicating your true needs to the Father continually, enabling you to understand and apply God's Word, giving you the ability to recognize truth from error, giving you the power to say no to sin and leave it behind; comforting you in your afflictions; empowering you to do God's will boldly and courageously; and so much more.

Are you living and operating in these new realities today? I don't know about you, but I easily lose sight of the truths of my new identity and power in Christ. It's a daily struggle to push back the lies Satan starts whispering to me as soon as I wake up and stumble down the stairs to my warm shower and cup of coffee. Can you relate? He says things like: "You can't do this. You'll never get done what needs to get done this week. You're a terrible preacher. You're failing as a father and husband....You...you...you..." ...fill in the blanks. The spiritual battle is real, my friends and it's a battle we need to fight by the Spirit living inside as we learn to live in our new identity...As we learn to listen to the Spirit's voice of truth, replacing Satan's lies with what God tells us is true and trusting that he will give us what we need for each day as we look continually to him.

Sometimes there are things we need to change in our lives and sin we need to deal with. The Spirit could be telling us about it. But the voice of the Spirit does not sound like the voice of condemnation I just shared with you from my own life...condemnation leading to despair and loss of hope. Instead the convicting voice of the Spirit always comes with hope for change...change that always begins with true repentance and ends with forgiveness and moving forward without wallowing in regret.

As Paul shares with us in 2 Corinthians 7, verse 10:

For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.

Satan's voice calls us to despair and hopelessness and death. But the Spirit's voice calls us to life. May we learn to recognize the difference and continually reject Satan's lies, learning to live in our new identity by the power of God's Spirit dwelling inside...never doubting God's steadfast and unchanging love for us.

But for any of you here who still haven't decided what your response to Jesus Christ will be...I challenge you to do it today. Jesus is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, including you. He's not just a good man who had some wise teachings to share with humanity. He's the Son of God for whom even John the Baptist was not worthy to untie his sandals. He's calling you to choose your baptism today. He wants to turn you from chaff to wheat grain. He longs to baptize you with the Holy Spirit as you take refuge in him through repentance and faith in his death on the cross and resurrection from the dead. He died that death on the cross to pay the price for our sins, so we wouldn't have to pay it on the day when he comes to baptize with fire. His desire instead is that all people come to him in repentance and faith and escape that fiery day of God's wrath.

In case you're wondering how I know that, I want to close with God's message from Ezekiel 33:11 that he wants shared with all people, including you:

"Say to them, 'As I live!' declares the Lord God, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live.

Did you know that everyone of us here began and lived a good portion of our life in the wicked category? Because wickedness is simply rejecting the one true God and living life as if he doesn't exist or as if he has no authority over our lives. Wickedness has many forms and fruits but it all flows from rejection of the One who created us and is holding us together and giving us breath and life right now...Jesus Christ. Will you turn from your rejection of him today and enter his

eternal life through simple repentance and faith in him? I'd love to walk you through that process which just involves a simple prayer to God. A prayer like this:

God, I admit that I have sinned against You...
I turn from that sin right now...
I don't want to live my life that way anymore...
Jesus, I believe that you died on the cross for my sins...
And that you rose from the dead...
Right now, I put my trust in You alone for my salvation...
Jesus, You are my Lord and my Savior...My life is Yours...
Thank you for forgiving my sins and making me a new creation...
Thank you for giving me Your Holy Spirit and adopting me as your child...
Teach me through Your Word how to live life with You...
Amen.

We're going to spend a few minutes now remembering Jesus Christ and what he did on the cross for us through Communion.

SERMON APPLICATION AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

Read Luke 3:15-18 several times, asking the Holy Spirit to guide you as you read. Look at the surrounding verses, take your time and talk to God as you read and meditate on it.

Write down from the passage or from what was shared in the sermon: 1) a truth that stands out to you; 2) anything you believe God is showing you or telling you personally through it; 3) any related Scripture that comes to mind; 4) any questions you have.

What does John the Baptist teach us about our position and function as we seek to carry out God's will and call in our lives?

John understood that heart change and true salvation would be brought about only by Christ. How have you struggled in your life with feeling like you're responsible for changing people's hearts or doing God's work on your own?

Read Psalm 127:1. How does this verse realign our focus to where we need to be as we seek to do God's will like John?

Read Psalm 127:2. Recognizing that God's love for you in Christ is secure and unchanging (there's no question anymore of whether or not He loves you...you are his beloved!), what does this verse say about God's intention for you and how he desires you to function in life? Does anything need to change in how you're currently functioning?

How does Matthew 11:28-30 echo Psalm 127:1-2 and what additional wisdom does it provide?