

Anointed as our Substitute

Luke 3:15-22 ¹⁵ Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ *or* not, ¹⁶ John answered, saying to all, "I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ "His winnowing fan *is* in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire." ¹⁸ And with many other exhortations he preached to the people. ¹⁹ But Herod the tetrarch, being rebuked by him concerning Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, ²⁰ also added this, above all, that he shut John up in prison. ²¹ When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. ²² And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased."

¹⁵ Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ *or* not,

"the people were waiting with great expectation." They were waiting with nervous expectation just like the first hill of a rollercoaster. You go higher and higher, every inch you go up you know that you are going to plummet down the other side. You can see the ground getting farther and farther away. The tension and expectation build the higher you go.

The Israelites had the prophecies they knew that the Messiah was coming soon. They waited, wondering with each new prophet or rabbi, is this one. With John it really seemed like certainly he must be it. He had all the outward appearances that we might look for in a new religious leader. Yet John reminds them constantly I am nothing compared to the one coming after me.

I indeed baptize you with water - He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire

The mistake that many people make is to assume that John is comparing his baptism with Jesus' baptism as if John's baptism was less powerful and Jesus would come with a more powerful form of baptism. This is not what John is doing.

For one thing Jesus never baptized anyone. For another John is speaking before Jesus has even been revealed how could compare his baptisms with Jesus. For another "fire" here is clearly a punishment on the unbeliever not a part of any baptism.

What John is doing is to closely compare his ministry with Jesus'. It would be as if I said, "I preach to you with the word of God, but if you will not listen the government will preach to you with a sword and a gun." What the government is doing actually isn't preaching at all but the same verb is repeated to heighten the linguistic connection.

John is not comparing his baptism to Jesus' baptism, rather he is comparing his ministry to the Jesus' ministry. This is made very clear in verse 17 in which John explains exactly what he means by "he will baptize with the holy spirit and with fire." John's ministry was to baptize, calling all men to repent and prepare for the coming of the Lord. Jesus ministry was a ministry of judgment, dividing the wheat from the chaff.

He will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with Fire. One if life the other is death. Some he will give life and salvation through the Holy Spirit, others he will throw into the everlasting fire.

"His Winnowing Fan." A better translation is winnowing fork. It is a tool used to toss wheat into air. The hard wheat kernel falls back down to the earth, but the light husks (the chaff) is caught by the wind and blown away.

In this way Christ will separate the righteous and the unrighteous.

¹⁸ **And with many other exhortations he preached to the people.**

For verse 18 the ESV has **"So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people."** And the word there is indeed the gospel, not just preaching, but preaching good news.

At first you might think how is this good news? Jesus is going to come and burn up the unbeliever? But it is good news for those of us who are in Christ Jesus. He was baptized to be our substitute. In him the Father is well pleased with us. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

This is good news because it was what the people were waiting for, that the Lord would come and deliver them from the wickedness of this world. It certainly isn't good news for those who

are being destroyed in the fire. But for us who know that our sins are forgiven in Christ Jesus our Lord it is the best news. We also wait and pray for this very thing.

Whenever we pray the Lord's prayer we pray "thy kingdom come." When we pray thy kingdom come we are praying that the King would come and destroy all His enemies.

We pray "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." When we pray this petition we are praying that He would remove even from our own hearts every evil and sinful thought. And that if any will not repent that He would remove them even from the earth so that righteousness will prevail everywhere.

We also pray "deliver us from evil" when we pray this we are praying the Lord would come with this winnowing fork and remove all evil.

This is good news because we desire righteousness in our own life and in the world around us. And we do not need to fear His judgment because we know that we are forgiven, because He was baptized as our substitute.

¹⁹ But Herod the tetrarch, being rebuked by him concerning Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, ²⁰ also added this, above all, that he shut John up in prison.

Luke wants to finish John's ministry before he starts on Jesus so he jumps ahead chronologically to tell us what happened with Herod and the death of John before coming back to Christ.

This is the ministry of John. He lived in the desert eating locust and wild honey. He went as the Lord directed preaching the coming of the kingdom and baptizing. He accepted no praise which did not belong to him, constantly reminding the people that he was not the Messiah, but that there was one greater than him coming. He did not hold back from preaching the full condemnation of God against sin. He even condemned Herod for his sin, because of which he was thrown in prison.

Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, the greatest heroes of faith in the Old Testament. Every one of them we are told at some point fell into a pretty serious sin. And yet nothing negative is ever told us about John the Baptist except perhaps when he was in prison it seems he began to doubt.

John remained faithful even unto death.

If it was possible that anyone who lived did what was pleasing in the sight of God, then it would be John the Baptist. And yet it was to Jesus not John that the voice from heaven spoke saying, "This is my beloved Son." John as needed a substitute. Without Jesus John also would have been lost.

Jesus is our substitute. Jesus is as John himself proclaimed, "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

We would do well to mark these words and etch them with a knife into our skin. It is to Christ alone that the Father spoke from heaven saying, "You are my beloved son in whom I am well pleased."

²¹ When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. ²² And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased."

Just before Christmas I finished going through the Ten Commandments with the confirmation children. Now we have started on the apostle creed. Many Christians and churches would think that the Ten Commandments are more important. In the fifth commandment we talk about taking care of your body, not smoking not doing drugs, etc. In the sixth commandment we talk about how to build a good marriage. In the seventh commandment we talk about not being greedy, living on a budget etc. These are all very practical topics that lead to a good and prosperous life.

In the creed we talk about the incarnation, about justification, about redemption, about the person of Christ and the office of Christ. We talk about the Holy Spirit. We talk about the false teacher Arius and how Saint Nicolas slapped him in the face. We talk about sanctification. We talk about what will happen when Christ comes again. None of these things are what we would call practical; none of them really have a huge impact on our daily life. None of them are things that we can implement or change or work on.

Yet all these things are far more important than any of the commandments. They all speak to us about Christ. To which of us has the voice of the Father ever said, "You are my beloved son in whom I am well pleased?"

Imagine that you work hard your whole life, you are careful to save every penny, you go without lots of comforts that others take for granted. Eventually after years of work you have half a million dollars saved up and you are pretty proud of yourself. Then a friend or a neighbor comes over and says, "Here I thought you could use a little help." And puts a bag with 100 billion dollars on your table. What is a half million compared to that? What is all your work compared to the gift?

Even if I make a new years resolution and train hard and eat well. Even if I give money to the church and stick to my budget, even if I do everything right so that I have a healthy and prosperous life and maybe even extend my life by 10 or 20 years what is that compared to the gift that is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord.

In the same way all our work is worse than nothing compared to the gift of Christ who was anointed as our substitute. No matter how practical, the Ten Commandments are as nothing compared to this single word the Father speaks, "You are my beloved son."

It is to Christ and not us that God has said, "I am well pleased."

What God has done for us is far greater and more important than what we might do for God.

He is our substitute through whom we receive the forgiveness of sins.

Notice that Jesus comes up out of the river and is praying before the Holy Spirit descends and the father speaks from Heaven. Our hymn before the sermon suggests that it was while he was in the river, as do most paintings of Jesus' baptism. These are artists' renditions that aren't always meant to be literal. They are trying to fit the entire story into one picture, just like most people have the wise men in the manger with the shepherds. This is fine as long as we remember and recognize the truth that is clearly taught in scripture that the dove descended after Jesus came up onto the shore of the Jordan.

Notice also that the entirety of the Trinity is there with Jesus, working together to save us from our sins. It is the Holy Spirit that strengthens and encourages him. It is the Father who anoints and sends him, all so that Jesus can be our substitute and die for our sins.

Amen

