

It's All About The Water

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Baptism of Jesus

INI – SDG

Mark 1:4-11 ⁴ John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. ⁵ Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. ⁸ "I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." ⁹ It came to pass in those days *that* Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And immediately, coming up from¹ the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. ¹¹ Then a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Jesus' ministry begins and end with baptism and preaching.

John came preaching and baptism. Jesus was baptized then began his ministry. When Jesus ascends into heaven, he told his disciples "Go teach, baptize." In acts on the day of Pentecost, the apostles preached the word, and the people were baptized.

In our sinfulness we often fail to understand and appreciate how important baptism really is. We are tempted to think there are better way to grow God's church. It is true that if our goal is to get people into our pews there are better ways to increase our earthly numbers. When it comes to growing and sustain the church of God there is no greater means than the waters of baptism. We don't need new methods. We need to make use of the ones that God has given to us.

4 John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. 5 Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

What does it mean that John's baptism was "of repentance for the remission of sins."

Prepositions can be a tricky thing. They can mean a lot of different things. I might call that house over there my house, but we all know that I don't own it. It's only the one I live in. We don't have to guess about the prepositions in our text. God explains exactly what this verse means.

Ezekiel 36:25-26 25 "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 "I will give you a new heart and put a new

spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

Notice God applies the water. God cleanses your sin. God gives you a new heart. Through the prophet Ezekiel God foretold that through the waters of baptism he would give forgiveness of sins and repentance to his people.

We read the same thing in Psalm 51.

Psalm 51:7 Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Psalm 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Once again, the psalmist prays that God would wash him. This is God's doing and not ours. With the washing which God gives, the Psalmist also know that God will give forgiveness and a new heart, which is a repentant heart.

The Psalmist speaks here only spiritually because they did not have baptism in the Old Testament. But what was only spiritual for the Old Testament believers, God has made also physical for us in the waters of baptism.

Thus, a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, means a baptism which gives repentance, that is new heart, and forgiveness. It does not mean a baptism which is the result of repentance. Rather, it means a baptism which results in repentance.

John was sent to prepare the way. He did that through baptism. He baptized the people and God prepared them for the coming of Jesus by washing away their sin and giving them a repentant heart. They did not come to be baptized because they were ready and wanted to show it. Rather, they were baptized, and they were made ready.

This is what baptism does, it washes away sin and creates repentance, i.e. a new heart. These wonderful things are done through the waters of baptism.

6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.

Even John's appearance served to emphasize the necessity of the baptism he preached.

John's appearance gives the clear indication of two things:

1. He is Elijah who was to come. His clothing was an imitation of Elijah's clothing.
2. He was a man dedicated to his task.

John had no time for things like baking bread, building houses, and growing grapes. He was a man sent on a mission. He ate what he could find along the way. He wore the cheapest of garments. He was dedicated to one thing and one thing only, preaching a baptism of repentance to prepare the way of the Lord.

We tend to think that when I take care of everything else, then I can get to work. In one episode of the office Pam gets in trouble because she is sitting and drinking her coffee and not working. She tells her boss she is just getting ready. I remember a pastor talking once about whenever he went to pray, he found there was always something else that had to be done first. But for someone truly dedicated the opposite is true. They eat when they have time.

John was all about the water. He was all about the baptism. Worldly concerns like soft clothing and tasty food did not matter to him. He understood the preciousness of what God was doing for the people in that water of baptism and he had no time for anything else. He was all about the water.

7 And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. 8 "I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

The other gospels add that he will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Mark's gospel is usually more succinct, but the meaning is not changed. As great as John's baptism was, there was an even greater one to come.

This does not indicate a different baptism, but the same baptism raised to greater heights.

If I were to tell you, "I preach with words but next week a preacher is coming who will preach with fire."

You would understand that his preaching isn't going to be substantively different but qualitatively. That is to say he is still going to use words. He is just going to do it a lot more effectively and passionately than I do.

Jesus still uses water as the earthly element for baptism, but he adds something to that baptism which was not present in the baptism that John gave, namely the Holy Spirit. Just as Jesus is greater than John, so Jesus' baptism is greater than John's. Jesus' baptism not only creates repentance and gives forgiveness but now also gives the Holy Spirit.

If the baptism of John was one of greater power and importance, how much more so the baptism of Jesus? They were washed of their sin and given a heart of repentance, but we receive forgiveness, repentance, and the Holy Spirit.

Even as he was baptizing them John was pointing them forward to the greater gift that would come through Jesus and which we have received. The waters of baptism were already a precious gift from God, but now God has given even more gifts through those same waters.

9 It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And

immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove.

Back in Advent we heard the fervent plea of the prophet Isaiah that God would rend the heavens. He spoke of his coming down, and that the mountains would shake at his presence.

Isaiah 64:1 Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down! That the mountains might shake at Your presence-

This prophecy is fulfilled in Jesus' baptism. Mark draws our attention to the opening of the sky in order that we might understand the fulfillment of the prophet's message. It's not just that the heavens were opened but that they were torn or split apart.

Mark uses the term "skizoo" which means to tear or split. This is the same word which Mark uses also when Jesus dies and the veil in the temple is torn open. Josephus tells us that the veil in the temple was painted with a picture of the sky. The same thing is happening at Jesus death and at his baptism. The heavens the thing that divides us from God is torn so that God comes to man.

This is the fulfillment of Isaiah 64. As the prophet foretold not even the heavens can any longer stand as a barrier between us and God. In the baptism of Jesus and in our baptism again the heavens are split open so that God comes to us through the person of Jesus who is called the Christ.

But, if this is the fulfillment of Isaiah 64, where is the shaking of the mountains? The other gospel accounts help us out there with the reminder that Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. The shaking of the mountains is the preaching of God's word through the greatest prophets Jesus the Christ.

His preaching was with power and authority to bring down the high and lofty mountains of our hearts. He also lifted us the humble and lowly. Jesus shook the mountains, which is the high, great, powerful people of this earth, when he preached the kingdom of God. Jesus promised that the tiniest faith could likewise pull down mountains through the preaching of that same word.

This all began with baptism.

We see here again the mystery of God because we would not have known that this was the fulfillment of Isaiah unless God had revealed it to us by the Holy Spirit. We would be expecting and waiting for something louder. Instead, God channels all that power into baptism.

It would be as if you set off a nuclear bomb, but you had some kind of device which could absorb all the energy and radiation from the bomb even as it was going off. People would be very confused. Where is the explosion? Where is the death? They would not see the power of the bomb because it would be hidden in that device.

So also, what the power that prophet Isaiah describes is hidden in baptism. The power that caused the heavens to split and the mountains to shake is hidden in this sacrament. All that power is

kept locked with in the sacrament of baptism. Because of this it does not appear to us as though any great energy was dispelled upon the earth and yet there it is in our baptism.

It is all about the waters. They may seem small and unimportant, but greatness is hidden within.

11 Then a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

See how joyful and excited God himself is at the baptism of his Son. We take baptism for granted and think of it as a common thing. But God himself opens the heavens so that he might speak in joy at his Son's baptism.

"This is my beloved son in him I am well pleased."

Jesus is baptized and, in that baptism, he pours out on all who will be baptized the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Joel 2:28 "And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions.

Joel tells us that the Spirit will be poured out on all flesh. This phrase "all flesh" should be understood in contrast to the nation of Israel. It does not mean that every human will receive the Holy Spirit. IT does

mean that people from every nation will receive the Holy Spirit. That Spirit and the word of life are no longer reserved for the nation of Israel. They are poured out on all people who receive baptism.

As Revelations reminds us "people from every tribe and tongue and nation." This was truly and fully fulfilled on the day of Pentecost and continues to be fulfilled now every time we come to this precious water.

Jesus become the vessel through which the Holy Spirit comes to all men. The Holy Spirit comes to him through His baptism. In that act the sacrament of baptism itself is now transformed and all who receive baptism receive the Holy Spirit.

It is truly all about the waters of baptism. Through the waters of baptism Jesus was anointed for his ministry. At the waters of baptism, the heavens were opened. In the waters of baptism we receive, forgiveness, a new heart and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

This is not a gift we should ever look lightly upon, rather we ought to celebrate and marvel at the wonderful things God has done for us in this sacred sacrament.