

# John the Baptist

Sermon . Peter Scott . 2009



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(New King James Version)

This is the story of John the Baptist as he emerged in ministry in Judea; notice Matthew chapter 3,

*In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (vs. 1&2)*

That was his simple message, “Repent; God is coming!” There was a lot for that society to repent of. As a matter of fact, they were committing the same sins then as we see today, only without the added technology. The root of their alienation from God was the original sin that the New Testament clearly identifies, which Adam and Eve both partook of. Simply stated, they wanted to disobey God. To put it another way, sin is to do less than what God wants; it is to fall short of His glory. Sometimes we think righteousness consists of a list of do’s and don’ts and sin is the failure to keep some rules. But no, sin is to do less than what God wants, to disobey by not being obedient to Him.

*For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.’ ” (vs. 3)*

I love those verses. I have especially appreciated them when I’ve listened to Handel’s Messiah, over and over again. While John was a forerunner for Christ two thousand years ago, yet it is also true that throughout Church history, many have been called to be forerunners in making a way for the Lord as He arises anew by His Spirit. Even the parable of the sower teaches that if you turn over the soil of your heart, you’re preparing a way for the Lord to come and plant His word in you in order to bring forth good fruit.

*Now John himself was clothed in camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. (vs. 4)*

Such a lifestyle may not appeal to many of us today, but it speaks of the fact that John did not partake of the things of this world. He kept himself apart.

*Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins. (vs. 5&6)*

John didn't even live in the context of an urban society. The people who were curious about what he had to say actually had to leave their villages to even hear the message. It wasn't brought to them; they had to go out to get it. How opposite of today; so many say, "Let's make church palatable to our communities, make it convenient for them." John made it *inconvenient*; they had to go out to him. And when they got there he spoke a message many may not have wanted to hear. They were to first confess their sins and be baptized in water. However,

*. . . when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance . . . (vs. 7&8)*

God's message wasn't just that they were to repent and feel sorry for what they had done. But they were to bear the *fruit* of repentance which would mean following the path of righteousness. And John only had partial insight into what that meant.

*. . . and do not think to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our father." For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (vs. 9&10)*

Trees would be cut down and stones would become children of Abraham! What stones was he referring to? I believe He was speaking about the Gentiles who would now receive the word of God and believe like Abraham had. Talk about having a prophetic ministry. We've often wondered how specifically John had functioned as a prophet. Well here it is. He prophesied amazing events to come, both nationally and internationally, before they even happened. For ex-

ample, many Gentiles would believe while God's ax was laid to the root of Israel. Many in the nation would perish for rejecting God's Son.

Then he says something very striking,

*I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance . . . (vs. 11a)*

So what was John doing? He was baptizing all of those who heeded his message. First they were to confess their sins with sorrow and then seek to walk in righteousness. That was John's message of baptism. But he says,

*. . . He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. (vs. 11b)*

John was prophetic; he didn't yet know of whom he was speaking. He was pointing to Jesus who would be immersing them in the Holy Spirit. Today when believers come together we worship the Lord in the Holy Spirit. It is impossible to be an accurate expression of His church otherwise. The fire that John was referring to was the "refining fire" of the Spirit convicting us of sin, the Holy Spirit teaching us how to live in righteousness. So John was prophesying that there would soon be another baptism. In modern vernacular he was saying, "Hold on! Stay Tuned. Wait till you see what heaven has coming."

*His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. (vs. 12)*

And so, John was even prophesying of the "end times."

Then Jesus enters the scene.

*Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. (vs. 13)*

Did you ever think about that? Why would Jesus, the Son of God, who *never* sinned want to be baptized in the baptism of repentance? He had nothing to repent of! We know that He was tempted but that is not the same as sinning. I used to wonder if He was repent-

ing for the temptations He experienced. But rather, I think something else was going on.

*And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" (vs. 14)*

Since John was prophetic, he knew that he needed to be baptized more than this man. Talk about being spiritually in tune.

*But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him. (vs. 15)*

So Jesus didn't say that He had to do this to be obedient to the Father. I always thought that obedience to God was Jesus' only motive at this particular event. But rather, it was to "fulfill all righteousness." But how could that possibly be if He had never sinned? How could His going into the waters of repentance fulfill righteousness at all?

The answer is that Jesus was prophetic too. *That's the clue.* This baptism wasn't simply the baptism of John. The baptism which John performed was that of repentance; his baptism of Christ however was something much *more* than that. It was awesome since we see what happened immediately after,

*When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."(vs. 16&17)*

It was a *proclamation* of the Lord. Jesus, who was more prophetic than anyone, knew that His baptism was fulfilling righteousness because it was establishing a New Testament *pattern*. As all New Testament believers would repent and partake in baptism, the Lord would give to them His righteousness. And so the new believers to come would be *baptized into Christ*. Righteousness would be fulfilled in them because He was baptized and His Father put His seal of approval on the whole event. Awesome.

*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. (Mt. 4:1)*

We know of these temptations and how overwhelmingly Jesus overcame them. Only then did His ministry begin. This is so good.

We know from Romans chapter six, that the power of God, operative through our obedience to be baptized brings us to the place where our old nature, the effects of Adam's original sin can be dealt with. In other words, God brings us to the place where we can, just like Jesus, come out of that water and say, "Father, here I am." Jesus' life, His resurrection life, can then start its progress in us. At that point, the work of the Holy Spirit is not finished. Rather, it has just begun. He has caused our old nature to be executed and done away with. Now we no longer have to go out into the wilderness and repent to John's ministry and confess our sin in order to somehow find Christ. We've done that. Now we need to put on His resurrection life.

When I was going through a lot of problems, issues and trials at work over the past couple of years, I would frequently pray and visualize myself being crucified on a cross. I would quote the scripture to myself, "Pick up your cross daily and follow after Me." Surely this was my cross to bear; I was just going to have to walk this out. I did not enjoy what was happening at all. Experiencing the cross is never enjoyable. Of course, you endure the cross for the *joy* that's set before you.

But then a couple of weeks ago, as I was praying before I went to work, the Lord said to me, "Why are you still on this cross?" "Because that's where I belong; this job is revealing an area of my life where I need to be 'crucified.' Part of me needs to die." "Yes, but you need to live in resurrection life." He brought back to me what I had experienced in water baptism, that we are baptized into His death and then we come out that we might live and walk in His resurrection life. What was bothering me was how my three bosses view me, and that I never get paid enough. They don't appreciate me or the work I'm doing. At this point the Lord convicted me saying, "If you are going to live in the resurrection life, you have to let this issue go! Making sure you are treated fairly is not why I have you at this particular job." "But, Lord, I thought I was here to get a paycheck." "No, that's not true; you're here for Me and My kingdom." "Okay, so that

means that I have to live and work this job *as unto You in resurrection life.*”“ Yes, son, now you’re getting it.”

You know, now when I pray in the morning I no longer see myself on the cross, but I see myself walking with the Lord right out of my baptismal waters and saying, “This is the kingdom of God that is before me and it will come to pass.” That’s because of the prayer that the Lord Jesus prayed for each one of us. His will shall be done here, in our lives just like it is in Heaven.

*Father, for our life, Lord, I pray that we would put on the coat and the mantle of righteousness. . . that we would be able to go forth not in a continual crucifixion process, for we know we need to die to ourselves, but that we would walk in resurrection life, in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

