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The Baptism of Jesus Luke 3:16-22 www.bible-sermons.org December 2, 2018

John the Baptist's fiery preaching empowered by the Spirit brought all of Judea out into the wilderness to watch and hear his prophetic words. His main message was to prepare their hearts for the coming of the Messiah. They were about to see the salvation of God. His preaching did not stop with the unseen actions within the heart, for he went on to proclaim what actions should result from the change of heart, generosity, fairness, and contentment were expounded on in practical ways. All people were commanded to escape the coming wrath of God by repenting of their sins.

We continue today in the middle of Luke's account of John's message. ¹⁶ *John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.* Luke 3:16 In the previous verse the people had asked if John was the Messiah (3:15ⁱ). The suggestion did not go to his head. John knew exactly what God had called him to do. The Holy Spirit let him know that Jesus was so much greater that comparisons were sacrilegious (Psalm 8:4ⁱⁱ). John declared he was unworthy to untie his sandal.

Disciples served their rabbi like a slave serves a master. They knew it was privilege to be allowed to learn from him, but removing a filthy sandal was considered too lowly for Jews. Animal waste on the roads and paths would be just a part of the filth that would collect on one's feet and sandals. In Jewish homes it was the job of foreign servants. John is saying that the Messiah is so much greater that he was not worthy to perform the most humiliating task for Him.

That is a reverence that should be restored in our day. Remember that John was full of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:15ⁱⁱⁱ), but Jesus is God incarnate. We are mere creatures. And while we can boldly go to the throne of grace to find help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16^v), we should be in awe and wonder that our Creator who is worthy of so much more than we could ever be or give, is gracious and welcoming. The Apostle Paul says we are seated with Him in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6^v). This is an honor we did not earn, but which He earned for us. This is grace piled upon grace (John 1:16^{vi}). John cannot compare himself to Jesus except to say he is unworthy of the lowliest task. Do we realize that is true of us? With what amount of reverence should we come to God in prayer? He calls us friend (John 15:15^{vii}), but that is not because there is any good thing in us. It is all due to His love and grace (Ephesians 2:8-9^{viii}).

John baptized with water. It was a picture of being washed after repentance. Jesus, however, baptizes with the Holy Spirit and fire. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost (Acts 2:4^{ix}). Jesus made it possible by making us sanctified vessels. The Spirit who was in John is in us. Again, consider how unworthy we are to receive such a gift. It is Jesus' righteousness given to us that allows it to be so (2 Corinthians 5:21^x).

He also baptizes us with fire. There various interpretations of this phrase. I assume it means what it did in the Old Testament. Stone vessels that were impure could be purified by fire (Leviticus 11:33^{xi}; Numbers 31:23^{xii}). Jesus purifies our lives outwardly by the things He takes us through. We are holy in God's sight (positionally) because of Jesus' sacrifice in our place, but outwardly (experientially) He takes us through fires that cause us to recognize how our behavior and words must change (Hebrews 10:14^{xiii}; Isaiah 43:2^{xiv}). The refining fires of God change our actions, like a refiner's fire burns the dross off metal (Isaiah 1:25-26^{xv}). Baptize means to immerse in something. Believers are immersed in the Spirit and in God's refining fires. This is what Jesus came to do in the lives of all who will come to Him (2 Thessalonians 2:13^{xvi}). Following Jesus isn't for the faint of heart. We should receive these cleansing fires with joy (James 1:2^{xvii}).

17 His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire. Luke 3:17 At harvest time the grain would be brought to a flat rock area, crushed with a rolling weight and fanned or tossed up in the air. The wind would blow the chaff to one side. The grain that was heavier could then be gathered and stored. Chaff was good fire starter as it was light and combustible. Clearing the threshing floor meant nothing would be left behind. Chaff is discarded, and wheat is stored. It's one or the other.

John is saying that Jesus will separate the people of substance, those who have repented and received the Messiah, from those who do not have substance. In this verse unquenchable fire is judgment that completely consumes rather than purifies. We are all going to go through the fire. For the person in Christ there is the refinement fires referred to as sanctification. Jesus is with us in the process. For the unbeliever there is only loss for they have nothing that will withstand the fire.

This is the Gospel message. Receive Jesus and be saved from the wrath of God (John 3:36^{xviii}). Jesus will fill you with His Spirit and sanctify your life if you will come humbly to Him with a repentant heart. If you reject Him, you cannot escape the wrath you deserve. Romans 2:5 tell us that (⁵ But) *because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.* By the grace of God we can choose which fire we will endure. Not believing it to be true does not change the fact that it is. Other religions have no solution to final justice. Only the Judeo-Christian faith ends with righteous justice applied fairly to all and the Christian faith alone offers a just solution to our dilemma.

18 So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people. Luke 3:18 Why would Luke call the preaching of John "good news"? Is the coming wrath of God good news? It is for those who repent and prepare their hearts for the Savior! That is what the Israel of God was longing for, the Deliverer. They not only hoped for deliverance from Roman taxation, but also expected One who would restore the honor of the God of Israel in the world, clarify which interpretations of the Law were correct (John 4:25^{xix}), and even simplify the Law with one great command (Matthew 22:36^{xx}). This was their hope. The good news was that He was about to arrive. Refining fires are

good news for us who believe. We long to be free of sin. Wrath against God's enemies is a good thing also, even if those enemies are within your own nation. If they are enemies of God they are enemies of goodness and justice, righteousness and truth. Those are the kinds of people that cause distress within every nation. Good news not only meant that the Messiah would make us holy and thereby escape the wrath of God (Exodus 31:13^{xxi}), but that the unholy will be judged (Malachi 4:1^{xxii}).

19 But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reprovved by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, 20 added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison. Luke 3:19-20 John was so bold that he reprovved Herod Antipas for stealing his brother, Herod Philip's wife, the daughter of a Nabatean king, Aretas. He seduced her into leaving her husband (Matthew 14:3^{xxiii}; Leviticus 18:16^{xxiv}). Herod rejected Herodias some time later and was soundly defeated in a war with her father. Jews historically protected prophets who spoke against kings, but Herod Antipas yielded to his wife's demands. If you speak truth to the powers that be, as John did, you will probably face persecution. John was imprisoned in Herod's palace in Machareus, in what is present day Jordan, until he was beheaded.

21 Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, Luke 3:21 Jesus came at the beginning of His ministry to John to be baptized. Luke leaves out their conversation as recorded in Matthew. When Jesus approached John, John said that Jesus needed to baptize him (Matthew 3:13-14^{xxv}). These two had probably met as boys when Joseph and Mary made their annual trip to Passover. They most likely hadn't seen each other in decades.

Luke adds something the other Gospel writers don't mention. When Jesus came up out of the water "and was praying," the Spirit descended on Him like a dove. Luke may have heard that Jesus was praying from John the Beloved who witnessed the event. John the Beloved had been a disciple of John the Baptist until Jesus returned from the temptation in the wilderness, at which time he became a follower of Jesus (John 1:37^{xxvi}). Luke saw the importance of mentioning how Jesus frequently prayed.

22 and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." Luke 3:22 The Holy Spirit descending like a dove does not mean that Jesus was not already filled with the Spirit. Some try to claim this is when Jesus became God or was adopted as the Son of God because a few manuscripts add "this day have I begotten you." Gabriel's words to Mary contradict that idea (Luke 1:35^{xxvii}). The dove from heaven and the voice were signs to John the Baptist confirming Jesus was the Messiah (John 1:32-34^{xxviii}) and dispenser of the Holy Spirit.

The Jewish term 'threading pearls' means to take a theme from the three Jewish divisions of Scripture, the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings together into one statement. From the Writings we see God said "This is my Son" - Psalm 2:7^{xxix} - a Messianic Psalm declaring God's Son will reign over the nations. From the Law we have "Whom I love" - from Genesis 22:2^{xxx} Isaac as the foreshadow of Jesus. Beloved is and

interesting term because it was Solomon's name, Jedediah, and the Messiah is the Son of David. And from the Prophets, "with whom I am well pleased" from Isaiah 42:1^{xxxix} - which is a servant song of the Messiah who brings justice to the nations. Rabbis used this method to make theological statements. It is fascinating that one of the few times God's audible voice was heard from heaven He would use a method they respected. Did He inspire the method or was He using a way man respected to communicate in the way that they were most likely to receive it? And isn't that the same reason for the incarnation? He is communicating with us in a way that is most comprehensible to us, the life of Jesus and the written account and, in this rare case, the spoken word from heaven. The final time the voice came from heaven during Jesus ministry, Jesus said it was not for His sake, but for the sake of those who heard it (John 12:30^{xxxii}).

There are only two other times mentioned in the New Testament when God spoke audibly for all to hear (Matthew 17:5^{xxxiii}). When God spoke on the Mount of Transfiguration He said the same thing but added one phrase to the baptism declaration, "Listen to Him!" That is also from the Law (Deuteronomy 18:15^{xxxiv}). The other time was when Jesus prayed that the Father would glorify His name. In John 12:28^{xxxv} the voice of God answered Jesus, "I have glorified it and will glorify it again" (Psalm 86:9). Some people only heard thunder, just as the men with Saul on the road to Damascus only heard a voice but did not understand what was said (Acts 22:9^{xxxvi}). I think that is because God only allows those who are ready to hear to understand.

This is the very beginning of Jesus' ministry. What had Jesus done to please God? He had waited in faith for God's direction to start the ministry He was called to do. God has His perfect time for everything. While He waited, He labored with His hands supporting the family. Imagine knowing you are God the Creator and putting up with sinful man day after day without sinning. God is pleased when we serve our family and look to Him in faith saying and acting only as He leads in what seems to be the mundane routines of life. Jesus exemplified what it meant to work in an occupation for the glory of God. He believed by faith the Word of God and the voice of the Holy Spirit. Faith pleases God (Hebrews 11:6^{xxxvii}). In this passage Jesus submitted Himself to baptism even though He had no sin to repent of. His total obedience to God in all things pleased God.

While we will never be obedient to that extent, we can be pleasing to God if we have faith in Jesus. If you are trusting in His righteousness and not your own, you too are pleasing to God. By faith you are a child of God. John 1:12 tells us ¹² *But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,* Receiving Jesus and believing in His grace, mercy, and salvation, which is to believe on His name, makes you a child of God. God declared His love for you in John 3:16^{xxxviii}. That means if you are in Jesus, this string of pearls applies to you as well. You are His beloved child in whom He is well pleased.

When I was reviewing the sermon this morning it dawned on me that the Greek word for beloved is the name of Pinocchio's maker, Geppetto (*agapetos*). Then the whole story became a wonderful parable. The fairy is the Holy Spirit. Geppetto is Jesus. Mankind without the Spirit is Pinocchio. Geppetto prays we will come to life, a picture of

salvation. Jiminy Cricket, our renewed conscience, instructs us. We are faced with temptations and often give in and suffer the consequences. We even watch as other turn into stubborn donkeys while resisting the Spirit. The enemy tries to devour us, which is the whale. But eventually we are rescued and safe on the shores of heaven in the Beloved's arms. What a parable! No wonder the author named him Geppetto!

When God spoke audibly He spoke Scripture. The Word is God's voice. When we read it we don't always understand what is being said because like the men with Saul or those around Jesus, we just aren't ready. Then we read the same passage again and suddenly we hear. That is because our hearts are ready to receive it. In this passage John was getting hearts ready to hear the voice of God through the lips of Jesus. It is a work we must invite the Holy Spirit to do in us, to level the mountains and fill the valleys to make a highway for our God, that we might hear and understand and yield our lives to His good and perfect will.

Then we must walk in the Spirit as Jesus so amazingly demonstrated for us (Galatians 5:25^{xxxix}). Whether it is decades of an occupation done for the glory of God, or obedience when it doesn't seem necessary, such as must have been the case in Jesus' baptism, we walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7^{xl}). That pleases God.

Allow me to close by having us visualize this scene. The crowds were on the banks of the Jordan listening to the prophet John as he exhorted them to repent and prepare their hearts for the coming of the Messiah. Suddenly John's eyes lock on one man making His way to the river. It's his cousin Jesus. John cries out, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29^{xi}). Jesus walks up to John and conversation ensues. You see John shaking his head no and then a few moments later nodding yes. John immerses Jesus into the water and Jesus comes up uttering a prayer. The heavens appear to open and what looks like dove of light descends on Him as He prays. Then you find yourself falling to your knees as a booming voice from heaven says to Him, "You are my beloved Son, in you I am well pleased!" Silence. No one utters a word. Everyone is in awe, frozen in place. Then Jesus begins to walk out of the Jordan, but in the opposite direction from which He came. He is headed into the desert wilderness (Luke 4:1^{xlii}). What an impact that must have had on all who saw it.

Have you been baptized? Jesus would tell the disciples just before His ascension to go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19^{xliii}). It is a call to declare to the world that you were buried with Him, declaring your old life dead, and then declaring you were also raised with Him to a new life, a resurrected life. It is saying you are following His path, letting Him live in you, helping you to do all things to the glory of God, obeying the Holy Spirit in everything by the grace of God. It is desiring to let the Holy Spirit have His way in your life, to experience His fullness.

Going in and out of the water doesn't save you, but it does make a declaration to the world that you are serious about following Jesus. If you have never been immersed in baptism, it would be a great way to start the coming year. Let me know if you would

like to make that declaration. And for those who have been baptized, I would ask if you are living out that declaration you made then, or has the whale swallowed you? The beloved is coming to rescue you, take you in His arms, and give you a fresh start.

Questions

- 1 What was John preaching?
- 2 What was his answer when asked if he was the Messiah?
- 3 How did he describe his worth to that of the Messiah?
- 4 With what does Jesus baptize us?
- 5 Why is judgment good news?
- 6 What happened to John the Baptist?
- 7 Why was Jesus baptized?
- 8 What is stringing pearls?
- 9 How does it apply to you? 10 What does baptism mean?

ⁱ **Luke 3:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ,

ⁱⁱ **Psalms 8:4 (ESV)**

⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?

ⁱⁱⁱ **Luke 1:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.

^{iv} **Hebrews 4:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

^v **Ephesians 2:6 (ESV)**

⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

^{vi} **John 1:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

^{vii} **John 15:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

^{viii} **Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)**

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,
⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

^{ix} **Acts 2:4 (ESV)**

⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

^x **2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)**

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

^{xi} **Leviticus 11:33 (ESV)**

³³ And if any of them falls into any earthenware vessel, all that is in it shall be unclean, and you shall break it.

^{xii} **Numbers 31:23 (ESV)**

²³ everything that can stand the fire, you shall pass through the fire, and it shall be clean. Nevertheless, it shall also be purified with the water for impurity. And whatever cannot stand the fire, you shall pass through the water.

^{xiii} **Hebrews 10:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

xiv **Isaiah 43:2 (ESV)** ² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.

xv **Isaiah 1:25-26 (ESV)** ²⁵ I will turn my hand against you and will smelt away your dross as with lye and remove all your alloy. ²⁶ And I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city."

xvi **2 Thessalonians 2:13 (ESV)**

¹³ But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

xvii **James 1:2 (ESV)**

² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,

xviii **John 3:36 (ESV)**

³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

xix **John 4:25 (ESV)**

²⁵ The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things."

xx **Matthew 22:36 (ESV)**

³⁶ "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"

xxi **Exodus 31:13 (ESV)**

¹³ "You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, 'Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you.

xxii **Malachi 4:1 (ESV)**

¹ "For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.

xxiii **Matthew 14:3 (ESV)**

³ For Herod had seized John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife,

xxiv **Leviticus 18:6 (ESV)**

⁶ "None of you shall approach any one of his close relatives to uncover nakedness. I am the LORD.

xxv **Matthew 3:14-15 (ESV)**

¹⁴ John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

¹⁵ But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.

xxvi **John 1:37 (ESV)**

³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.

xxvii **Luke 1:35 (ESV)**

³⁵ And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.

xxviii **John 1:32-34 (ESV)**

³² And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.

³³ I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'

³⁴ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

xxix **Psalms 2:7 (ESV)** ⁷ I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you.

xxx **Genesis 22:2 (ESV)** ² He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."

xxxi **Isaiah 42:1 (ESV)** ¹ Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.

xxxii **John 12:30 (ESV)** ³⁰ Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not mine.

xxxiii **Matthew 17:5 (ESV)** ⁵ He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."

xxxiv **Deuteronomy 18:15 (ESV)** ¹⁵ "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—

xxxv **John 12:28 (ESV)** ²⁸ Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

xxxvi **Acts 22:9 (ESV)** ⁹ Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me.

xxxvii **Hebrews 11:6 (ESV)** ⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

xxxviii **John 3:16 (ESV)** ¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

xxxix **Galatians 5:25 (ESV)** ²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

xl **2 Corinthians 5:7 (ESV)**

⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight.

xli **John 1:29 (ESV)** ²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

xlii **Luke 4:1 (ESV)** ¹ And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness

xliii **Matthew 28:19 (ESV)** ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,