



John 1:29-34
“Christ’s Baptism”

29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

30 "This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.'

31 "I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water."

32 And John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him.

33 "I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'

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

I strongly believe that none of the encounters with other people that Christians have are purely accidental, God has his purposes in arranging all of them. For instance, back in July I had to take our truck to an auto-glass place to get the passenger side window, which had been smashed in a robbery, replaced. I had to wait for them to finish the work, so I brought my bible with me to read. The woman at the desk spotted it and asked what part I was reading. When I mentioned it was a book in the old testament, she explained that while she was a Christian, she had never understood what the old testament was all about – the law, the sacrifices, the prophecies and so on. She understood that the New Testament was about the gospel and Jesus, but the Old Testament was something of a dark book to her.

I don't think her experience was too terribly different from that of many other Christians, I've even heard people call themselves "New Testament believers" and speak as though the material in the Old Testament concerned a different religion with a different God, who is all law and judgment, while the "New Testament God" is one of Grace and Love.

In any event, I had a chance to recommend some materials and spend some time talking about how the Bible is in fact one book that tells the same story of God's redemption from start to finish, and that the focus of both the Old and New Testaments is the Redeemer, the Messiah. Either as the one who is coming or as the one who has come. Either as the promised *Immanuel* meaning God with us of Isaiah 7:14, or as Jesus whom the Angel announced to Joseph in Matthew 1:23 was the long awaited *Immanuel*. I also talked about how many things in the New Testament don't make sense without the old, for instance the New Testament assumes that man is Fallen and that our biggest problem is not poverty, or oppression, or sickness, or even global warming, it is sin and separation from God. And we find the story of the fall at the very beginning of the Old Testament, when in Chapter 3 of Genesis we read of how the Serpent of Old, tempted our first parents, Adam and Eve in the Garden to eat the forbidden fruit. But right after the Lord pronounced his curse, he promised Satan in Genesis 3:15 that

one day the seed of the woman would crush his head. In the New Testament, we read about how that promise was fulfilled.

But here in these verses we see what is in effect the transition between the promises and types and shadows, and the fulfillment and the reality of what all those types had been pointing towards. There is this definitive moment when John, the last and greatest of the Old Testament prophets sees Jesus coming towards him and points him out to all of his followers, saying “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” *This is the one, the one whom I was telling the delegation about, this is the promised one, this is the Messiah!*

In pointing out Jesus John uses a title that Christians are all very familiar with today, but which had never been used before, *the Lamb of God*. The term is a New Testament term, but God had prepared his listeners to understand it through the revelation of the Old Testament. In the Passover it was the blood of a lamb on their lintels, that had caused the angel of death to passover Jewish households on the night of the last plague in Egypt, every day at the temple morning and evening according to God’s instructions in Exodus, a lamb was the sacrifice of atonement. In Isaiah 53 the sin bearing servant of the Lord who would take upon himself the sins of his people to make atonement for them, is spoken of as a lamb led to the slaughter. The people were told through all these images, that the blood of the lamb would as Lev. 17:11 says make atonement for their souls.

God would provide that lamb, he too had given them an analogy for that when in Genesis 22 Abraham, had taken his son Isaac to the top of Mt. Moriah to sacrifice him as the Lord had commanded and there at the top Isaac looking about had said “**Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?**” and Abraham had replied, “*My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.*” And of course in the end God provided a Ram to be the sacrifice in place of Isaac.

But it wasn’t the blood of animals, God was speaking of, as the author of Hebrews tells us in Hebrews 9:13 the blood of mere animals could never take away the sins of men, much less could it atone for the sins of the world. Those lambs were shadows pointing towards the real Lamb God would give. God had to provide His own spotless Son to be the Lamb, who would take on the iniquities of his people, and by his sacrifice, wash them away with the infinitely powerful blood of God.

John points to Jesus and says that is Him, the one who is going to atone for the sins. And he says something radical, Jesus would take up and take away the sins of the world. Now by that not every man, everywhere is meant, in the same way that not every man every where is meant in verse 10 of this chapter “**and the world did not know Him.**” No the bible doesn’t teach universalism. What it teaches though is that salvation was not just for the Jews, it was for people throughout the world that Jesus died. In Rev. 5:9 those people will sing to the lamb “**For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation.**”

But how does John the Baptist know that Jesus is the Promised Messiah, the Lamb of God? Well even though John was Jesus’ cousin, it wasn’t because they were related or friends that they figured this out. In fact, it’s very doubtful they had any contact prior to the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry. John spent his time in the wilderness in the south, while Jesus grew up in Nazareth in the North.

As John says he didn’t know Him, but he did have a prophetic word from the Lord, that he would be the one to reveal the Messiah to Israel and the Lord let John know that the way he would know would be that as he was baptizing and preparing the way for the Messiah, he would see the Holy Spirit

descending upon him and remaining. That too was in fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy regarding the Messiah. Isaiah had said in 11:1-2 ***“There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.”***

Sure enough, the day had come when Jesus had approached John to be baptized, and as all the Gospel Writers record at that baptism ***“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.””*** (Luke 3:22)

So John knew the Jesus was the Lamb, because God the Father had declared it and John had seen it. Now why hadn’t John declared it at that point? Well immediately after his baptism Jesus had been led away by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. As the first Adam had been tempted in the garden, a veritable paradise, and had fallen so the last Adam, Jesus was tempted in the wilderness after 40 days and nights of fasting and had resisted. Now Jesus has returned, and John can make public at that point what he “saw” that now we have the transition from types to reality, from old testament promises to new testament inauguration.

John even marks out the difference between his water baptism and that of Christ. Now John’s baptism was not strictly speaking Christian baptism. As Hodge points out:

“(1) John was the last Old Testament prophet, and not a New Testament apostle (Luke 1:17);
 (2) He did not baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost;
 (3) His baptism was unto repentance, not into the faith of Christ;
 (4) He did not by baptism introduce men into the fellowship of the Christian Church, as the apostles did at Pentecost (Acts 2:41,47);
 (5) Those baptized by John were baptized over again by the apostles when they were admitted to the Christian Church (Acts 18:24–28; 19:1–5). For analogous reasons we believe that the baptism performed by his disciples previous to the crucifixion of the Lord (John 3:22; 4:1,2) was not the permanent Christian sacrament of Baptism, binding its subjects to the faith and obedience of the Trinity, and initiating them into the Christian Church; but that, on the contrary, like the baptism of John, it was a purifying rite, binding to repentance, and preparing the way for the coming kingdom.”

But here John is talking about much more than the difference between his water baptism, and the water baptism as the sign and seal of the Covenant that Jesus was to give to his church. He is speaking of what the external sign symbolizes – the regenerating and washing work of the Holy Spirit that no mere man can bring about, only the Son of God can give that kind of Baptism. I love what Ryle has to say about this *baptism of Christ*:

“The baptism here spoken of is not the baptism of water. It does not consist either of dipping or sprinkling. It does not belong exclusively either to infants or to grown up people. It is not a baptism which any man can give, Episcopalian or Presbyterian, Independent or Methodist, layman or minister. It is a baptism which the great Head of the Church keeps exclusively in His own hands. It consists of the implanting of grace into the inward man. It is the same thing with the new birth. It is a baptism, not of the body, but of the heart. It is a baptism which the penitent thief received, though neither dipped nor sprinkled by the hand of man. It is a baptism which Ananias and Sapphira did not receive, though admitted into church-communion by apostolic men.

Let it be a settled principle in our religion that the baptism of which John the Baptist speaks here, is the baptism which is absolutely necessary to salvation. It is well to be baptized into the visible Church; but it is far better to be baptized into that Church which is made up of true believers. The baptism of water is a most blessed and profitable ordinance, and cannot be neglected without great sin. But the baptism of the Holy Spirit is of far greater importance. The man who dies with his heart not baptized by Christ can never be saved."

Now people believe a lot of silly things about Jesus who he was and what he came to do. For instance, the late atheist Douglas Adams summed up the ministry of Christ in his Hitchhikers Guide to the galaxy this way "two thousand years after one man had been nailed to a tree for saying how great it would be to be nice to people for a change" and probably the vast majority of his fellow modern Englishmen would agree. Unfortunately Douglas Adams now knows better, but far too many still believe that Jesus was just "A nice guy who told us to be nice to one another who was senselessly killed."

Well Brothers and Sisters, the bible doesn't say our problem is that we aren't nice to one another, to be sure we aren't. But it says the reason for that is that we are all sinners. And John says Jesus didn't come to earth to do anything as banal and hopeless as saying "be nice" he said, he came to deal with our real problem, our sin problem the problem that alienates from God and makes us His enemies and the problem that alienates from one another, and makes us hate and murder one another. To do that he needed to bear our sins, and pay for them as the LAMB of GOD by dying for us on the cross, and then he Had to apply that salvation via that inward Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

He was able to do that Brothers and sisters, because He is NOT "one man" he is as John the Baptist heard direct from the Father, the ONLY BEGOTTEN SON of GOD.

Friends do you believe that today? Have you undergone the baptism that John spoke of, not merely the outward washing with water, but the inward heart washing and Spirit giving that only Christ can accomplish? Without that heart change you cannot be saved, it was the objective in the Old Testament and the New: Deut 30:6 "And the LORD your God will **circumcise** your **heart** and the **heart** of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your **heart** and with all your soul, that you may live.