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The Gospel According to Matthew

The Baptism of John –Prepare the Way of the Lord

February 11, 2018

Scripture Reading: Acts 19:1-10

This morning we want to return to the ministry of John the Baptist who comes on the scene here in this 3rd chapter. Follow along once again as I read:

Mat 3:1-12 In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, (2) "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (3) For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'"

(4) Now John wore a garment of

camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. (5) Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, (6) and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

(7) But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? (8) Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. (9) And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. (10) Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

(11) "I baptize you with water for repentance, but 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. (12) His winnowing fork is in his

hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

We know that the baptism of John was not New Testament, Christian baptism. Of this we are certain because it is evident in the Acts 19 Scripture reading we just heard –

Act 19:1-5 And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. (2) And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." (3) And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." (4) And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus." (5) On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

So what was the meaning of the baptism of John the Baptizer? And really the question we are leading up to this morning is, *why was Jesus baptized by John?* Even John asked that question:

Mat 3:14 John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by

you, and do you come to me?"

This is not merely some academic question bantered about by minutiae loving theologians. No. It has direct application to how WE are saved in Jesus Christ.

John baptized with a baptism of *repentance*, Acts 19:4, with the purpose of calling people to turn from their sins to Jesus Christ. New Testament baptism is baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus, a profession of faith in Christ.

But this saving faith is logically preceded and accompanied by *repentance*. And that was John's baptism. As people submitted to it they were confessing their sin and turning from it. John then pointed them to faith in Christ.

Let me suggest to you, and I am confident this is correct,

John the Baptist was the personification of the Old Testament Law. His preaching was the preaching of the Law, the purpose of which was (and still is) condemnation for sin and announcement of God's judgment. The Law, as John's preaching did, also called upon sinners to turn from their sin. It also pointed them to One who would come, the Christ, the Lamb of God

who would be the perfect sacrifice for sin.

And we see all of these elements that characterized the Law in the preaching of John the Baptist. John IS the Law thundering and condemning the wicked, promising God's mercy for all who repent and look in faith for the Messiah. But for the hard-hearted, unrepentant, there is no mercy. John's preaching bears hearing once again. It is the thundering voice of the Lord from Sinai-

Mat 3:7-12 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? (8) Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. (9) And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. (10) Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (11) **"I baptize you with water for repentance, but 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.** (12) His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn

with unquenchable fire."

Christ baptizes His true people with the Holy Spirit in the New Covenant – that did not happen in the Old Covenant. But He also baptizes *in fire*. He comes to separate the chaff out of His wheat. His true people from the hypocrites like the Pharisees and Sadducees.

NOTE: Let's make two important points of application for our day.

First, Christ is coming in judgment. In Christ His elect, His remnant, His true church there is eternal life and blessing. But Christ is not devoid of judgment and wrath as he is so often wrongly portrayed by preachers and professing Christians today. The Law of God still stands and it condemns all who will not repent and turn in faith to Christ. If anyone is not in Christ, then their relationship to God, the terms by which He relates to them – is the Law.

Gal 3:10-12 For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." (11) Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." (12) But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them."

Without confession of the sin that the Law convicts us of and without repentance that prays “God, be merciful to me a sinner,” then there is no faith in Christ, no turning to Him, no justification in Him. Only curse and condemnation, death and unquenching fire. Which is exactly what John told the hypocrites when they came.

2) Second, Christ’s judgment of fire upon the wicked is likened to a separation of the wheat from the chaff. In most biblical texts that describe Christ’s judgment when He comes again, we are presented with a *mixture*. An *alloy* you might say. Goats and sheep mixed together that need to be separated. Just like these Pharisees were false Israelites yet they mixed themselves in with God’s true people.

It is not so difficult to identify worldlings who make no profession of Christ at all. Christ will effect that judgment too, but it is very interesting that Scripture repeatedly shows us that the fiercest and hottest wrath of God is not directed against the pagans as much as it is being stored up for the creeps who creep in among God’s people, parading as the people of God and working their evil in the church. Therefore we say again:

The most dangerous place in the world is that of the hypocrite who sits in the church pew week after week,

having never repented, hard-hearted and unbelieving.

Be certain that YOU are not one of these.

John the Baptist then is the personification of the Law of God, condemning the wicked, announcing coming wrath and judgment, calling upon all to repent and turn in faith to Christ. And, as we have seen, that New Covenant in Christ, symbolized by New Covenant baptism in His Name includes a baptism with the Holy Spirit which was not present in the Old Covenant people of God. The changed heart. The new birth. The Law written upon the heart. All in the New Covenant knowing the Lord. These things were not effected by John’s baptism. He prepared the way of the Lord by preparing the hearts of the people through conviction and repentance.

The Baptism of Jesus

Mat 3:13-17 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. (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. (16) And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he

went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; (17) and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Whenever I read this passage I am reminded of an experience I had many years ago in a church Verla and I attended in Prineville. We were in a Sunday School class and the teacher asked the important question, "why was Jesus baptized by John?" I answered "to fulfill all righteousness." I wasn't trying to be smart and I didn't understand what that phrase meant, but as you can see this is the reason Jesus Himself gave John as to why Jesus should be baptized. The teacher kind of just blew it off with a smirk and moved on, never himself giving a satisfactory answer.

But you see that the answer DOES lie in those very words of Jesus –

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

"Yes, John, it is true. You do need to be baptized by Me. But right now, I am baptized by you in the baptism of repentance in order to fulfill all righteousness." But what did Jesus mean? Jesus had no sin to confess. No

lawlessness to repent of. So what was this all about?

When we see phrases in the New Testament such as "fulfill," we are immediately led to think of the Old Testament prophets, specifically their prophecies about the Person and works of the Messiah. Listen to these points made by G.K. Beale in his book on Biblical Theology and you will begin to understand why Jesus was baptized by John:

"John baptizes Jesus in the Jordan River, along with other Israelites. What is the significance of the water? Why is it apparently so important that Jesus be baptized by water in a river, along with other Jews, at the inception of his ministry? The answer seems ready at hand, if one is sensitive to OT precedents.

Just as Israel was led by Moses and had to go through the sea at the exodus to enter the promised land, and just as the second generation had to do the same thing at the Jordan River under Joshua's leadership, as a miniature second exodus, so again, now that Israel's restoration is imminent through Jesus, true Israelites must again identify with the water and the Jordan and their prophetic leader in order to begin to experience true restoration.

This is also in fulfillment of the prophecies of Israel's restoration as a second exodus through water (see Isa. 11:15; 43:2, 16-17; 44:27-28; 50:2; 51:9-11), especially through rivers (Isaiah 11:15; 42:15; 43:2; 44:27; 50:2). The picture of a separation of waters in conjunction with mention of God's Spirit and God placing people in a new land seems to gall all the way back to Genesis (ie, Adam and Eve at creation, Noah).

Jesus' baptism signifies not only the beginning of a new exodus but also a new creation, since he has come to reverse the curses of the fall (through his healings, cross and resurrection), the first act of which is to defeat the devil during the wilderness temptations, to which both Adam and Israel had succumbed.

After his baptism, Jesus steps directly into the land of promise to begin his new creation/exodus mission after his baptism, which as we will see later, is but a foreshadowing of the ultimate promised land of the new creation....

In conjunction with this OT pattern of the new exodus and, as we saw earlier, new creation, that Jesus' baptism was part of his work to 'fulfill all righteousness' (Matt 3:15) seems to allude to the fact that he came to set right what Israel and Adam had done wrong; he was coming successfully to

obey, in contrast to Israel's former disobedience, as well as that ultimately of Israel's progenitors, Adam and Noah...Therefore, "all righteousness" refers to Jesus' obedience to God's will and commandments throughout his ministry as the eschatological Adam and Israel, culminating with his obedience of suffering at the cross. His obedience formally begins with the baptism and the immediately following test in the wilderness. In doing so, he was fulfilling all the prophecies and types and other ways in which the OT looked forward to him.

Now, there is one more aspect of the baptism of Jesus that I think is vitally important for us to get hold of as well. Remember, John's baptism was a baptism of *repentance*. Jesus had no sin to repent of, *but His people, His elect, the remnant, did!* You and me. And therefore I would make this observation:

Even this early on in the ministry of Jesus, here at His baptism, we see Him taking the sins of His people upon Himself. There He is, going down into the water, confessing and repenting of MY sin. Is this mystery somehow connected to the fact that repentance is said to be the gift of God?

Beale seems to note this as well:

Likewise also, part of the significance of the baptism is that Jesus is identifying with humanity's sin, for which he will atone and for which he is the representative who will work complete eschatological righteousness for them.

Jesus' baptism, in other words, was essential for our salvation because by it He already began to obey and meet all the Law's demands upon us. The Law called for God's people to come out of Babylon (Jerusalem) into the wilderness, confess and repent of their sins, and look for a perfect righteousness in Jesus Christ, not in their own feeble efforts to be righteous.

Mat 3:1-3 In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, (2) "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (3) For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'"

That voice, you see, was the voice of the Old Testament Law itself in the person of John the Baptist.

Jesus and Noah

Let's close with one final comparison. Comparisons in the Bible are never an

accident and in Jesus' baptism we have one – Jesus and Noah.

Gen 8:1-19 But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided. (2) The fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed, the rain from the heavens was restrained, (3) and the waters receded from the earth continually. At the end of 150 days the waters had abated, (4) and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat.

(5) And the waters continued to abate until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen. (6) At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made (7) and sent forth a raven. It went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth. (8) Then he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground. (9) But the dove found no place to set her foot, and she returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took her and brought her into the ark with him.

(10) He waited another seven days, and again he sent forth the dove out of

the ark. (11) And the dove came back to him in the evening, and behold, in her mouth was a freshly plucked olive leaf. So Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth. (12) Then he waited another seven days and sent forth the dove, and she did not return to him anymore.

(13) In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried from off the earth. And Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked, and behold, the face of the ground was dry. (14) In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth had dried out.

(15) Then God said to Noah, (16) "Go out from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. (17) Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh--birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth--that they may swarm on the earth, and **be fruitful and multiply on the earth.**" (18) So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. (19) Every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out by families from the ark.

Throughout the Old Testament, ever since Eden, we have the account of new beginnings. Adam and Eve in the

garden, and then the fall. Then came Noah and all the evil of his day. God resolved to destroy every living thing and after doing so offered Noah and his family what we might call *a new creation*. But sin remained. The curse remained.

Then came Abraham to whom the Lord promised a new Land as well. But we all know the sorry outcome of his descendants in that land. The curse, once again, remained.

So when we see the Lord Jesus come, here again we have a Man to whom a posterity and a New Creation are promised. Is the dove at Jesus' baptism reminiscent of the dove Noah sent out, a symbol of the Holy Spirit who ultimately makes us new creations? Very likely so.

But the point of all this is simply that this time, this Adam, this Noah, this Abraham *will not fail*. And He didn't. In Christ we have a perfect, sure righteousness all effected by Him for us.

Php 3:8-9 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ (9) and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes

from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith--