

Luke

The Baptism of Jesus
Luke 3:21, 22

With Study Questions

Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
(310) 212-6999
pastorpaul@branchofhope.org
www.branchofhope.org
4/14/2024

Luke

The Baptism of Jesus
Luke 3:21, 22

When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. ²² And 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 3:21, 22).

Introduction

Years ago, I was teaching a class when a dear brother, perceiving the class was leaning toward the more academic end of things, asked me a personal question. He asked, "How would you define your relationship with Jesus?" I don't think this brother was entirely charismatic, but he tended toward a very likeable emotionalism in his faith. I think he thought I could use a bit of that.

My, I believe accurate, but certainly insufficient answer (having to answer on the fly) was that He is my Savior, and I am the one in need of saving. That is the primary way that I relate to Jesus. The way a patient might relate to a doctor or a drowning person to a lifeguard. Of course, all of this is insufficient. Doctors can't raise the dead. Lifeguards can't rescue a person has already drowned.

My answer also left out that Jesus is my Lord. I look to Him for answers to my life questions, for direction. I also look to Christ, not merely as my Lord, but as *the* Lord. He governs all that is. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. Since I believe Jesus is God, I recognize that He has the hairs on my head numbered and that nothing happens apart from His divine will.

And since I belong to Him, I can trust that even those difficult and painful days are designed to designed to cultivate holiness-Christlikeness-in me. I, sometimes very uncomfortably, am being conformed into His image and likeness (Romans 8:29). Yet I don't think any of this was really touching the nerve of my friend's question.

In modern, western evangelicalism we are fond of saying 'Christianity is not a religion, it is a relationship.' This is where my friend felt I might be lacking. And I do appreciate the concern. And I do think there is a certain accuracy to it. But there is also a difficulty to it. For my friend (and many others I know), this relationship was clearly a moment-by-moment two-way street that resembled other relationships we have with people.

Yet my Christian faith is not like that. For example, if I have any type of meaningful relationship with someone and I text them, call them, or communicate with them in any way, I expect them to get back to me pretty rapidly and pretty clearly. And most professing Christians who have told me that this is the way it is with them, that is, they immediately, audibly hear the voice of Jesus, are bordering on madness, or at very least bad theology from the voice they hear. I hope that doesn't sound mean. I don't intend for it to sound mean.

Others interact with Jesus intuitively. And even though God is sovereign, even over my thoughts, we must recognize that my sinful nature is quite insufficient when it comes to arriving at infallible conclusions using this method.

At very least, we must understand that our current relationship with Jesus is unlike our relationships with others. And when we try to relate with Christ the way we relate with others, we make the relationship inferior to what it could be. When I was a youth pastor the students would often try to relate with me as if I were one of them. But I wasn't one of them and I wanted them to know that. I wanted to be friendly, but I wasn't merely one of their friends. They didn't need another friend. They needed a mentor, a teacher, a more mature voice in their lives. Our relationship with Christ is different than I relationship with others.

I recently read a somewhat heartbreaking thread from a young man who knew me from a debate he had seen me in. This to say, I don't know him personally, but online. He wrote a very thought-provoking piece on why he left the Christian faith, touching on this very subject-*Christianity is not a religion, it is a relationship*.

His argument was that praying and reading the Bible are not qualities of a real personal relationship. Comparing it to other relationships, he questioned whether or not you actually had an active and lively relationship with your mother if you've never met her, but simply

read what other people wrote about her during the last three years of her life.

According to this young man, if you have not heard, or seen or had some type of personal, interactive experience (think, Saul on the road to Damascus), you don't actually have a relationship with Jesus. I am not being critical at this point. I am sympathetic to his thesis and his problem because this is the way the Christian faith is often billed.

As if Jesus is going to be your new friend. And it is going to feel so good to have such a great new friend. But there you are, sitting in your room alone, in pain, reaching out, and your new friend seems to be ghosting you. You feel like David,

How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me (Psalm 13:1)?

And yet, as I stated earlier, there is a superiority to the type of relationship God has chosen to have with us through Christ, yet in the absence of His physical body. Jesus was not unclear about this. When the hearts of His followers were filled with sorrow He taught,

Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you (John 16:7).

Jesus then taught of how the Spirit would work in the world and in them in a way superior to the way things were working while He was present with them. It is very likely that was why the apostles said,

Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer (2 Corinthians 5:16).

By His word and Spirit, we have something deeper, richer and with greater surety. Things may not happen immediately or observably, but Christ holds us in His hand, guides our steps, nurtures our hearts. Things that can be seen can be doubted and misunderstood. A mere human being's lack of ability to figure things out is substantial. When Jesus was in the flesh, His followers continually misunderstood what He was about. But

He is working in us in a more profound way than other would-be instructors or saviors.

A Common Baptism

Why have these two verses on the baptism of Jesus taken me in this direction, you might ask. I answer that even though these two verses contain a concentration of depth, it is the unity we have with Christ that jumps out. Calvin says it well,

The general reason why Christ received baptism was, that he might render full obedience to the Father; and the special reason was, that he might consecrate baptism in his own body, that we might have it in common with him.¹

He received the same baptism with us, in order to assure believers, that they are ingrafted into his body, and that they are “buried with him in baptism,” that they may rise to “newness of life,” (Rom. 6:4).²

There is a grand unity in our baptism. When the rescued Israelites were **“baptized into Moses” (1 Corinthians 10:2)** they were a unified body of those delivered from slavery. In that journey they ate spiritual food and drank spiritual drink and **“that Rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:4)**. Jesus, by types and foreshadows, was with them. In His baptism, we are told that He is with us. He is numbered among us.

For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren (Hebrews 2:11).

It was humans who sinned, so it was humans who needed help, a mediator, who was also human. He became man in every sense, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

¹ Calvin, J., & Pringle, W. (2010). *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Vol. 1, p. 202). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

² Calvin, J., & Pringle, W. (2010). *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Vol. 1, pp. 201-202). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

A Deeper Relating

How do I relate to Christ when all I have is a historical record of what He accomplished? When a person drives, they might think of how he relates to the accomplishments of Henry Ford. When you turn on a light you might think of your relationship to Edison. When we exercise our political freedoms, we might of our relationship to the pilgrims or founders.

But when I live and move and have contemplate my very being (Acts 17:28); when I ponder my beginning and my destiny and everything in between (Psalm 139); when I wonder where I will reside when my few years on this earth come to an end (Psalm 73:23, 24); my only true comfort is found in the knowledge that Christ, though He calls us friends (John 15:15), is a friend closer than a brother (Proverbs 18:24). For He also calls us His body and has promised that where He has gone, we will go also (John 14:3). This is unlike, and superior to, any relationship a creature can know.

There is a depth to this which transcends our normal, mundane idea of a relationship. In His baptism He is marked at one of us. In the grand intimacy of the Lord's Supper, there is a spiritual presence of Christ that we, so to speak, ingest. His Spirit bears witness with ours that we are His child (Romans 8:16). This unity is summed up in the words, **"When all the people were baptized... Jesus was also baptized."**

Luke also highlights the humanity of Jesus in his record of Jesus praying. This Luke does often throughout his gospel (Luke 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28f.; 11:1; 22:41; 23:46). I fear many of us view prayer as nice but expendable. In this, we are poor imitators of Christ. Whatever your quest, to pursue it without prayer is like seeking to drive with no fuel and wondering why you're simply not arriving at your desired destination.

During this particular prayer of Jesus, **"heaven was open."** We will see another expression of this at the crucifixion when the veil is torn from top to bottom (Luke 23:45). There it expresses our entrance into heaven. Here is expresses heaven being open to us. There is a divine word about to come, but first we read of the Holy Spirit descending in bodily form **"like a dove."**

There is great speculation as to why a dove. Perhaps it was the hope of Noah when the dove returned with a **"freshly plucked olive leaf"**

(Genesis 8:11). Perhaps it was the tenderness or innocence of a dove which Jesus taught us to imitate (Matthew 10:16). It is difficult to say. But some things are clear.

Jesus was being consecrated for His ministry. This fulfilled that which was taught in detail in the Old Testament.

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots. ²The 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 (Isaiah 11:1 2).

Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One *in whom* My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles (Isaiah 42:1).

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound (Isaiah 61:1).

We haven't time to pursue the glorious promises associated with the anointing of Christ for His ministry. But all who have trusted in Him are beneficiaries of it. And the sufficiency of Christ in being the One who is capable of this victory-this redemption-are summed up in the words,

You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased (Luke 3:22).

In surveying the dearth of those in whom we might trust, we often feel like John, weeping because no one is **“found worthy to open and read the scroll” (Revelation 5:5)**. O the clouds we tend to trust! I enjoy science fiction and was recently watching yet another series where the scientists are our only hope from invasion and extinction.

The word “smart” in describing the young academics must have been used a thousand times. As well as some well-placed, but poorly thought-

out criticisms of the Christian faith. And to be sure, they were good at math. But not so much at life and certainly blind in terms of ethics, epistemology, metaphysics and theology. How lost we are to trust in the towers of humanity (Genesis 11:4).

But here we have the affirmation from the Father that the Son is worthy of the task while the Holy Spirit equips the Son who, in His love for us will face and overcome that which we have no power to contest. As William Hendriksen observes, “All three are equally interested in our salvation, and the three are One.”³

And what is the heart of this task? This is also anticipated in Isaiah.

But He *was* wounded for our transgressions, He *was* bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed (Isaiah 53:5).

We commonly ask, ‘why would Jesus be baptized since He has no sins which need washing?’ It may very well be asserted that being one with us, He was baptized that we might know that with Him and in Him, our sins are washed away as well.

³ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke* (Vol. 11, p. 219). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

Questions for Study

1. How would you define your relationship with Jesus? How it is like or unlike other relationships (pages 2-5)?
2. What do we learn about our relationship with Christ through His baptism (page 5)?
3. In what ways do you discover that your relationship with Christ is deeper when we ponder His baptism (page 6)?
4. What was Jesus doing just prior to heaven being opened? What does it mean that heaven was opened (page 6)?
5. Discuss the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus. Why was that necessary? What did it accomplish (pages 7, 8)?
6. How is the affirmation of the Father comforting for Christians (pages 7, 8)?