
000305 AM Mark-6

TAPE # 6

WALKING WITH JESUS SERIES "BAPTISM: JOHN'S AND CHRIST'S" MARK 1:4-8

Tonight let's join the crowds trudging out toward the Dead Sea, listen with me at the back of this massive group of people listening as John the Baptist preaches. They have come into the region to the immediate W of the Dead Sea—an utterly barren desert. This area was known as the realm of the Jewish sect of the Essenes, and they had significant communities in this region. Of course, there is no biblical evidence to suggest that John was in any way connected with that sect. John also seems to have preached near the northern end of this region, close by where the Jordan flows into the Dead Sea, rather than midway down the shore.

John was the last of the old, as well as a messenger of the new. As he stood thundering the call to repentance, he pointed to the Lamb of God who by one sacrifice would pay the sufficient price for the sin of the world. His powerful words are recorded by God, through the eyes and ears of Peter, by the hand of Mark, and under the inspiration of God. Let's stand as we join those listening to John, as I read Mark 1:4-8.

Tonight as we heard John the Baptist preach repent and be baptized, we wonder, what does that mean to us this side of the Cross? And what was his baptism? Did it save? Can baptism save anyone? Is baptism an option, tacked on like a business meeting to a church service? All these vital questions we will examine tonight!

WHAT DID JOHN THE BAPTIST SAY?

John called for a **baptism** resulting from true repentance¹. John's ministry was to call Israel to repentance in preparation for the coming of Messiah. His baptism did not produce repentance, but was its result (cf. Matt. 3:7, 8). Far more than a mere change of mind or remorse, repentance involves a turning from sin to God (cf. 1 Thess. 1:9), which results in righteous living. Genuine repentance is a work of God in the human heart (Acts 11:18). **for the remission of sins.** John's rite of

¹ MacArthur Study Bible notes in loc.

baptism did not produce forgiveness of sin; it was only the outward confession and illustration of the true repentance that results in forgiveness (cf. Luke 24:47; Acts 3:19; 5:31; 2 Cor. 7:10). Repentance itself is not a work, but works are its inevitable fruit. Repentance and faith are inextricably linked in Scripture. Repentance means turning from one's sin, and faith is turning to God (cf. 1 Thess. 1:9). They are like opposite sides of the same coin. That is why both are linked to conversion (Mark 1:15; Acts 3:19; 20:21). Note that the works John demanded to see were "fruits" of repentance. But repentance itself is no more a "work" than faith is.

WHO WAS JOHN THE BAPTIST?

For us to best see the context of John the Baptist we need to briefly see the key figures that surround the times in which he ministered. So turn to Luke 3:1 where we left off last time. Note some key names.

First, meet the Herodian Family. Herod the Great was the founder of a dynasty that played a key role in Gospel history. In the pages of the New Testament we will see four generations of Herods. Herod the Great, murderer of Bethlehem's children is the founder, who ruled from 47–4 B.C. In the birth of Christ record he was aged and nearing the end of his life in Matthew 2.

The whole Herod political family starts with Herod's dad who attached himself to Julius Caesar's party, was made a Roman citizen, and was appointed procurator (ruler) of Judea. Later, Herod (the Great) and his brothers were given government roles. It took an entire bloody decade of battling before Herod was proclaimed king of Judea by Rome. He then was able to enforce his rule. Listen to this biography of Herod:

As king, Herod was both brutal and decisive, punishing or executing his enemies, and rewarding his friends. Rivals were murdered. When the decisive battle for the Roman Empire was fought between Anthony and Octavian (later to become "Augustus"), Herod gained the victor's friendship and was given control of additional lands.

While Herod's power was growing, his control over himself and his family was slipping. Herod had married 10 wives and had a number of sons. While these sons schemed to gain the throne, his wives hatched plots and counterplots. Herod became more and more suspicious and paranoid, even torturing his sons' friends to discover any plots against his own life. Herod's own character as a plotter who never hesitated to resort to murder was being reproduced in his family, and this led to the aging tyrant's own sense of terror and fear. Herod finally had the two sons of his favorite wife,

Mariamne, executed by strangulation in the very city where he had married their mother 30 years earlier. Antipater, Herod's oldest son and designated heir, tried to poison his father and was put in chains.

When nearly 70 years old, Herod was stricken with an incurable disease. It was at this time, shortly before his death, that Herod heard of wise men who were seeking to worship the newborn King of the Jews. The dying man still struggled to grasp the power that had brought him and his family only suspicion, hatred, and death! Herod, realizing that the wise men had returned to the East without reporting to him, had all the male children of Bethlehem two years old and under killed!

It was then only a few days before Herod's own death. Five days before he expired, Herod had his son Antipater executed. Then he called all the leading Jews of his territory to his palace. When they came, he imprisoned them, giving orders that they were all to be killed the moment he died. He wanted to ensure that there would be national mourning at his death, rather than rejoicing! Herod's dream of power and glory had turned into a nightmare. The desperate king struggled to the last to maintain control over his kingdom, long after he had lost control over himself. And so he died².

The most vital character in John's life was Jesus. Jesus and John were born as the hateful old Herod was living his last days in the splendors of the marble palaces he had spent his life building, a Child from Everlasting was born in a filthy stable. Baby Jesus was welcomed only by the warmth of the animals which shared His birthplace. Baby Jesus had entered our world and became a part of a family so poor that Mary could only offer two doves because she couldn't afford the prescribed lamb as the sacrifice for her purification.

Jesus grew up in a small town far from the seat of power, becomes a carpenter, to lives and labors in complete obscurity for 30 years. Until here in Mark 1, as the Carpenter from Nazareth stands on a riverbank, He is recognized by John the Baptist as the Lamb of God. John points to Him and says He was the One destined to take away the sin of the world.

Then there is the Messenger, John the Baptist. Conceived by prophetic promise, raised in the ways of the Lord, prepared in the wilderness of Judea, untainted by the greed, hypocrisy and corruption of his day, John walks out of the wilderness.

- ✓ Here he stands, the last and greatest Old Testament prophet;
- ✓ Here he breaks the four centuries of silence from God;
- ✓ Here he booms the thunderous message of repentance and baptism;

² Richards, Lawrence O., *The Teacher's Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1987.

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- ✓ Here he shakes the entire religious establishment, spiritually powerless, full of externalism and the empty rituals of the day; and,
 - ✓ Here he points to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

What was John?

John was only a Voice, Jesus was God's Word.

John was only a lamp shining, Jesus was the Light of the World.

John was only a man, Jesus was God in human flesh, the Promised Messiah!

WHAT WAS JOHN'S MESSAGE?

It was simply, **Repent**. This is no mere academic change of mind, nor mere regret or remorse. John the Baptist spoke of repentance as a radical turning from sin that inevitably became manifest in the fruit of righteousness. The symbolism of John's baptism likely had its roots in OT purification rituals (cf. Lev. 15:13). Baptism had also long been administered to Gentile proselytes coming into Judaism. The baptism of John thus powerfully and dramatically symbolized repentance. Jews accepting John's baptism were admitting they had been as Gentiles and needed to become the people of God genuinely, inwardly (an amazing admission, given their hatred of Gentiles).

By comparing the Gospels we find John notes three types of baptism at this climactic moment:

- 1) **with water unto repentance**. John's baptism symbolized cleansing;
- 2) **with the Holy Spirit**. All believers in Christ are Spirit-baptized (1 Cor. 12:13); and
- 3) **with ... fire**. Because fire is used throughout this context as a means of judgment (Luke 3:10, 12, 16), this must speak of a baptism of judgment upon the unrepentant.

John, the forerunner of Jesus, came baptizing also. But this was not Christian Baptism, because—

- 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). As were the baptisms performed by his disciples previous to the crucifixion of the Lord (John 3:22; 4:1,2) like the baptism of John, they were a

purifying rite, binding to repentance, and preparing the way for the coming kingdom.

NEW TESTAMENT BAPTISM IS:

Christian Baptism is an ordinance immediately instituted by Christ himself, and designed to be observed in the Church until the end of the age. Baptism means identification. In New Testament baptism it involves identification with Christ in His death and resurrection. Being baptized in the name of Christ (Acts 2:38) stresses association with Christ in the rite. Although Romans 6:4–5 refers to Spirit baptism and not water baptism, the passage nonetheless illustrates the meaning of water baptism. It is a public declaration that the believer has been united to Christ by faith in His death and resurrection. Immersion is the most appropriate mode of baptism, not only because the Greek word behind it connotes immersion but even more importantly because that is the only mode that symbolizes burial and resurrection.

1. **BAPTISM ALWAYS PORTRAYS** *my new relationship with God.* Matthew 28:19-20 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, [even] unto the end of the world. Amen. (KJV)
2. **BAPTISM ANNOUNCES MY PLEDGE** *of allegiance to Christ, as I am baptized into the name of the Triune God, and fellowship with Him.* 1 Corinthians 12:13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether [we be] Jews or Gentiles, whether [we be] bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. (KJV) Galatians 3:26-27 For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (KJV)
3. **BAPTISM ALWAYS PARALLELS** A CONFESSION OF FAITH [Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12; 9:17-18; 10:45, 48; 16:30-33]
4. **BAPTISM WAS ALWAYS PART** OF THE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH. Faith demands action, and an immediate action is baptism!
5. **BAPTISM WAS ALWAYS PRESENTED** AS A COMMAND. An unbaptized Christian is alien to the NT. Baptism was not an option, it was obedience to a command.
6. **BAPTISM WAS ALWAYS ONLY FOR THOSE WHO HAD ALREADY PERSONALLY** CONFESSED CHRIST. Only believers were baptized. No infants or children that could not confess Him for themselves were baptized!

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7. **BAPTISM WAS ALWAYS TO PORTRAY** PURIFICATION. [Acts 2:38; 22:16; Titus 3:5; Hebrews 10:22; I Peter 3:21; Revelation. 1:5]

WHAT DOES THE LORD ASK FROM US ABOUT BAPTISM TODAY?

When Jesus issued His great commission and commanded baptism. What were His purposes? **baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.** To baptize literally means to immerse in water, and certain forms of baptism had long been practiced by various Jewish groups as a symbol of spiritual cleansing. The baptism of John the Baptist symbolized repentance of sin and turning to God (Matt. 3:6). As instituted by Christ, however, baptism became an outward act of identification with Him through faith, a visible, public testimony that henceforth one belonged to Him.

The initial act of obedience to Christ after salvation is to submit to baptism as a testimony to union with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection. "Do you not know," Paul asked the Roman believers, "that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:3-4).

Although the act of baptism has absolutely no saving or sacramental benefit or power, it is commanded by Christ of His followers. The only exception might be physical inability, as in the case of the repentant thief on the cross, a prisoner who is forbidden the ordinance, or a similar circumstance beyond the believer's control. The person who is unwilling to be baptized is at best a disobedient believer, and if he persists in his unwillingness there is reason to doubt the genuineness of his faith (see Matt. 10:32-33). If he is unwilling to comply with that simple act of obedience in the presence of fellow believers, he will hardly be willing to stand for Christ before the unbelieving world.