

The Identifier & The Identified by Mark Jarvinen

¹⁵The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ. ¹⁶John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. ¹⁷His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

*²¹When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened ²²and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" **(Luke 3:15-17, 21-22).***

Having taken part in quite a few discussions on Christian doctrine over the years, I've discovered that the topic of Christian baptism is one of the most controversial. Does Scripture teach water baptism as something God does in bestowing the grace of forgiveness as a gift, to infants, young children, and believing adults; or does it teach "believer's baptism" as a public testimony of an already existent faith for those who have reached an age of accountability?

Today's message deals with the subject of "**Jesus' baptism,**" but take a breath, there should be no real controversy concerning this topic, which isn't actually about Christian baptism at all. Christian baptism began after Jesus' resurrection, as part of His Great Commission to His followers in **Matthew 28**, in which He commanded them to go into all nations and make disciples by baptizing and

teaching them. Today's text deals with the one time, special event in the life of Jesus, referred to as "**the baptism of our Lord**" which had special significance for His life and ministry, and which is important for us to understand.

BACKGROUND

It had been roughly eighteen years since Mary and Joseph had found their missing 12 year-old son confounding the rabbis in the temple of Jerusalem with His questions and deep understanding of Scripture (*see Luke 2:41f*). Apparently, at some point during those eighteen years, Joseph died, and Jesus had taken up his father's trade of carpentry to provide for his widowed mother and siblings. Now at the age of 30, Jesus was moved by the Holy Spirit to begin His public ministry "**to seek and to save that which was lost**" (*Luke 19:10*).

Jesus must have walked the **70-75 miles**, (roughly equal to the distance from Eagan to Rochester), from the northern region of **Galilee**, past **Jerusalem**, and down the dangerous **Jericho Road** until he finally arrived by the banks of the **Jordan River**, where **John the Baptist** was preaching the Kingdom of God and baptizing multitudes of people. Arriving, Jesus no doubt saw this multitude gathered to hear **John the Baptist** preach and then respond by submitting to his **baptism** in the waters of the Jordan. The crowd was likely numerous at that time since **NT** scholars surmise that Jesus appeared during the Jewish **Feast of Weeks**, a time when many Jews would have been traveling toward the Temple in Jerusalem to commemorate the harvest. Remember that Jesus was a member of John's extended

family, (**Luke 1:36** tells us that Jesus' mother Mary was related to John's mother, Elizabeth,) and was therefore, probably not a total stranger to John as he presented himself for baptism.

THE SPECIAL NATURE OF JOHN'S BAPTISM

Luke 3: 3 tells us that John's baptism was "***a baptism for repentance for the forgiveness of sins.***" Judaism knew of baptisms for the purpose of cleansing, for example "***proselyte baptism,***" which took place when a non-Jew converted to Judaism. In addition, among the Jews, items such as clothing, utensils, and even articles of furniture were ceremonially cleansed or "baptized." ***But John's baptism was something special.*** It was a call to prepare for the arrival of the era of salvation. John's call for people to be baptized involved a "***turning of the heart to God.***" This was not a call to a mere outward, sentimental remembrance of their heritage as God's people, but a call to turn their hearts toward God in repentance for sin and a realignment of their way of life around God's plan for His people, which included the sharing of one's belongings with those in need and a morality based on personal integrity (***see vv. 10-14***). The activity of John the Baptist could mean only one thing. God's Kingdom was at hand! His salvation was near! This salvation was not an outward political freedom, but an inward, spiritual turning of the heart toward God.

JOHN THE BAPTIST'S HUMILITY

Now, turning from John's baptism to the man himself, we must note that ***John the Baptist*** was the center of attention at this time. All of Jerusalem was coming out to hear him. A man of lesser integrity

could easily have been swayed by this sudden popularity. But there was something unique about John, even more unique than his diet of locusts and wild honey or his wardrobe made of camel's hair and a leather belt (**Matthew 3:4**). It was his **HUMILITY**. **Verse 16** of our text says, ***"I baptize you with water; but he who is more powerful than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am unworthy to untie"***

In those days, rabbis had disciples who performed all sorts of menial tasks for them - except for the removing of their sandals. In the Middle East of John's time, sewers were unknown and the waste products of humans and animals filled the streets and roadways. It was unthinkable that anyone else would handle your sandals after a day spent walking about. But John said that the One who was to come would be so great that he (John) would be unfit to perform even this lowly task of untying his sandals for him. The people of Israel had been without a prophet for 400 years, and some wanted to worship John and follow him. But John deflected all glory off himself and onto Jesus, insisting that he was unworthy even to be Jesus' forerunner.

JOHN UNDERSTOOD HIS ROLE – AND THAT OF JESUS

John knew his place in the scheme of things. He had no doubt grown up being taught what God had revealed to his parents, ***Zechariah and Elizabeth***, about their son becoming God's prophet of preparation for the coming Messiah. Jesus, the Lamb of God Himself, now presenting himself for John's baptism, certainly validated John's prophetic role. Yes, John knew his place in the scheme of God's salvation plan, but even more importantly, ***HE KNEW JESUS' PLACE.***

Here at Jesus' baptism by John we see who Jesus is. In that moment, the Holy Spirit descends as a dove and a voice comes from heaven, saying, ***“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”*** These are words similar to those found in ***Psalm 2:7***, where it is written, ***“He said to me, ‘You are my son, today I have begotten you ...’ ”*** words that would be used at a king's coronation, and also in the adoption proceedings of the Middle East. Though onlookers that day would have seen Jesus in prayer, (***V. 21***), perhaps while standing in the waters of the Jordan, and would have noticed the dove, which signified the Holy Spirit descending upon Him, the words were spoken to Jesus privately: ***“You are my son, ...”*** Here, **God identifies His Son and anoints Him for His Messianic role.** In the difficult days that lie ahead for our Lord during His earthly ministry, beginning with his ensuing temptation in the wilderness, no doubt this validation from His heavenly Father spurred Him on. Jesus had His Father's seal of approval as He began His redemptive work. From this moment on, Jesus was confirmed in His calling as the anointed Messiah of God. So...

WHY WAS JESUS BAPTIZED?

This is a question often posed in theology. Scripture is clear that the ***“Lamb of God”*** was spotless and without blemish. He had no sin from which to repent. So why was he baptized? Answers usually revolve around the word **IDENTIFICATION.**

Certainly in His baptism we see ***Jesus identifying with sinners.*** We see in Jesus' baptism the ***shadow of the cross***, a portend of what was to come. In his baptism, Jesus identified with

humanity in a generic sense, but it would be on the cross where Jesus fully identified with sinners by taking the sins of the world upon himself, though He himself remained sinless. The righteousness of God demanded the shedding of blood, and Jesus did just that on the cross. As Paul writes in *II Corinthians 5:21*, “**He (the Father) made him (Jesus) who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in him.**”

In His baptism, we also see *Jesus identifying with the believing remnant of Israel*. These were the true people of God, God’s chosen in more than name only, who had confessed and repented of their sins, had gone into the waters of the Jordan in response to their repentance, and who were now prepared for the Christ who would forgive them and baptize them with the Holy Spirit.

JESUS: IDENTIFIED BY THE FATHER, FOR HIM AND FOR US

But most importantly, at His baptism *we meet the Jesus who not only identified with humanity, but who also received His identity from His Father. Thus, Jesus was the “identifier,” but also the One who was “identified.”* “*You are my son ...*” the voice from heaven declared. This affirmation of the Father no doubt meant a lot to Jesus as His ministry began. ***But it’s also significant for us. Jesus is God’s Son!*** A person can’t remain neutral about Jesus. His identity calls forth our response. In our text, John says that Jesus would baptize with the *Holy Spirit* and with *fire*. In other words, some would believe in Him and receive the Holy Spirit, while others would reject Him and be judged by fire.

Many in our culture respect Jesus, regarding Him as a religious teacher and leader of great significance and even placing him among the top religious teachers and leaders of all time. Others even acknowledge him as a prophet, giving him a seat at the table with a rather exclusive group of divine revealers. Unfortunately for them, that's simply not the Biblical portrait painted by Luke. ***Jesus is not like anyone who came before Him or anyone who has come since.***

Years ago, while living in the East, I visited **Baseball's Hall of Fame** in Cooperstown, NY, where the busts of all of baseball's greats were then and still are on display. However, if there was such a thing as a **Religious Hall of Fame** there would be only one worthy of inclusion - **JESUS**. There have been other great prophets, teachers, and kings, but there is only one who has combined all those roles as God's Son.

Therefore, ***it matters supremely what you think of Jesus Christ.*** Contrary to public opinion in this age of tolerance, Jesus is not merely one avenue of truth. True religion is not like a line in a cafeteria, where one has a choice of what meal to eat. The message of Jesus is unique. The road to the Father comes only through him (***John 14:6, Acts 4:12***). Faith is not a vast interstate highway system where many roads lead to God. **Understand that Jesus is available to all humanity. His offer of salvation is not exclusive. But the Bible is clear. In order to know the Father, one must know the Son.**

Jesus and the message of salvation offer an invitation to believe, which many will receive. Others, however will reject the call of

salvation. **Luke 3:17** says, ***“His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear the threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, BUT HE WILL BURN UP THE CHAFF WITH UNQUENCHABLE FIRE.”*** Jesus came both to **deliver and divide** - to **save and to judge**. In other words a person must in humility believe and receive the righteousness that comes from God through the finished work of Jesus. To ignore or reject God’s offer of salvation through Jesus brings disastrous results.

Several years ago a man and his wife were found frozen to death in their car. A blizzard had dumped tons of snow in the area, burying their vehicle with them in it. Before she died, the woman in that car scribbled a note on a piece of paper and stuffed it in the glove compartment. The note read: **“I DON’T WANT TO DIE THIS WAY.”** Tragically, less than fifty feet from their icy grave stood a stranded bus, whose passengers, strong in their mutual encouragement and support, remained warm through the night. Less than fifty feet away was help and hope, but this husband and wife died unaware. I wonder how many people will die not knowing that salvation was closer than the air they breathe. Jesus is God’s Son. That makes Him our Savior. It’s vital that people come to know him.

CONCLUSION

I’d like to close today with Paul’s words to the Greeks on Mars Hill from **Acts 17:30-31**:

“The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man

whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead.”

Who is this man whom God has appointed and raised from the dead? He is none other than **the Lord Jesus Christ**. To know God, you must know this **Appointed One**. To be a part of God's Kingdom, one must know the King.

Yet, to so many today Jesus remains respected, but at arms length, idealized but impersonal and not all that capable of fixing the real problems in the world of today. But the gospel, the message of salvation, opens the door for us to understand **the real Jesus** – the One who came to earth as one of us, and loved us in spite of our self-centered and rebellious ways, dying on the cross in payment for our sins and breaking the power of sin and death through His resurrection, to give new life to all who trust in Him. **Jesus is God's movement toward us**, even though, because of our sinful nature, we sometimes find ourselves opposing Him. Nevertheless, Jesus is the giver of grace, the grace by which we are brought to faith and saved, and the grace by which we are continuously loved and forgiven. Because of His great mercy and love for all humanity, God invites all to believe in Jesus - the One sent by God the Father, and identified by Him as His Son in Whom He is well pleased – the One Who is God for us – our Savior, the One whom to know is life eternal. **What is God's message to people today?** What it always has been – “Repent and believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the One identified as My beloved Son, and the One who identifies all who believe in Him as My beloved children and heirs to eternal life.” **A-men.**