

Hymns: 46 I am Resolved 55 Redeemed, How I Love to Proclaim It
Scripture: Psalm 111

Big Idea: Baptism Symbolizes a Changed Heart

Have you heard the news about Dunkin' Donuts? Less than two weeks ago, they revealed they're considering changing their name -- dropping the *Donuts* and just making it *Dunkin'*. They're doing marketing tests now.

Who likes to dunk?

- Donuts in coffee
- Oreos (other cookies) in milk
- French fries in catchup
- Chips in dip or salsa
- Strawberries in chocolate
- Raw celery, carrot sticks, or broccoli in hummus, guacamole, or plain Greek yogurt

Today we're continuing our study of John the Baptist. In honor of Dunkin' Donuts, this lesson includes a look into *baptism*. Where did the practice come from? What was its purpose? What did John's baptism mean?

Review

Last time, we saw that after the last of the Old Testament prophets spoke, Israel had become a battleground and a pawn of sorts controlled by the greatest power of the day. During over four hundred years of silence from God the Israelites clung to the last two verses of Malachi looking for Elijah to return.

Into that setting John the Baptist (whom we'll call *John*) **burst** on the scene with miracles surrounding his birth. Could this be the long-awaited return of Elijah? Would he free Israel from the shackles of Rome and restore the nation to its former greatness?

We saw the angel Gabriel prophesied a miracle birth would be (Luke 1: 13-17):

1. a boy born to Elisabeth (covered).
2. filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb (covered).
3. Named *John* meaning "Jehovah is gracious" (covered).
4. the object of rejoicing at his birth (covered).
5. **great** in the sight of the Lord.
6. He would drink neither wine nor strong drink.
7. He would turn **hearts** back to God in a way that Elijah did.

Zacharias the priest, his father, prophesied that John would (vv. 76-79):

1. *go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways;*
2. *give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide [their] feet into the way of peace.*

3. *give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins,*
We left off with John in the wilderness:

[80] *...the child
grew,
and waxed strong in spirit,
and was in the deserts till the day of his sh[o]wing unto Israel.*

Ministry of John the Baptist

While the only account we have of John's early life is found in Luke chapter 1, descriptions of his ministry appear in all four gospels. We'll combine these testimonies, filling in details, and harmonizing them to get a complete picture of John's life and ministry. Let's begin:

Luke 3

[1] *Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar,*

Luke gives us the specific time. Using the dates provided by historians, we pinpoint the date at 29 A.D. This lines up nicely with the age of thirty designated for Jewish priests to start their ministry (Numbers 4:3,30).

Now listen to this familiar list of names:

Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea,
and *Herod* [Herod Antipas son of Herod the Great] being tetrarch [a ruler over one fourth of a Roman province or country, tetrarch] of Galilee, ...
[2] *Annas and Caiaphas* being the high priests,

There's the time context and some key players. We already know these names from the story of Christ's trial.

the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.

Notice John is doing what prophets do – speaking God's word.

[3] *And he came into all the country about Jordan,
preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins;*

That's the message that his father prophesied that he would give. But what exactly does it mean? We need to stop here and unpack that phrase "baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." We'll take it one piece at a time.

First, we have the word *baptism*. The translators of our Bible chose to leave that word untranslated. Instead, we have the same sounds put into our language making it what is known as a *transliteration*. The word appears only in the New Testament in our Bible.

Baptism: *baptisma* βάπτισμα *bä'p-tē-smä* immersion, submersion
 Baptize: *baptizō* βαπτίζω *bäp-tē'-zō* dip, immerse, submerge

Where did that practice come from and exactly? What did it signify? Did John invent it? No. It was a Jewish religious practice used to bring *proselytes* into the Jewish faith.

Now you're probably thinking, "Cut that out!" (as Dad would say.) You're defining a transliteration with **another transliteration**. What is a *proselyte*?

Proselyte: *prosēlytos* προσήλυτος *pros-ā'-lü-tos* stranger, alien, Gentile convert to Judaism

While not part of the Jewish law per-say, baptism was part of the Jewish tradition. The Torah (first five books of the Bible) does include various washings. The Jews expanded on this idea and came up with baptism to signify a cleansing of sorts of a Gentile. All Gentile converts were required to be baptized and attest acceptance of the Jewish precepts. In addition, males were required to be circumcised.

John picked up the practice of baptizing to emphasize the **cleansing** from sin and **turning** to the Lord. The Jews had lost their way in **legalism** and worse yet **idolatry**. John's message was one of a turning of **hearts** back to the Lord.

*...man looketh on the **outward appearance**, but the Lord looketh on **the heart**.* (I Samuel 16:7)

The next word in the chain is *repentance*. What does **that** mean? It means a change of mind that leads to a change of living. In this context, it is a change of mind about sin. These people coming to John were admitting they were living in sin and publicly declaring their decision to clean up their lives.

Remission: forgiveness, pardon, canceling of debt, washing away

So putting it all together:

John's baptism was an outward expression (immersion in water) of an inward change of heart toward sin resulting in pardon.

...returning to Luke chapter 3

[4] *As it is written in the book of ... [Isaiah] the prophet, ...,*

[Quoting Isaiah 40:3-5]

The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

[5] *Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth;*

[6] *And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.*

When you invite someone to your house, you usually tidy up before they arrive. If **the king** were to come visit you, you would **really** want to roll out the red carpet and prepare a **royal** welcome for him. That's what John is saying here. The king is coming.

We'll interrupt the context in Luke to fill in details provided by John and Matthew:

John 1

[6] *There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.*

[7] *The same came for a **witness**, to bear **witness** of the Light, that all men through him might believe.*

[8] *He was not that Light, but was sent to bear **witness** of that Light.*

You can't miss those two keywords: *witness* and *light*.

Of course, that light is Jesus Christ – that same light spoken of by John's father in his prophesy. The light which his son would point people to.

...switching now to Matthew 3

[4] *And the same John [was clothed with] camel's hair, and a leather[] girdle about his loins; and his [diet consisted of] locusts and wild honey.*

See, I told you. He ate bugs!

[5] *Then went out to him
Jerusalem,
and all Judaea,
and all the region round about Jordan,*

[6] *And [they] were
baptized [by] **him** in Jordan,
confessing their sins.*

...now back to Luke's account, chapter 3

[7] *Then said he to the **multitude** that came forth to be baptized [by] him,*

Here comes John the Baptist's pre-baptismal sermon to a **multitude**.
I can't help visualizing a Billy Graham Crusade meeting here.

Baptism means something. It's not just some cheap, religious ritual. It's an outward expression of an inward **change of heart**. That change in the case of John's baptism is called *repentance*. These multitudes were making a break from the old religious order and identifying instead with this new order articulated and led by John.

Matthew 3:7 adds...

[7] *But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said*

unto them,

Returning to Luke...

*O generation of **vipers**, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*

As most of you know, a few months ago I was bitten by a snake, very likely from the pit **viper** group. All is well with me now, but having experienced a poisonous snake bite, I have greater appreciation for the metaphor.

How was that generation (of Pharisees and Saducees) like **vipers**? Satan came to Eve as a serpent. He 's also a minister of death. His way of sin is a deadly poison that results in death. This generation was following and even teaching these doctrines of devils. **Jesus** spoke of the scribes and pharisees using this same language (Matthew 23:29-39).

And what is that day of the wrath to come? It's the day of the Lord's wrath as described in Malachi 4:1. Or more simply, The Day of the Lord. Malachi 4:5 speaks of it as "*the great and dreadful day of the LORD.*" This day is still in **our** future, but our present dispensation was not visible to the Old Testament prophets.

Luke 3

*[8] Bring forth therefore **fruits** worthy of repentance, and begin **not** to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.*

John is using the reasoning later given in the book of James. True change of **heart** produces a **changed life**. Many Israelites, as do even some mainline Christian churches today, believe that your family ties will garner God's favor. John nixes that idea.

*[9] And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth **not** forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.*

Here John warns the Israelites that time is very short for them. They must turn back (repent) to **genuine** worship of the Lord or face **certain** judgment.

Next, John instructs three groups:

1. regular people
2. tax collectors
3. soldiers

Note here, the Pharisees and Sadducees while they came to observe, would not humble themselves and submit to a ritual that indicated that they were in need of cleansing – especially one used to cleanse Gentiles!

*[10] And **the people** asked him, saying, **What shall we do then?***

Don't miss this question. People always want to **do** something in order to earn favor with God. God of course does not want us to *do* but to *be*.

[11] He answer[ed] and sai[d] unto them, He that ha[s] two coats, let him [give] to him that ha[s] none; and he that [has food], let him do likewise.

The first question comes from people of unspecified profession. John responds with an answer to which everyone can relate – food and clothing. He instructs them to share with those in need. His doctrine sounds a lot like the preaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Where did it come from? Way back in:

Leviticus 19

*[18] Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt **love thy neighbour as thyself**: ...*

Of course, this includes loving our brothers and sisters in Christ and members of our own family in this unselfish way as well.

John is preaching the same message that Jesus would later preach (Matthew 7:12).

*[12] Then came also **publicans** to be baptized, and said unto him, **Master**,*

Note their use of the term *Master*. The word means *teacher*. We'll consider this usage in greater detail in the next sermon in this series.

what shall we do?

[13] And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.

These tax collectors asked the same question of John. This time John answered **them** in terms that related to **their** experience. He put the finger on the abuse that was their **classic** form of sin.

*[14] And the **soldiers** likewise **demand**ed of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do **violence** to no man, neither **accuse** any falsely; and be **content** with your wages.*

The soldiers asked the same question as the previous groups. Notice they **demand**ed John reply to them. Like the tax collectors, they wielded the **authority** and **power** of the government. In addition, they held the **threat** of physical retribution or even **deadly force**. This **power** led them to the temptation of abuse.

Again, John saw their sin and fearlessly confronted them with it.

He spoke with such authority and wisdom, the people wondered. Could this be the one we have been waiting for? We'll have to stop there for now and pick up here next time (in six weeks).

But before we go, let's wrap things up.

Application

We've been considering baptizing – **dunking** if you will – in the River **Jordan**. *Dunking, Jordan*, does that ring a bell? Michael Jordan made dunking the basketball an art form and built a huge business around a moniker that represents Air Jordan. One of the best things about him was his **passion** for greatness. It was **contagious**, and it **drove** his teammates to excellence – in playing their sport, displaying their skill, and winning. They had **heart**.

We learned today that John came to **change hearts**. His baptism of repentance was an outward **witness** of a **commitment** to **change**. God still requires a true **change of heart**.

His offer to each of us is salvation by grace through faith. He provides all that we need to make that change. It's up to us to accept His gift of grace. The result will be a regenerated life that comes only through enlisting the indwelling power of His Holy Spirit.

Benediction

*[25] Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel,
and the preaching of Jesus Christ,
according to the **revelation** of the **mystery**,
which was kept secret since the world began,
[26] But now is made manifest,
and by the **scriptures of the prophets**,
according to the commandment of the everlasting God,
made known **to all nations** for the obedience of faith:
[27] To God only wise,
be **glory** through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen. (Romans 16:25-27)*

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