

BAPTISM AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

Mark 1:1-8 Text vs. 8 *"I baptize you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*

You're familiar with the story of Jonah and the whale when God said to Jonah, *"Arise, go to Nineveh that great city, and cry out against it. For their wickedness has come before Me."* Jonah went. He cried out against Nineveh, that that great city must repent, or in 40 days God would bring destruction against it. Nineveh repented. They put on sackcloth and ashes as a sign of humility before God. It was coarse clothing made from goat's hair. And they dusted themselves with ashes. God spared Nineveh.

By contrast, *Isaiah* cried out against the sin of Israel. He spoke for God. And of God. Painfully aware of the evil of its citizens, *Isaiah* anticipated Israel's collapse. His goal was to direct his people into ways acceptable to God, who by their conduct they had alienated. But they ignored *Isaiah's* message. And several thousand Israelites were forcibly relocated to Assyria.

Then *Jeremiah* cried out that *"the sins of Israel and Judah—the sins of the people of Jerusalem, the kings, the officials, the priests, and the prophets—have stirred up God's anger."* (Jeremiah 32:32) They, too, ignored the message and were taken away into 40 years of captivity in Babylon.

Finally, *John the Baptist* came preaching in the desert of Judea by the Jordan River. This was *his* message. *"After me comes One more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water. But He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."* (Mark 1:7-8) That powerful statement introduced John the Baptist as the messenger who would prepare the way for Jesus Christ. He had the privilege of introducing the Messiah to Israel. Later, some of John's own disciples would leave John to become Jesus' closest associates.

John was an extraordinary man. Born in an extraordinary way. To an extraordinary task *preparing the way for the coming of Jesus*. He was the last of the Old Testament prophets who alone, of all the prophets, had the privilege of looking *directly* into the face of Jesus as he was baptizing Him. Others saw Jesus only from a distance. John's voice was a warning. Judgement would fall upon Jerusalem if they did not repent and believe the Good News of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, that phrase about John being a *"voice crying in the wilderness"* has come to mean someone speaking out about something that's not popular. Or isn't being heard by others. It's often used to describe people who are promoting change, or reform, but aren't being listened to. Kind of like our politics today! The Jews didn't listen! So, in 70 A. D. Rome destroyed Jerusalem and all Israel.

And our lesson tells us that *"As soon as Jesus was baptized, He went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on Him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love. With Him I am well pleased.'"* Here, the Holy Spirit appeared as a dove at Jesus' baptism to show that through Jesus, God would pay the price righteousness requires for sin, so that humanity could enjoy peace with God. This miraculous moment demonstrated the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. God's three distinct features. It defines one God, who exists in three equal, eternal, real persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Three distinct beings. Yet One! The dove represents peace between God and humanity, going back to the time when Noah sent a dove out of his Ark to see if the water God had used to flood the Earth to destroy sinful people had receded. And the dove marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. It's a powerful moment. It demonstrates the love and approval God the Father had for his Son Jesus. It's Jesus recognized as the Son of God.

Now, the Gospel of Luke says Jesus was *"about 30 years of age"* when He began His ministry. He began by preaching, teaching, healing the sick, performing miracles, feeding the hungry, raising the dead. And throughout His public ministry He demonstrated His message of love, compassion, and forgiveness. He preached about the Kingdom of God. He called people to repent. To turn away from their sins. He encouraged them to confess their sins and be baptized as a sign of their repentance. This message is still important today. The Bible teaches that *"if you confess your sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive you your sins and purify you from all unrighteousness."* (1 John 1:9) Confession is an act of humility. It's when you honestly admit you have fallen short of God's teaching, and you need His forgiveness. It's trusting that God is merciful and gracious and will forgive you when you come to Him seeking His forgiveness. It means making up for the harm you have caused others. It may even involve apologizing. Making repayment if necessary. Doing something to repair the damage you have done. And if you have been baptized, it means you have a responsibility to publicly declare your faith in Jesus. That you are committed to following Him. Baptism is your admission to the church symbolized by the pouring or sprinkling of water on your head. Or by total immersion in water. It's a confession of faith in Christ, that's symbolic of a cleansing of the soul from sin. Death to sin. And being resurrected to a new life of righteousness. Baptism is important. It's the foundation for the Christian life. It's the beginning of your public testimony to your faith in Jesus Christ. However, Billy Graham believed baptism is not a main requirement for salvation. He said when baptism is made the main requirement for

salvation, it violates the Scriptures. Baptism's *not* necessary for your salvation. And the requirements for salvation vary, depending on the religious tradition.

In mainline *Protestantism*, the Bible teaches you must believe in God and Jesus Christ. Repent of your sins. Be baptized. And remain within the fellowship of the Church.

In *Catholicism*, you must hope in God. Persevere in charity. Die in a state of grace, which is the condition when a person is free from mortal sin and pleasing to God. It's the necessary condition of the soul at death to attain heaven.

In *Judaism*, salvation is not viewed as a one-time event. It's an ongoing process attempting to live a life of righteousness and holiness. The *Jewish* concept of salvation is closely tied to the idea of Covenant, which is the special relationship between God and the Jewish people. According to Jewish tradition, the Covenant was established when God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai. And it's renewed every year on the holiday of the Feast of Weeks in late May or early June. The idea of Covenant involves living a life of righteousness and holiness. Observing God's commandments. Performing charitable deeds. And repenting for one's sins.

In other religious traditions, the requirements for salvation may include different beliefs, practices, or rituals. For example, in *Islam* you must believe in the oneness of God and the prophethood of Muhammad. Pray five times a day facing Mecca, toward the Holy Kaaba in Mecca. Give to charity. Fast during the month of Ramadan, during which the *Quran*, believed by Muslims to be the literal words of God that provide a complete code of conduct that offers guidance in every walk of their life. And to make a pilgrimage to Mecca.

In *Buddhism*, the belief of salvation differs from many other religions. In Buddhism, salvation is achieved through the attainment of enlightenment. Buddhism does not teach you are saved from the sins you inherit or develop. It's the realization of the true nature of reality. The end of suffering. The state of enlightenment known as *Nirvana* which is achieved through the practice of the *Eightfold Path*: right understanding, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

In *Confucianism*, salvation is achieved through the cultivation of virtue and the practice of moral behavior. It doesn't teach you are saved from sin. Or that your soul is saved from eternal damnation. It involves living a life of compassion, generosity, and righteousness. Treating others with respect and dignity.

But in our lesson, at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry His baptism marked the beginning of a new era in the history of the world about how you receive salvation. In the third chapter of John's Gospel, Jesus was speaking to a Pharisee named Nicodemus who was one of the members of the highest Jewish authority in Israel, the Jewish ruling council called The Sanhedrin. He secretly went to Jesus to tell Him he knew Jesus was the Christ, the son of God, because of the miracles and signs Jesus was performing. When Jesus heard that, He told Nicodemus that to see the kingdom of God he must be "*born again.*" Nicodemus responded, "*How can a person be born when he is already old and obviously cannot come out of the womb again?*" That's when Jesus wondered why Nicodemus, as one of Israel's teachers, could not understand what He meant when He said, "*you must be born again!*" And John 3:16 clears it up! Say it together with me . . .

But then, Jesus went on to say that He Himself must be "*lifted up.*" His coming sacrificial death on the cross would have worldwide effect. It would draw all people to Him, regardless of race, gender, or social status. It meant everyone would have the opportunity to be made right with God through faith in Him. That everyone who believed in Him would have eternal life.

That scene between Nicodemus and Jesus is in the movie "*The Chosen*" which focuses on Jesus and the different people who met and followed Him or associated with Him. It's marvelous! If you have never seen it, please do! Because when Jesus declared the powerful message of John 3:16 — that God loves His people so much that He gave us His only son Jesus, that through Him, we can have eternal life. *That's* what makes the difference between Christianity and the other religions of the world just described. *John 3:16!*

And Jesus went on to say in verses 17 and 18, "*He came into the world to save, not to condemn.*" His message of love and compassion continues to inspire today. His teachings continue to be important. His teachings are powerful! John the Baptist teachings continue to be important. John's presence and testimony pointed to Jesus as Messiah and Savior. John's words and deeds inspired to repent and believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior. John's example and challenge encouraged to follow Jesus wherever He leads.

Today we're living in a time when many voices are calling from different directions. Some voices may tell you what you want to hear. Some may tell you what you need to hear. Some may tell you what you don't want to hear. How will you respond when you hear such voices? Will you listen like John did? Will you recognize like John did? Will you prepare like John did? May each one of you try to follow Jesus by being baptized and then with the power of His Holy Spirit, live a life of love, compassion, and forgiveness. AMEN