

02. Mark 1:9-10

“The Baptism Controversy” Pt.1

(9/6/26)

Last week we started a new study here at Calvary on Sunday mornings—the Gospel of Mark.

The Greek word translated ‘gospel’ literally means ‘good news.’

The 4 gospels are the good news about the most significant events in all of human history—the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

Mark’s gospel, like any other historical record, has a beginning—and so he starts out his gospel:

Mark 1:1–3 (NKJV)

¹ The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. ² As it is written in the Prophets: “*Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.*” ³ “*The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.’*”

The story of the good news of Jesus Christ begins with a *messenger* who was sent by God to announce the coming of the Messiah—that messenger was named John:

John 1:6-7 (NKJV)

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name *was* John. ⁷ This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe.

So, John was sent from God with a message, a message he was supposed to deliver to the Jewish people (and all humanity)—which means that John was a *prophet* (someone who speaks on behalf of God).

John was born to Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth.

They had both prayed for a son for years—but Elizabeth had remained barren.

And now after years of praying, they were elderly and no doubt had long since given up hope of ever having a son.

And then one day as Zacharias, who was a priest, was in the Temple burning incense to God—the angel Gabriel appeared to him and gave him some incredible news:

Luke 1:11–17 (NKJV)

¹¹ Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² And when Zacharias saw *him*, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. ¹³ But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. ¹⁴ And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. ¹⁵ For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. ¹⁶ And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, *‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’* and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

So, John’s birth was special (not as special as Jesus’ birth of course) but John’s birth was special in that long before John was born on the earth, his coming was foretold by the O.T. prophets.

As God said through the prophet Malachi:

Malachi 3:1 (NKJV)

¹ "Behold, I send My messenger and he will prepare the way before Me...

John was the one prophesied in the O.T. who would be the forerunner of the Messiah—who would come announcing Messiah’s coming thus preparing the way for Him by preaching a message of repentance and baptizing people in the Jordan River.

Mark 1:9–10 (NKJV)

⁹ It came to pass in those days *that* Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove.

As I said last time, John and Jesus were second cousins—John’s mother Elizabeth and Jesus’ mother Mary were first cousins.

We know from Luke 1:26 that John was born approximately six months before Jesus, and if he started his public ministry at age thirty, as Jesus did, that would mean that John would have been ministering for about six months by the time Jesus came to him to be baptized.

Jesus walked approximately sixty miles from Galilee to the lower Jordan River to be baptized by John—indicating how important John’s baptism was in launching the ministry of Jesus.

Now, because of the importance of baptism, I’d like to spend the rest of our time this morning and next week presenting a two-part message I’m calling **“The Baptism Controversy.”**

The English word “baptize” comes from the Greek word “*baptizo*” which means to “*immerse*.”

It is used 74 times in the New Testament every time the idea is immersion—the question is into what?

Well, we have to look at the context of each passage to determine that—because the word is used to speak of 6 different kinds of baptisms in the N.T.

1. The baptism of suffering

Matthew 20:23

So He said to them, "You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with...[Explain—2Tim. 3:12]

2. The baptism of distress or of being overwhelmed

The word is still used this way in Greece today—for example:

If they wanted to say, “*I’m overwhelmed with problems today*”, they would use the word “*baptizo*” meaning that they feel as though they are “*immersed*” or “*drowning*” in their problems.

In fact, that is how Jesus used the word in Luke 12:50—

Luke 12:50 (NKJV)

⁵⁰ But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished!

Here He was talking about the cross and how He was immersed in His *mission* to die for the sins of the world—but also, of being immersed in the emotional *duress* of wanting to finish the work the Father had given Him to do.

3. The baptism with the Holy Spirit

Acts 1:5, 8 (NKJV)

⁵ for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now... ⁸ But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”
[*This is the baptism of power for service*]

4. The baptism of judgment

Matthew 3:11–12 (NKJV)

¹¹ I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit [*salvation*] and fire [*judgment*]. ¹² His winnowing fan *is* in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn [*the redeemed into His Kingdom*]; but He will burn up the chaff [*the unredeemed*] with unquenchable fire [*the Lake of Fire i.e., “Hell”*].

5. The baptism of salvation

1 Corinthians 12:13 (NKJV)

¹³ For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...

If you look at the context of this verse, you will see that salvation is in view—so this is speaking of the baptism of salvation.

The baptism of salvation is a “dry” baptism where a person who receives Jesus as their Savior is instantly, invisibly and supernaturally ‘*immersed*’ (baptized) into the Body of Christ by the Holy Spirit.

Now that leaves one final baptism we need to talk about—the one we most often think of when we hear the word *baptism*—water baptism.

6. Water baptism

Water baptism is mentioned throughout the New Testament.

Water baptism is a *symbol* of us being washed from our sins and identifying with Jesus in His death, burial and resurrection.

And yet, water baptism not only speaks of our oneness with Jesus—it also speaks of our oneness (our unity) with each other as Christians being members of the Body of Christ (the Church).

But instead of being a symbol of our *unity* with each other in Christ, it has become a subject that has *divided* Christians from one another over the centuries.

And the reason for this division is because many Christian denominations believe that water baptism is essential for salvation—a doctrine called ‘*baptismal regeneration*’.

While many other Christian churches (like ours) believe that, while water baptism is a beautiful *symbol* of our oneness with Christ thru our faith in Him—it is not essential for our salvation.

Let me set this up by saying that—water baptism isn't a uniquely *Christian* thing.

A lot of Christians don't know that the Jews practiced a form of baptism *before* Christianity.

Before they went into the Temple to worship the LORD, they would undergo a ritual purification in a special cleansing pool or bath known as a 'mikveh.'

They would immerse ('baptize') themselves in the waters of this cleansing pool, washing off the dirt from their bodies which would symbolize a purification from sin and all outward defilements.

And then (and only then) were they considered *ceremonially* clean and could go in and worship the Lord in the Temple.

In New Testament times, if people wanted to convert (proselytize) to Judaism, they went through a ceremonial washing referred to as *baptism*.

Now, we must be careful to note that the baptism of John was not *Christian* baptism—but was a baptism connected with *Israel* and its acceptance of their Messiah.

In Christian baptism we identify with Jesus in His death, burial and resurrection which comes *after* we have received Him into our hearts as Savior—whereas John's baptism *preceded* the receiving of the Messiah.

Please understand, Christian water baptism does not in any way *wash* us of our sins.

“But didn’t Peter say it does in Acts 2:38?”

Acts 2:38 (NKJV)

³⁸ Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest (and others) have said that in the Greek, what Peter actually said was, *“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ because of the fact that your sins have been put away...”*

Salvation precedes water baptism and does not come *after* we are baptized in water—or in other words, salvation is not the result of a person being water baptized.

And so, water baptism doesn’t wash sins away—nor is it a necessary part of salvation (no baptismal regeneration)—so then what is the purpose for doing it?

It acts as an outward sign, symbolizing the washing away of sin through the blood of Christ, and identifying the new believer with their Lord Jesus Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.

Water baptism is the sign of the New Covenant just like a wedding ring is the sign of the marriage covenant.

A wedding ring isn’t essential for marriage—even as water baptism isn’t essential for salvation.

The thief that died on the cross next to Jesus professed Him (and received Him) as Lord and Savior—at which time Jesus said to him, *“Today you’ll be with Me in paradise”* acknowledging that he was in fact saved—without being water baptized.

The Philippian jailer, in Acts 16, asked Paul and Silas what he had to do to be saved—and Paul said, *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved...”*

He didn't say, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be baptized in water and you will be saved."

Romans 10:9 (NKJV)

⁹ ...if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

Notice that water baptism is not mentioned.

And then, in my mind, the greatest testimony against baptismal regeneration (that water baptism is essential for salvation)—comes from the mouth of Paul the apostle himself in 1 Corinthians 1:

1 Corinthians 1:14-17 (NKJV)

¹⁴ I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. ¹⁶ Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. ¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel...

Notice how Paul separates *water baptism* from the *gospel*—indicating that they were separate and distinct things that were not working together to secure a person's salvation.

Look, if water baptism was essential for salvation, it would be part of the gospel and therefore Paul (the quintessential evangelist) would never have said that the Lord *didn't* send him to baptize—if in fact baptism was necessary for a person to be saved!

If Paul believed that water baptism was essential for salvation, he would have rushed everyone who received Jesus as their Savior down to the river as quickly as possible to *throw* them into the water and 'seal the deal!'

If a person put their faith in Jesus but then died of a heart attack a half hour later before they could be water baptized—if water baptism was essential for salvation, they would be forever lost!

Matthew 3:13-14 (NKJV)

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ And John *tried to* prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?"

John here recognizes that Jesus doesn't need to be baptized by him because John's baptism was a baptism of repentance and Jesus was sinless and therefore didn't need to repent for anything.

This is a fact that John acknowledged when he said, "*I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?*"

So, what was the purpose of Jesus being baptized by John?

I think there are four main reasons why Jesus submitted Himself to John's baptism and why it was so important for Him to do so.

- a. Jesus' baptism was an *affirmation* of John's ministry
- b. Jesus' baptism was an *identification* with us personally
- c. Jesus' baptism was a *revelation* of His divinity
- d. Jesus' baptism was an *illustration* of His future work on Calvary

a. Jesus' baptism was an affirmation of John's ministry

By Jesus coming to John to be baptized it was His stamp of authenticity upon John's ministry.

If John had been just a 'nut job' or even worse a false prophet—Jesus would have had nothing to do with him.

So, by being baptized by John Jesus was endorsing the ministry of John—recognizing him to be a true prophet with a true message from God and the prophesied forerunner of the Messiah.

b. Jesus' baptism was an identification with us personally

This was extremely important—not just for His public ministry but also for His redemptive ministry.

Practically speaking if Jesus was going to minister to prostitutes, tax-collectors and other sinners—they needed to know He was willing to identify Himself with them.

The Pharisees would never identify with sinners whom they had nothing but disdain for.

But Jesus sought these people out and had contact with them—even eating with them (becoming one with them) which earned Him the title, “*friend of sinners.*”

But He also needed to identify with sinners to die for their sins.

I think Harry Ironside expresses the idea rightly when he says, “*He who was to take the sinner's place came to be baptized by John, that he might thereby be identified with sinners for whom he was to lay down his life.*”

c. Jesus' baptism was a revelation of His divinity

Matthew 3:16-17 (NKJV)

¹⁶ When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. ¹⁷ And suddenly a voice *came* from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

John 1:32-34 (NKJV)

³² And John bore witness, saying, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. ³³ I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ ³⁴ And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.”

[It was also a revelation of the Trinity—Explain]

d. Jesus' baptism was an illustration of His future work on Calvary

Matthew 3:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵ But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him.

What did Jesus mean when He said to John that it was fitting for Him to take part in John's baptism at this time in order to "fulfill all righteousness"?

One author put it this way—

"What He meant was that baptism for Him was a ritual symbolizing the way in which He would fulfill all the righteous claims of God against man's sin. His immersion typified His baptism in the waters of God's judgment at Calvary. His emergence from the water foreshadowed His resurrection. By death, burial, and resurrection, He would satisfy the demands of divine justice and provide a righteous basis by which sinners could be justified."

Now I realize we threw a lot of information at you this morning—all good stuff we need to know but can any of it help us in our walk with the Lord this week and beyond?

I think that the greatest practical lesson that we can take away from this study is in understanding how much our Savior loves us that He would leave His exalted throne in heaven, come to earth and take on a human body to identify with us in our weaknesses and to eventually die in our place.

The greatest identification of Jesus with us was through the incarnation.

Jesus had to become one of us to die for us.

It was by one man (Adam) that sin came into the world, and it was going to have to be a Man (Jesus) to take away the sin of the world.

In other words, it would take a "kinsman redeemer". (Explain)

The root meaning of the word ‘compassion’ is ‘*to get into the skin of another.*’ (Explain)

Hebrews 4:14–16 (NLT)

¹⁴ So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. ¹⁵ This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.