

## Baptism and the Gospel

Turn to Luke 3 please. This is called “baptism and the gospel.” This Sunday and next will be on baptism. For our church mid-June is traditionally church family camp time, and that’s where we’ve usually baptized people, so we’ll talk about baptism even though we’re not having camp.

I’m doing this to invite baptism. If you are not baptized, think about this. And if you are, take these Scriptures today as describing you and me. These Scriptures tell us what kind of world we live in, and what God had done about it, and how we came to the Lord. These Scriptures are our story. Let’s listen to how the Bible tells our story.

The Four Gospels are all pretty clear that baptism and the gospel both began with John the Baptist. We’ll talk about the gospel first, and then get to baptism. “Gospel” means “good news.” In English, the word “gospel” means a *religious* message of some kind, but in Greek it just means “good news.”

### **The Bad News**

So John preached good news, but he had a troublesome starting point. If you could accept John’s starting point, then the rest of what he was saying really was good news. John the Baptist’s troublesome starting point is that the whole human race is on a collision course with God’s wrath. Let’s get it in John’s own words:

*Luke 3:7-9 - John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? <sup>8</sup> Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. <sup>9</sup> The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”*

*Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? <sup>8</sup> Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. . . . <sup>9</sup> The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.*

God’s wrath is coming. You need to decide to live God’s way, and it needs to show. “Repent” means “decide to live God’s way,” and “produce fruit” means there is evidence in your life that you have decided to live God’s way. That does *not* mean we’ve become perfect. It *does* mean there’ve been big changes, and there is evidence of living in God’s way.

Go down a few verses and we’ll read a bit more from John the Baptist (Luke 3:16-17) - *John answered them all, “I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup> His 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.*

*But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. . . .<sup>17</sup> His 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.*

John uses the picture of rotten trees being chopped down and burned, and of wheat chaff being burned. Those are both “fire in a farmyard” pictures. But this is a picture of the coming wrath; “coming wrath” is not farmyard talk. And the chaff gets burned in unquenchable fire – that’s not farmyard talk either.

And this is not just John the Baptist, and not just Luke’s Gospel. In Matthew, *Jesus* speaks of people being thrown into hell (5:29-30; 18:6-9). Twice Jesus speaks of people into the furnace of fire (Matt 13).

In Matthew 25 Jesus says that he, the Son of Man, the King, will send people into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus speaks several times about “weeping and gnashing of teeth” in final judgment. Same with “hell,” and with “fire” connected with final judgement in one way or another.

You do not enjoy hearing this, and I do not enjoy talking about it. We like the good news, but this is the starting point of the good news. John the Baptist was not the only one who began with this bad news.

Jesus also taught that God’s wrath is on a collision course with the human race. And the coming wrath of God is in Paul’s writings, in book of Hebrews, and in Peter’s writings, and whichever “John” wrote Revelation has it too, probably John of Zebedee.

The Bible teaches that the human race is in deep rebellion against God, and that God is entirely just and fair to send people into eternal judgment. This made sense to the biblical writers, and to Jesus himself.

In Acts we read this of Peter, preaching to the crowd: *With many other words he warned them, and pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”* (2:40)

He warned them, he pleaded with them: “save yourselves.” He was calling them to repent and be baptized in Jesus’s name. But it is because the wrath of God is moving toward the human race that Peter warned them, and pleaded with them: save yourselves, repent and be baptized.

## **The Good News**

The God who is just and fair to send the rebellious human race to eternal punishment also made a way out. He didn’t leave it at judgment, he made a way out. And THAT is the good news, and that’s why it is called “good news.”

The way out is his Son Jesus, Jesus is the one who rescues us from the coming wrath. The rescuer is a person. Living God’s way and being baptized are how we grab onto Jesus.

Now let's look at a few baptism texts in the NT. The first one is earlier in Luke 3, and it is about John the Baptist. We already know what kind of sermon John the Baptist was preaching, so now let's hear what he did with baptism. This is how Luke summarizes John's ministry.

### **Baptism according to John**

*Luke 3:3 - John went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*

John preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. There are three things in that line: baptism, repentance, and forgiveness of sins. The way it is written, and I want you to note this because it is not how we would say it, is that John does not preach repentance, or forgiveness, he preaches a particular kind of baptism.

John preached a baptism that meant repentance and forgiveness of sins. Repent means “decide to live God's way.” If someone heard John preaching about the coming wrath, about chaff thrown into unquenchable fire, and they wanted to escape that, then these three things went together: baptism, deciding to live God's way, and forgiveness of sins.

For John, this was the right way to respond to his preaching, this is the response God wanted: be baptized, decide to live God's way, and receive the forgiveness of your sins.

Baptism is how we tell God we are deciding to live God way, and we want our sins forgiven. Baptism is not a way of telling people that we've come to God and to the Lord Jesus. Baptism is how we say “yes” to God.

There are many baptism passages in the NT. Not one of them says we're baptized to show something to people who watch. We are baptized to tell God we want to live in his ways, and we want what he's offering.

People will see baptism, but more importantly, they better see evidence that we have decided to live God's way, and they should also see that we're forgiven people!

But faith and baptism and repentance are all so we can be at peace with God. God has given us a way to make peace with him and to be rescued from the coming wrath. Faith and baptism and repentance are a part of this.

### **Baptism according to Peter**

Acts 2:37-38 - In Acts 2 Peter preached the first Christian sermon. It was about 7 weeks after died and rose, it “Pentecost.” So Peter preached about Jesus being God's Son, the Jesus that the Jews had not accepted as their Messiah. By the end of the sermon, Jews were afraid of what God would do, since they had rejected and killed the Messiah.

*When the people heard [Peter's sermon], they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

It sounds a lot like John the Baptist, doesn't it? Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you'll received the greatest gift of all: the Holy Spirit.

The people want to know: is there any way we can make things right with God? Peter says yes, you can: choose to live in God's ways, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Your sins will be forgiven, and you'll receive the Holy Spirit.

### **Baptism according to Paul**

Now, Galatians 3. let's look at one more baptism text, this one from Paul the apostle's writing, two verses from the end of Galatians 3.

*Galatians 3:26-27 - So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*

There are two lines here, the second explains the first. Let's start with the first line: *In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.* That's pretty simple. Let's take "in Christ" to mean "being joined to Christ, bound to Christ."

*So by being joined to Christ, bound to Christ, you are all children of God through faith.*  
Our faith joins us to Christ, binds us to Christ, so we are children of God.

Let's read the two lines together: *So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith,<sup>27</sup> for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*

How do we get joined to Christ, bound to Christ? Baptism. When we're baptized into Christ, we become clothed with Christ, and on that basis we are children of God.

*So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*

Notice that faith and baptism cannot be separated here. We are children of God through *faith* because *baptism* clothes us with Christ. [Repeat] Paul could not imagine a believing adult that was not baptized. If you had faith, you were baptized, because that's how you told God you wanted to live in his ways and receive his forgiveness, and that's how you attached to Christ.

The Starting Point of the NT is that the human race is rebelling against God, and God's wrath is moving toward us and it will certainly arrive, and it will be the worst thing that has ever happened to people. God is entirely just and right and fair to send this.

But God has done two things: first, he sent people to warn us of the danger. Our rebellion is so deep we don't see the danger, we have no idea we're in such big trouble with God. John and Jesus did lots of warning. We need to be told what kind of trouble we're in.

And, second, God made a way out, beginning with John the Baptist, but centering of course completely on his Son Jesus. And baptism is one of the things at the center of God's way out.

*And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*

*When the people heard [Peter's sermon], they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the Holy Spirit.*

*So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*

Amen.

PRAYER: O God, the best thing that could happen to anyone has happened to us. We were in trouble, terrible trouble, and you came to us and made us yours. We did not know we were in trouble like that, but you told us. And you made a way out. You sent your Son to make way out for us, and you have sent an unending stream of messengers to spread the good news. And it has come to each one of us, and you opened our hearts to receive the message and turn to you. All glory and praise belong to you.

Thank you for faith, and for baptism. Thank you for washing away our sins, and for giving us your Holy Spirit. And now we ask for your help to show the fruit of our repentance every week. But mostly, God, we give you glory and praise for bringing us into the gospel. Amen.

BENEDICTION: To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.