

DECLARING IDENTITY Sunday School- January 3, 2010

Unifying Topic: PROCLAIMED IN BAPTISM

Lesson Text

I. Meet John The Baptist (Matthew 3:1-4)

III. Experience John At Work (Matthew 3:5-6, 11-12)

III. Jesus Is Baptized (Matthew 3:13-17)

The Main Thought: And lo a voice from heaven saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. (Matthew 3:17, KJV).

Unifying Principle: Our actions reveal who we are. What actions disclose our identity? Jesus' willingness to be baptized and God's declaration confirming Jesus' identity provide us an example of how to relate to God.

Lesson Aim: To demonstrate the length to which Jesus was willing to go in order to identify with us. While Jesus knew no sin, He was willing to be baptized. As Jesus was being baptized, God identified Him as His Son.

Life aim: We must seek and follow God's will always, even when it means refusing the urging and insistence of the crowd.

3:1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea.

3:2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

3:3 For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

3:4 And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.

3:5 Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan.

3:6 And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.

3:11 Indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire;

3:12 Whose fan is in his hand and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

3:13 Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.

3:14 But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?

3:15 And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he suffered him.

3:16 And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:

3:17 And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

HISTORY:

The birth of Jesus the Messiah in the stable has come and gone. And we've just talked about the journey of the Magi who traveled from the East, following the Star, in search of the child, prophesied long ago. The fulfillment of the Messiah had come. They found Jesus, a child, in His house with Mary His mother and they fell down, worshiped Him, and presented gifts. The Magi, being warned in a dream, did not go back and tell Herod the king that they had found Him, and Joseph being warned in a dream, did not return to Bethlehem of Judea but instead, was to flee to Egypt, then after a while, warned again in a dream, to go to Nazareth of Galilee, a messianic prophecy. "*He shall be called a Nazarene*" Matt.2:23. This is in reference to Christ coming from the city of Nazareth. Matthew 2 ends with the family returning to Nazareth and Luke 2, ends with "*Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man*" Luke2:52. Jesus had grown into boyhood, the age of twelve, not a child per say any longer. And so getting back to Matthew, there is a transition of Matthew Chapter 2 and Chapter 3.

LESSON:

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

Matthew 3:1-4: Meet John The Baptist

3:1-2 John The Baptist¹

After 30 years had passed since the events of Chapter 2. Now John the Baptist who was Jesus' cousin, bursts onto the scene, as the forerunner of Jesus Christ. His theme was, "Turn from your sins." While many people in Bible days were known for who their parents were (Simon son of Jonah) or where they were from (Saul of Tarsus), John was known for what he did. John was a Baptizer.

Baptisms were the result of John's preaching. Today, preachers have how-to manuals and church growth books to help them gather and keep a crowd. They tell us that the church should be in a convenient location - no more than two or three blocks from a freeway. And the message should leave people with a good feeling - don't talk about things like sin, blood, and death. Well, John didn't have any of those books or manuals. He didn't care that the crowds were on street corners or in the temple. He decided to preach in the wilderness of Judea at the Jordan River, at least 19 miles from Jerusalem. And as for his message, it was quite different. He told those who made this long trip, *Matt. 3:2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

Repent

"Repent!" What does it mean? The Greek word is "met-an-o-EH-o." It is a combination of "met-AH," meaning "after," and "no-EH-o," meaning "to understand." **Repentance is something that takes place "after understanding."** In other words, we realize what sin is and change our minds about it. How do we know when we've truly repented? Our minds are changed. When we think about that certain action or behavior, we don't think about it longingly. We despise it !

POINT:

If there had been a time in your life that you had an epiphany - suddenly realizing what you were doing was sinful, and you somehow realized, what a terrible witness you would be, and so you stopped, that is proof of repentance - after understanding, you changed your mind and turned around. Real repentance produces action.

In a few verses, we will hear John say, *Matt. 3:8 "...bear fruit in keeping with repentance"* True repentance is shown with action. It starts in the mind and is demonstrated with the life. It's not just about being sorry for your sin. You see, a drunk may often cry on your shoulder and say, "I want to quit." But **until he acts on it, it isn't godly sorrow, it's not real repentance.** *2Cor. 7:10 For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.*

Because The Kingdom Of Heaven Is At Hand

John was preaching repentance. Notice that his preaching was not, "Repent because sin is bad for you and messes up your life." Nor was it, "Repent because it's the right thing to do." No, he preached that the motivation for repentance was because "the kingdom of heaven is at hand." In the Greek there is a verb, saying that the kingdom of heaven is "drawing imminently near." The root of that verb means "to squeeze." Time is running out, the kingdom of heaven is coming. God is going to judge the world, and we need to make sure that we're ready. Don't sit around and say, "When my sin gets really bad, I'll stop. When it affects my health or my family life, I'll quit." Instead, realize how evil sin is, and quickly get rid of it, because the kingdom of heaven is tightening its squeeze, it's almost here!

3:3 The Crying Voice

Once again, Matthew points out that the things happening in the New Testament were foretold in the Old Testament. He says that John is the fulfillment of the prophecy in *Isaiah 40:3-5—A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. Let every valley be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; And let the rough ground become a plain, and the rugged terrain a broad valley; Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed..."*

POINT:

¹ <http://www.rondaniel.com/library/40-Matthew/Matthew0301.html>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

The speech used is painting a picture. You see, unlike today, where Air Force One, flies the President to distant lands, and air-conditioned limousines whisk him to his destination, a king in ancient times had to travel like everyone else - on land. And so, before a king's journey, the route would be inspected and upgraded. Potholes would be filled in. Mountains would be flattened and valleys would be filled. The path would be made straight. In the same way, John is preaching that people need to prepare the road of their heart, make it suitable for the Lord to arrive. That preparation is repentance.

3:4 John's Appearance

John the Baptist was not your average individual. He was an unexpected child. He lived in the wilderness. He wore strange clothing and ate strange food for that day. He was not head rabbi of a large synagogue. He was not dressed in fine clothes. He did not sport a fine chariot, nor did he enjoy sumptuous meals with leading citizens. John's appearance was clothes made of camel's hair, leather belt around his waist, and locust and wild honey for food. People might have been curious about his lifestyle. John illustrates the truth of Paul's words that "God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty" 1Corth.1:27. We can use people's simple curiosity as an opener to share how Christ makes a difference in our lives.

Matthew 3:5-6, 11-12: Experience John At Work

3:5 People came To See

John wouldn't be a successful TV preacher nowadays. But his appearance didn't stop huge crowds from making the trip to hear him preach. This is God's supernatural ordination of a ministry - when there is no earthly reason why a ministry is "successful," but it is anyway. **John's location—the wilderness, not a town; John's message—Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand; and John's appearance—camel hair clothing and a belt around his waist** should all have guaranteed his failure, but droves of people were going out to him and being baptized. John was markedly different from other religious leaders of his day, to show that his message was new. He not only preached about God's law, he lived it.

3:6 Being Baptized

When you wash dirty hands, the results are immediately visible. But repentance happens inside with a cleansing that isn't immediately seen. So John used a cleansing that people could see, baptism. This baptism they were undergoing was a **baptism of repentance**; that is, the person who repented was baptized in water. Notice that for many Christians, baptism is a major source of debate and division. What baptism represents; who can be baptized; and in what manner those people should be baptized?! Some churches make you take weeks worth of classes before being baptized.

We should seek to know the truth about the meaning and manner of various baptisms in the Bible. John didn't suffer from such difficulties. He simply told the people about their sin, and when they understood and desired to change, he submerged them in water as they confessed their sins. This was John's baptism of repentance, plain and simple. John's message bore fruit. The crowds gathered and listened to his preaching, and they confessed their sins and were baptized.

POINT:

- *The world should hear, respect, and respond to the messenger of God.*
 - *God forgives sin when a person confesses and repents of his sin.*
 - *Confession is necessary, it is part of repentance.*
 - *A person who says he is innocent and refuses to believe and admit his sin is condemned already.*
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3:11 John's Baptism

The word baptism (baptizein) means to dip, to immerse, to submerge, to place into. John's baptism was with water, but Jesus' baptism was "in (en) the Spirit and fire." John's baptism was both a preparation and a symbol of the spiritual baptism that Jesus was to bring. It was not Christian baptism. The death and resurrection of Christ had not yet occurred in order to be depicted by this baptism. It was similar to the Old <http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

Testament oblations (washings) that symbolized a cleansing of personal repentance on the part of a believer. John's **water baptism** meant two things;

1. It symbolized cleansing from all sin.
2. It symbolized separation or dedication.

Jesus' spiritual baptism was a double baptism.

1. Jesus baptizes the person in the **Spirit**. He dips, immerses, and places the person in the Spirit. Whereas the person was carnal and materialistically minded, he now becomes spiritually minded (Rom.8:5-7). This refers to the spiritual rebirth of the regenerate receiving the baptism of the Spirit 1Corth.12:13.
2. Jesus baptizes the person in **fire**. Fire has several functions that graphically symbolize the work of Christ. To be baptized with fire is the result of judgment. It illuminates, warms, melts, burns, and utterly destroys. The difference between baptism with water and fire is the difference between an outward work and an inward work. Water only cleanses the outside, fire purifies within, that is, the heart. Jesus Christ separates a person from his former life and purifies him within by the fire of His Spirit.

The real sign came at Pentecost (Acts2) when the Holy Spirit was sent by Jesus in the form of tongues of fire, **empowering** his followers to preach the gospel. It also symbolizes the work of the Holy Spirit bringing God's judgment on those who refuse to repent. Everyone will one day be baptized—either now by God's Holy Spirit, or later by the fire of His judgment. In John's mind the "baptism of fire" meant that the Messiah was to destroy the enemies of Israel. It was "the messianic fire of judgment" that was to come from the throne of David.

NOTE:

Before any baptism—WATER, or The HOLY SPIRIT, or by FIRE, the springboard would have to be **repentance!**

3:11-12 He Is Mightier Than I

...but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear... This saying is expressive of the most profound humility and to put on, take off, and carry the shoes of their masters, was, not only among the Jews, but also among the Greeks and Romans, the work of the vilest slaves. Notice that John was not exalting himself above the Pharisees and Sadducees as he rebuked them. He makes sure to point out that he is merely the road-preparer, that Jesus is the mighty one. This gives a comparison of how worthy Jesus is, to how unworthy we all are without Him. John was the announcer—a voice, while Christ is the Prophet, Priest, and King.

He says that his fan is in his hand, and that he will thoroughly purge his floor, and he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. He is coming, and His *"fan is in His hand,"* the fan that winnows or separates and the fire will burn. This separation process is also pictured as the division of the sons of the kingdom from the sons of the wicked one Matt.13:38. The *"threshing fan"* refers to a wooden shovel used for tossing grain unto the wind in order to blow away the lighter chaff, leaving the good grain to settle in a pile. The references to *"fire burning up the chaff"* refer to judgment rather than cleansing. The chaff would then be swept up and burned. The *"unquenchable fire"* refers to the eternal punishment of hell or the lake of fire. But His methods are constructive. He shall baptize you with fire; He shall cleanse the threshing floor not destroy it, and He will *"gather His wheat into the garner."* We are never free from sin, and must always remember that we aren't even qualified to untie Jesus Christ's shoes.

Matthew 3:13-17: Jesus Is Baptized

3:13-14 Jesus Coming For Baptism

In the midst of the crowds being baptized by John, Jesus shows up. Now remember, Jesus has not yet begun His public ministry. He is virtually unknown to anyone but the people in His hometown. And yet when He came to the Jordan to be baptized, John's attitude completely changes. He has been pointing out everyone's sin, and challenging them, commanding them, to repent. But now, as Jesus is standing in front of John, John tells Him, *"I shouldn't be baptizing You. You should be baptizing me!"* Jesus was compelled to be baptized by John. **He was to identify himself with John's ministry.** He was the Messiah, the Lamb

of God, being proclaimed by John. John's baptism was a call for men to take a stand and to become identified with a life of repentance and righteousness. Jesus needed no repentance. His righteousness was the pattern, the very righteousness that could stand for and cover every man. So Jesus was obeying the voice of God through the prophet.

3:15 Baptized By John

The first issue we must note is the humility of our Lord. John had already upbraided the arrogant Pharisees and Sadducees who came for baptism as a show. Jesus said something that convinced John to allow the baptism: *Matt. 3:15 "...in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness..."* What does that mean? It means that if Jesus wasn't baptized, all righteousness would not be fulfilled. Which part of righteousness? There are several possibilities. The two most likely candidates for explanation are: **1)** Jesus was baptized to fulfill the righteousness of those who believed but were not baptized. "*Righteousness*" in Matthew's gospel implies doing the will of God. It was fitting, therefore, because God had commanded it. or **2)** that when Jesus began His public ministry, He would be open to accusation by everyone. "Well, 'WE' were baptized by John in the Jordan. Why weren't 'YOU'?" Jesus gladly humbled himself before John and the crowds as though He was a sinner like the rest. He risked His reputation to identify with sinners, so that He might become a merciful and faithful mediator on our behalf. He was willing to be misunderstood in order to be obedient to the Father's Will.

But the humility of Christ goes another step with the sinless Son of God fully identifying with the sinners He came to save. **Jesus' submission to John's baptism affirmed the validity of what John was doing, as well as, the validity of his baptism.** But more so, Jesus identified with John as a sinner, just as He did with every other sinner He came to save. John needed the work of Christ just as we do. He had no merit to commend himself to God apart from the merits of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

3:16-17 After Being Baptized

It is probable that His baptism was quick compared to everyone else's because He had no sins to confess as the others did. Matthew and Mark both describe **Jesus as coming up out of the water** of baptism "*immediately*" (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10) something supernatural happened, heaven was opened, and **the Spirit of God descended upon Jesus** in the form of a dove. And **God the Father spoke from heaven**, *Matt. 3:17 ..."This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."* We see the working of The Trinity.

As Jesus came up out of the water, it symbolizes that though the way to God had been closed, it was now open through Jesus Christ. Man's sin had made the way to heaven as brass. But the Messiah would open the way for sinners to enter into God's presence with a new righteousness not of their own doing. "*Behold, the heavens were opened.*" No one else opens the way to God but Christ. It also symbolizes the Father publicly declaring His Son's identity. The triune God is presented to the world!

The emphasis and shift in Matthew's gospel from this point, onward focuses upon Jesus Christ! The coming of the Holy Spirit also tells us of the initiation of Jesus Christ's Messianic work. He is the one who anoints the Messiah to bear the Good News. The Father who sent the Son verbally affirms His ministry at this coronation of Baptism.

Jesus Christ is the "*beloved*" of the Father. "*Beloved*" is an endearing term, showing that Christ is the object of the Father's affections from all eternity. He is the "*One*" in whom the Father delights. And it is this "*One*" that has been sent by the Father as our Redeemer. God did not send anyone less than His own beloved Son to satisfy His own justice so that we might be saved forever. The Father finds eternal pleasure in the Son. He found pleasure in the Son's Incarnation, in His sinless life, and in His faithfulness. He found pleasure in bruising His Son for us. We cannot fathom such depths of love, yet, as Isaiah expressed it, "*But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief*" (53:10). Why all of this grief for His beloved? So that He might be the guilt offering to avert His wrath, and purchase a people for His own possession. If the Father has such pleasure in the Son, shouldn't we?

SUMMARY:

John the Baptist was born in Judea about six months before the Savior Jesus Christ. John's primary mortal mission was to prepare the way for, and baptize, Jesus.² John the Baptist was no showman. His goal was to decrease while Jesus Christ increased (John 3:30). He was a pointer-not the goal of men's faith. He spent his life pointing to Jesus Christ as "the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). But people were enamored (*in love with, captivated*) with John. Some wondered if he might be the Messiah. He recoiled at the idea of accepting personal praise or glory. He was "*the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight!*" So it is no surprise that on every occasion, he explained something of the Messiah, for that was his ministry.

John was the prophet of God who spoke after 400 years of silence in Israel. He commanded repentance and baptism demonstrated it. This was not a suggestion, but a command for all who heard him preach. John's baptism not only professed repentance but it confessed a trust in the coming Messiah that John proclaimed. By divine command, John's initiation of baptism was a means of outward declaration of inward repentance and faith. Jesus Christ affirmed it when John baptized Him. Jesus later showed the link of baptism when He commanded His followers to practice baptism for all who believed in Him.

John had shaken Judea with his preaching and the call to repentance, but he was limited. He could preach and baptize but he could not change a man's heart. The Messiah was dramatically different! He would baptize in the Holy Spirit and fire! He would winnow, separate the wheat and the chaff. He would gather the wheat into his barn and burn the chaff with unquenchable fire. The work of Jesus Christ is transforming, purifying, and distinguishing lives. Every one of us will be affected ultimately by His work. The question that demands our response is just this: Will the work of Christ bring blessing or judgment in my life?

John the Baptist's ministry announces the King's arrival, and the consequential effectiveness of His work. He stood as "a voice" from the past representing the long line of prophets. Most importantly in the scene of Christ's baptismal coronation were the recognized guests: the Holy Spirit descending as a dove and the Father speaking as a Voice from heaven. Thus the Trinity in Unity affirmed the identity of the person and work of Jesus Christ as He was baptized. Having no sin, Jesus was willing to go through great lengths to identify with us, in being baptized. And God went through great lengths in presenting to the world His Son, in whom He was well pleased. Christ's baptism marks His coronation as our Prophet, Priest, and King; and in this the Trinity bears witness to our eternal salvation through Christ.

APPLICATION:

Jesus Christ did not personally need John's baptism but He received it because God commanded it. Have you tried to ignore or rationalize around baptism or some other area of divine command? Look at the example of Jesus Christ, and follow likewise. Are you a Christian? Have you followed the Lord's example and command in having been baptized? Jesus identified with us in His baptism. We identify with Him in His death and resurrection when we are baptized. Does this not tell us something quite pointed in our own obedience? Are you one that needs to enter this watery grave in public confession of Jesus Christ?

² http://www.southwoodsbc.org/sermons/matthew_03.11-12.html
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>