

The Water and the Blood

Luke 3:21-38

Everyone in Nazareth knew Jesus. At least, they thought they did. Soft-spoken, mild-mannered, He was a small town craftsman who lived in a little house on a quiet side street with His mother.

But then He did something that made his neighbors scratch their heads and wonder if they really knew Him after all. When He was thirty years old, He closed His carpenter shop for good. No warning. No explanation.

It was not feast time. Nevertheless, Mary's Son silently strode out of town. And after a few minutes, He had disappeared down the road pilgrims used to travel to Jerusalem.

Jesus had never walked that way alone before. And He would never do so again. In the future a band of devoted disciples would walk along with Him.

It was a long walk out of the hill country, around the southern end of the blue waters of the Sea of Galilee down to the gash of green where the Jordan rippled down to the Dead Sea. But finally, the Savior caught a glimpse of the tall palms that rustled in the breeze over Jericho.

But that ancient city was not our Lord's goal. He was going to the river. And He was not alone.

John the Baptist preached there beside the reeds and rushes that grew in the shallows of Jordan's green waters. And great crowds of people stood and listened to the desert prophet's words.

The Baptist saw the Savior when He was still a ways off. And a light gleamed in John's eye.

Deep in the desert, God had told the prophet he was to prepare the way for the Messiah. But the Creator did not say just who that Man was.

But when Jesus walked to the river, the still, small voice of God's Spirit whispered in John's ear. This was the One he was waiting for.

His Pattern

John was not surprised that a man from Galilee was coming to be baptized. Every day multitudes came from all over Palestine.

Prostitutes and publicans, derelicts and drunks, swindlers and sinners of every shape and sort came begging to be baptized. But this man was nothing at all like any of them.

The Savior made His way through the crowd. Then He stepped up to the shore and asked John to baptize Him.

Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. Matthew 3:13

John was alarmed. The very idea was unthinkable. It was all upside down and backwards.

John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" Matthew 3:14

John's heart melted within him. The Carpenter who calmly stood before him was the One the desert prophet had proclaimed would come.

One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; Luke 3:16

John's objection was two-fold. First, Jesus did not need to be baptized. He had no sins to confess. And even if the Master did insist on being baptized, John knew he was utterly unworthy to administer it.

The Savior's eyes were calm and His voice was soft. But His words were firm and forceful.

But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted Him. Matthew 3:15

Jesus waded out into the river. And with a lump in his throat, John lowered Him back into the water.

That much we know. The question is why. Why did Jesus walk all the way from Galilee to be baptized by John in the Jordan?

Our Redeemer's reasons were many. But one of them is personal and practical. In one sense, baptism was the same for our Lord as it is for us.

It is acting out a solemn prayer to God. That is why Luke wrote that Jesus was praying as He was baptized.

Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened, Verse 21

Paul explained it in a letter to Christians at Rome. For a born again believer, baptism is telling God we want to die to everything we have sought and savored. At the same time, it is telling God we want to live a new life for Him: a life of faith and love, of obedience and service.

In a much different way, our Lord was also making a new beginning. He was drawing a curtain over His obscure life as a small town carpenter.

Christ had but three years left on earth. And from the instant He sloshed up out of the Jordan, He would spend every moment serving His heavenly Father by healing life's losers and transforming the lost, by teaching and training disciples to serve as missionaries.

Jesus Christ is always our pattern. He is our model, the One we are to imitate. And we must never forget. Although He was God's sinless Son, He said He needed to be baptized to fulfill all righteousness.

So if we would be right with God, we must also be baptized.

His Purity

As Jesus waded ashore, something happened. It was the very thing the Baptist was waiting and watching for.

...heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased." Verses 21-22

John heard the voice of God the Father. But he already knew Jesus was God's beloved Son. Back in the desert, God told the Baptist how he would know the Messiah when he saw Him.

He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God. John 1:33-34

It seems a rather abrupt departure from Luke's story of the Savior. But instead of continuing to tell his tale, he paused to record the names of a long string of sons and fathers.

It stretches from Jesus and Joseph all the way back to Eden. At the end of Luke's list of genealogy is the earth's first father, Adam.

And Adam not only reminds us of God's creation of the heavens and the earth. He also brings to mind the source of sin, the seed of slavery to Satan which still rapes and ravages all mankind.

Wars started in the Garden. So did sorrow and heartaches. And that is not the worst of it.

Death also had its beginning at Eden. With it came despair and darkness. And close behind, the fires of Hell began to smoke and smoulder.

When God first created Adam, The Lord not only placed him in a perfect environment. He also gave him an exalted position. The Creator made the man lord over all the earth. And Adam neither obeyed nor bowed before anyone but the Creator Himself.

But all of that changed when Adam ate the forbidden fruit. When he bit into the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He was not only disobeying the God who loved him. He was also bowing down before the Creator's eternal enemy, the devil.

Whether Adam realized it or not, by giving in to the serpent's subtle temptation, he was not only willingly submitting himself to Satan. He was also offering all his descendants as slaves to death and darkness.

Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, Romans 6:16

So it is not surprising that Luke's genealogy is a foul swamp of sin and sorrow. Larceny, lusts and lies are everywhere in Luke's list of names. And one of the worst examples is the story of Jacob's son Judah and the child of his old age, Perez.

...the son of Perez, the son of Judah, Verse 33

Judah's eldest son, Er, married a woman named Tamar. But Er died, so she was given to his brother. But that man also died.

Therefore, Judah told the woman to go back to her father and wait. When his youngest son was grown, she would be married to him, so she would not die childless.

However, when that boy was grown, Judah reneged and refused to fulfill his promise. So Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute and lured Judah to her bed. And the child born of that union was named Perez.

That is an ugly, sordid story, full of lusts and lies, of promises made and not kept. And it is but one example of the sin that spread from the seed Adam planted in Eden.

When Adam sinned, he not only sold himself and his descendants into slavery to Satan. He also infected himself with a dark and desperate disease: a hideous hereditary deficiency.

So all of Adam's descendants were also diseased with that same enate, inborn bent for sin. All of his children were and are sinners by nature, sinners by choice, and sinners by desire. Sin was and is both inevitable and irresistible for all of Adam's sons.

Remembering that puts wicked teeth into Luke's roll call of sinners. Each name listed is linked to another sin infected human father.

There are only two exceptions. Two names on that list are not linked to any other human father. And the first is listed last.

...the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God. Verse 38

Adam had no earthly father. His one and only Father was God. The same is true of Jesus. He is not linked with an earthly father in this brief genealogy, either.

Jesus Himself was about thirty years of age, being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph, the son of Eli, Verse 23

Luke is careful to be clear about it. Jesus was not really Joseph's son as people supposed. God the Father said it as Jesus was wading up out of the river.

...a voice came out of heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased." Verse 22

Like Adam, our Savior was and is and ever shall be the Son of God. That is why Paul called Christ the second Adam. Both men share the same blessing. Neither one of them started out life here on earth diseased with a sin nature.

Adam had no natural desire to sin when he first walked through the green shadows of Eden. And neither did Jesus when He was born in Bethlehem. Both men had the same father, God Himself.

However, that is where the similarity ends. Adam became a sinner, not by birth, but by choice.

Of course, Christ could have made that same choice. But He did not. He lived a life that was perfectly pure.

Not even once did He do anything God forbids. And He never failed to fulfill each and every requirement God demands of men.

That is not of idle, offhand importance, either. The essence of the good news of salvation is that Jesus Christ died to pay the penalty for our sins. Peter's explanation of that is wonderfully specific.

He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; 1 Peter 2:24

That is why John declared that Jesus is the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world. The day the Baptist said that, everyone who heard him knew exactly what he meant.

Thousands of lambs were slaughtered each day at the temple in Jerusalem. And each time, just before the priest slit a lamb's throat, he laid his hand on the animal's head.

Then he prayed that God would place all of a person's sins within that animal's body. Moments later the lamb was killed. And the death penalty for sin was paid, not by the sinner but by the lamb.

But every lamb that was sacrificed had to be perfect. The slightest spot or blemish would render the animal unfit to be sacrificed.

That is why it was and is essential that Jesus never sinned in the slightest way. If He did have any sin of His own, He could not die for ours. He would have had to die for His own.

But Jesus did live a perfect life. God the Father Himself declared that He was perfectly pleased with His beloved Son. He was pleased because His Son was and is pure and perfect in every way.

Our Lord's perfection is much more than dry doctrine. It is not merely important, either. It is essential.

More than that, it is glorious good news. Since our Savior was sinless, He was qualified to lay down His life for us. And we can come to Him as we are: wounded and weighed down with sin and hopelessly lost in darkness and despair. We can come to Christ confident that He not only paid for our sins.

He paid for each and every one of our sins.

His Priesthood

There was yet another reason why our Savior insisted that John baptize Him in the green waters of the Jordan.

In the Sinai Desert, God gave Moses all the rites, regulations and rituals of the law. Among them was a set of instructions specifying how priests were to be consecrated and qualified to serve God. And that ceremony included washing in water.

...you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the doorway of the tent of meeting and wash them with water. Exodus 29:4

Maybe that is why Luke mentioned how old our Lord was when He began His earthly ministry.

When He began His ministry, Jesus Himself was about thirty years of age, Verse 23

That is the same age at which priests began their service at the temple. So the message is clear.

Jesus was not only beginning His ministry as Christ and King. And He was merely starting His work as Savior. He was also beginning His eternal work as the great High Priest in the temple of Heaven.

Christ's baptism in the Jordan was a kind of ritual washing in water. It reminds us that Jesus is our great High Priest. And just as every priest did, our beloved Savior offered blood for the sins of wicked and wayward human beings.

At the temple, the high priest offered the blood of a lamb in the most holy place deep within the temple sanctuary. In like manner, Jesus offered blood in the most holy place in the temple of Heaven at the very throne of God. But He did not offer lamb's blood. He offered His own.

...through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. Hebrews 9:12

Jesus also submitted to baptism to identify with sinful human beings. That is also why He endured every possible trial and temptation.

He did not merely want to be our great High Priest. He wanted to be a sympathetic and understanding Priest.

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:15-16

The advice the writer of Hebrews offers us is wise. We ought to draw near to God eagerly. And we ought to do so filled with faith not fear.

After all, our Savior has already done absolutely everything which was needed to complete our salvation. He lived a perfect life to be a fit sacrifice. He gave both His body and His blood for us. And now He intercedes for us before God's throne in Heaven.

He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. Hebrews 7:25

It is forever settled in Heaven. Nothing more needs to be done. Christ has completely purchased salvation from sin and deliverance from darkness, death and despair. And He has done so for us.

No one has sinned too long a time or so in so degrading and despicable a manner that he is beyond the reach of our Redeemer's grace. The blood of Jesus can cleanse every sin. And He passionately pleads our case before the throne of our high and holy God.

So the question is not now and never has been whether or not we can be saved. Only one question remains. Will we?

There is no limit to our God's power and ability. He can do all things. But there is one thing He will not do. He will not decide for us.

He will not force us into His family. We have to want His salvation. His Son has already done everything else.

