

“THE BAPTISM OF JESUS”

Genesis 1:1-5; Mark 1:4-12; Acts 19:1-7

In last Sunday’s sermon I told you that the word “Epiphany” is a Greek word, written in English letters. In the New Testament, it is always translated. It doesn’t appear as “epiphany” in English translations. The word “baptism” is also a Greek word written in English letters. It occurs many more times than “epiphany” but it is never translated. Here is the reason:

The King James Version of the Bible was translated by Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Baptists. They could not agree either on the mode of baptism or the significance of baptism, thus not on its translation.

As to the mode - There are three modes of baptism - immersion, pouring, and sprinkling. The Presbyterians insisted on sprinkling, the Baptists insisted on immersion. The Church of England had ministers who practiced all three modes. John Wesley was fired from his position as a Church of England vicar while in Georgia because he insisted on immersing the babies he baptized.

As to the significance of baptism - Episcopalians believe that being baptized makes a person a Christian. The name for that doctrine is “baptismal regeneration.” They refer to baptism as “christening”, that is, making someone Christian. Presbyterians believe that baptism is a sacrament. That is, it brings the Holy Spirit into the heart and life of a child to lead it to saving faith, or in the adult, it brings the Holy Spirit into the life of the new believer to begin the process of sanctification.

For the Baptists it is an outward sign of an inward change, but it is not a sacrament. They see no wrong in baptizing a person multiple times.

1.) John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (Mark 1:4-8 NKJV)

The baptism of John the Baptist was not the same as the baptism Jesus commanded by Jesus:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (Matthew 28:19 NKJV)

The baptism of Jesus is for those who believe the Gospel and are trusting in His death on the cross and His rising again from the dead for the forgiveness of their sin and life everlasting with Him. John the Baptist was sent to prepare the way for the coming of the Christ. The way for people to prepare was by repenting of their sins. John's baptism was not a sign and seal of their covenant relationship with God. That was circumcision. All of the people coming to John for baptism were already in covenant relationship with God. They were backsliders. They had broken their promises to God. Sin had created obstacles and pitfalls in the pathway to God or for Him to come to them. Therefore, the message of John the Baptist and Jesus initially was the same:

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matthew 3:1-2 NKJV)

From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:17 NKJV)

However, John the Baptist knew, and told others that the message of Jesus was more powerful and of greater magnitude than his own. He

was preaching for a revival in one time and place to prepare for Jesus' ministry. Jesus brought a message to change the world forever. John's baptism was a one-time cleansing; Jesus would bring the Holy Spirit.

2.) It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Mark 1:9-11 NKJV)

The first question that we ask of this Scripture is why is Jesus being baptized by John's baptism of repentance. Jesus was without sin, so He had no sins to repent. John the Baptist had the very same question:

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" 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. (Matthew 3:13-15 NKJV)

Jesus was baptized with sinners to identify Himself with them.

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:21 NKJV)

3.) What began as a baptism of repentance administered by John became an epiphany. Jesus, John the Baptist, and one or more of John the Baptist's disciples saw and heard God just as Moses saw and heard Him on Mount Sinai, and as Elijah heard God on the mountain. It was an epiphany because God revealed Himself to humans. There were several important things revealed at Jesus' baptism:

Despite the fact that he was Jesus' cousin and had leapt in his mother's womb when Mary arrived at their home, John says that he knew Jesus was the Christ at the His baptism:

And John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. 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.' And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God." (John 1:32-34 NKJV)

We have a clear testimony of the Trinity. The voice of God the Father is heard from heaven. The Voice identifies Jesus as being the beloved Son of God. The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove. There had been indistinct signs of the Trinity in the Old Testament. For instance our Old Testament Lesson has the Spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters. In Daniel when King Nebuchadnezzar cast Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the burning fiery furnace, he saw four men walking in the fire, "and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." (Daniel 3:25) It is not until the coming of Jesus that the nature of God as a Triune being was revealed.

Jesus' baptism began as a baptism with water but ended as a baptism of the Holy Spirit. That is what distinguishes John's baptism from Christian baptism. John's baptism was water, a temporary cleansing. Christian baptism is with the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit descended upon Jesus at His baptism. In Ephesus Paul found some disciples.

he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?" So they said, "Into John's baptism." Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus." When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. (Acts 19:2-6 NKJV)

The baptism of Jesus contains a lot of revelation about the nature of God and about the rite of baptism in a brief account. It is no wonder that this important doctrine is interpreted in a variety of ways by the different branches of Christianity. The important question is a personal one – Have you been baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus?

