

It Will Take All Three
John 1:24-34

Living today within our modern setting of instantly available news and information, we can't easily relate to the circumstances and situations that were taking place as Jesus was first making His entrance into His short-lived ministry of salvation to mankind.

One might wonder why God the Father did not choose a more convenient time for all of this to take place, a time perhaps like we live within today with all of its innovative means of communication.

But He didn't wait until now. And while we might not understand why, it was the perfect time and the perfect plan for the salvation of mankind to begin.

God The Father would begin by sending this man, John the Baptist . . . verse 6,
⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.
⁸He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. (John 1:6-8)

God The Father would then follow with having John the Baptist introduce the Lord Jesus, the True Light, who would carry out His portion of the divine plan.

And then, God the Father would have John The Baptist also introduce the Holy Spirit, who would complete the next portion of His divine plan. And it truly was a perfect plan, an absolutely perfect plan.

Let's pause for a moment and read these words of our passage that describes how this all took place. These words are given in John chapter 1, beginning in verse 24 . . .

²⁴ Now some Pharisees who had been sent ²⁵ questioned him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"

²⁶ "I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. ²⁷ He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie."

²⁸ This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

²⁹ The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' ³¹ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."
³² Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. ³³ I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴ I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."
(John 1:24-34)

This man, John the Baptist was given the unique opportunity of being God's messenger who would be the first to introduce the blessed plan of salvation to mankind, the "Gospel". And John's message bespoke the plan very clearly for anyone who had ears to hear and eyes to see.

And the plan would be three-fold with all three members of the Trinity doing their part, God The Father, God The Son and God The Holy Spirit.

God The Father would begin the first step of the Plan by sending His Beloved Son into the world. Those are the familiar words that are quoted so often from John 3:16,

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

And then, the Lord Jesus, the "Lamb of God" whom John would introduce first, the "Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world", would by His death, burial and resurrection, remove the power and the corruption of sin from all those who would receive Him. As verse 12 declares to us,

¹² . . . to all who received him (received the Lord Jesus as Savior and Lord), to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. (John 1:12)

Then to those who would receive Him, the Lord Jesus would "baptize them with the Holy Spirit and with fire". Those words given in Matthew chapter 3. There John the Baptist said,

¹¹"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. (Matthew 3:11)

This was God the Father making disciples of men, men who would then go forward even throughout the whole world proclaiming the "good news" of the salvation provided by the Lord Jesus.

And here, God was beginning by using the ministry and the voice of John. And He continues even today by using your and my voice, when we are willing.

This was God's plan folks! It was simple and it was clear. And it began with John. John was the "voice of one calling in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord".

And He did that with great fervor all the days of his short life. Everything that John was, in his daily life, and in his preaching, was dedicated to the sole purpose of preparing the hearts of men and women to receive the salvation that Jesus would bring.

And because John was so faithful to his calling, Jesus gave him the highest praise ever given to a man. He said of John, "Among those that are born of women there isn't a greater prophet than John the Baptist.

And folks, I confess that I would love to hear such kind words as those spoken about me on that day when I stand before the Lord. I want Him to say to me "well done my good and faithful servant".

As I ponder those kind words that Jesus spoke about John the Baptist, I know that He did not say them solely because John was a faithful preacher of His word. He was that yes, but He was also speaking about a very special attribute within the heart and the personality of John.

Yes, John had a very strong and dynamic personality. But within all of that strength, John was a very, very humble man.

We see that special humility in his words, like those spoken in verse 27. John said, ²⁷He (the Lord Jesus) is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie."(John 1:27)

And also in John chapter 3. There in verse 27 John said,

²⁷ . . . “A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. ²⁸You yourselves can testify that I said, ‘I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.’ ²⁹The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. ³⁰He must become greater; I must become less. (John 3:27-30)

There is such humility in those words, humility that John had, and that you and I must have also, every day of our lives, in every circumstance of life. Humility! “He, the Lord Jesus, must increase, but I must decrease.”

Folks, I can’t say this strongly enough! This need for humility and the need to redirect the attention of men and women was then and is now of such profound necessity.

The church then and the church now in our day claims too much emphasis and dedication for itself and for its leadership. And that kind of leadership and teaching robs favor away from God and it becomes a severe stumbling block to believers within our churches.

And so, here beginning with John, God was redirecting our praise and our worship to be solely focused upon the Lord Jesus. All other focus would fail.

Here also in these words, as we read a moment ago, God The Father was bringing the third Person of His Trinity up to the forefront of the Salvation ministry that the Lord Jesus would provide, the Holy Spirit.

Yes, God’s Holy Spirit has ever and always been a necessary part of God’s plan for the salvation of men’s souls. But here in these words, He is clearly declaring that all three, God The Father, God The Son and God The Holy Spirit together provide the complete plan of salvation for our souls. And praise be to God for His great wisdom in that plan.

And again, no, none of the involvements of either one of the three, God The Father, God The Son, or God The Holy Spirit was actually new. God The Father was simply putting into motion the full and complete plan that He, in the Trinity,

had devised before the foundations of the world and the creation of man had taken place.

And in giving us these scriptures, God is graciously revealing His complete plan to us, especially the ministry role that God's Holy Spirit will have in our lives.

Yes, we have yet to study and rejoice in the parts of the plan of Salvation that God The Father and God The Son will play in bringing eternal life to our souls. But here, God wanted to take a brief moment within these scriptures to introduce His Holy Spirit to us and to tell us about some of the things that He will do.

God had been prophesying about this moment for a long time. Through prophets like Joel and Ezekiel and others, He had been telling the people that this day would come.

In the Book of Joel, He prophesied,

²⁸ . . . I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,

your old men will dream dreams,

your young men will see visions.

²⁹ Even on my servants, both men and women,

I will pour out my Spirit in those days. (Joel 2:28-29)

And in Ezekiel 36 He told us,

²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. ²⁶I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. (Ezekiel 36:25-27)

And now here in the days of Jesus, it was all coming to fulfillment. John was telling them,

¹¹"I baptize you with water for repentance. (But) He (the Lord Jesus) will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. (Matthew 3:11)

In these few words God's full and perfect plan was coming to completeness.

God knew that men and women had not and could not, by using their own strength, gain or hold onto their own salvation.

Yes, Christ would die to cleanse and free men and women's souls from their sins. And yes, men like John and you and I could and would proclaim the salvation that Christ offered. But those same dear souls that would receive their salvation one day, would by the very next day prove that they had no strength to maintain that salvation.

And so, God in His great wisdom was here adding His seal of strength to the covenant of salvation. And it was a seal that could not be broken. Listen! These truths are given to us in 2 Corinthians 1,

²¹Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, ²²set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.(2 Corinthians 1:21-22)

Folks, this one transaction, this one gift is one beyond measure. The purchase has been made complete. By His death, Christ paid the entire cost for our redemption and we are His. But we are wanderers. We are like sheep that go astray. We want always to get to the other side of the fence and taste the greener grass over there.

But God's Holy Spirit has now been given to us as a guarantee that we can never wander too far from His fold. Listen again!

²¹Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, ²²set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. (2 Corinthians 1:21-22)

And so then John's words of Jesus take on a more personal and intimate reality. He said, "I baptize you with water for repentance. . . (but) He (Jesus) will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

Note also in these words, that there are two provisions, both with a promise, but one is a very stern, perhaps even severe provision.

Listen again to these two provisions, . . . John said, "after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

Folks, as some of you might know, I have spent most of these more recent years of ministry pastoring in some of the more “conservative” believing churches. And as we know, these words, “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” are not often used in most of those “conservative” churches.

But oh dear friends, these words are fully intended for all of us, for you and for me. And they are as much a part of our salvation as are those precious words given in John 3:16.

Unfortunately, I have often heard many of my conservative friends rush to explain away words such as these, perhaps fearing that they might find themselves tempted to lift up holy hands and act like our charismatic friends.

But please dear Christian, we must not try to explain away these words. These words are as much a part of our salvation as was the moment we first believed.

Many of those more conservative folks insist that these words “baptized with the Holy Spirit and fire” were intended only for the early church, in the days of Peter and Paul. But I find no “biblical proof” for that belief.

I confess to you that I do not know everything that God intends in these words, but He has been very clear on some of them.

First, He used the word “baptism” which gives the complete sense of a full immersion. In Romans 6, we are told that we are to be “Baptized into His death”. That baptism is meant to be complete. We can’t just die a little bit. We must die to sin and self completely, otherwise we cannot enjoy the resurrection.

So for the Lord to “baptize us with the Holy Spirit”, means that we will be fully immersed in Him. No part of us will be outside of His presence.

I believe that is why God emphasizes that we are to love Him with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. Every part of our being must be fully immersed in His Spirit.

Another reality of the presence of the Holy Spirit is that He brings with Him “fruits” and “gifts”. Whether or not we permit those fruits and those gifts to bear even more fruit in our lives, that is a choice of our own. But God’s Spirit that covers us

like a river of living waters, is always filled with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control.

The fruits are present in us every moment and they are at our very fingertips.

Also when we are baptized by His Spirit, we are given gifts, gifts that will not be revoked all the days of our lives. Romans 11:29 tells us so. There God tells us, "for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable."

The Holy Spirit will bring with Him gifts like faith, prophecy, teaching, preaching, leadership, compassion, serving, and yes also, gifts of miracles and healing and speaking in tongues.

Folks, when you and I are saved, we are baptized with God's Spirit. And with His Spirit flowing over and through us like a river of living waters, a whole new world of opportunity is opened up to us.

Now the question for you and me is, if we are truly "Baptized with God's Holy Spirit", then why don't we always act like it. Why are we, in so many ways, still the same old person we were before we were saved?

My only answer for that is a simple one, but a brutally honest one. It's a matter of obedience or disobedience . . . "obedience or disobedience"!

God gave us the special vision of Him as our Father and us as His sons for a reason. He brings with Him all that is available to us in heaven and on earth. And we can have it all, if we will fully agree to be His Sons.

If, and to the degree that we are willing to be obedient to His purposes and His calling, we can and we will have all that He intends for us, the fruits and the gifts are ours.

May I say that again . . . much of the responsibility for not being able to enjoy all the benefits of being a "son of God" rests firmly upon our own shoulders.

We can be true sons and daughters or we can be rebellious sons and daughters.

We can remain with Him and enjoy all the loving benefits of living in His presence or we can do as the prodigal son did, go our own way and choose to live with the pigs, too obstinate to enjoy the wonders that are truly ours. The choice rests with us.

The last part of the verse is by far the most difficult. It's the part that will do us the most good, but is also the part that we most often run away from, the "fire".

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with "fire".

The "fire" represents the "extreme holiness" of God. God is, above all else, Holy. And that holiness has its own life and power. It cleanses and it purifies. Nothing unclean can stand in its presence.

The Greek word for fire has that very sense within it, to cleanse and to purify.

God's Spirit will be as a burning fire within us to reach down deep within our souls to seek out and cauterize, and then heal the secret wounds of sin that have so often in the past prevailed against us.

It's true, we can quench His fire and we can grieve Him by our obstinate ways. But folks, it is all ours for the asking. His fruits and His gifts are ours. His joyous presence can bring healing and purifying from all our sins. The choice is truly ours.

John said,

¹¹"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.(Matthew 3:11)

Pray with me.