

“JOURNEY THROUGH THE GOSPEL OF JOHN” SERIES

#6: “John the Baptizer Teaches About Jesus”

SCRIPTURE: John 3:22-36

INTRO:

When John wrote *“After this...”* he was referring to the conversation Jesus had with Nicodemus. This conversation took place in Jerusalem, so Jesus and the four disciples He had called went from the city to the more rural areas of Judea, where He was baptizing folks. I find this rather interesting, yet puzzling. While John seems to indicate here that Jesus was baptizing people, he wrote in chapter 4, verse 2, that it was the disciples doing the baptizing.

I am further puzzled by the absence of information here regarding what this baptism was for. Was it the same as John’s baptism of repentance, or did it have some other significance? We know that those who were baptized by John were baptized again after Pentecost had come and gone. What about those who were baptized by Jesus’ disciples? Did they have to be baptized again to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit?

And note that John makes it a point to say that John *“was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there.”* What does that say about baptism? Actually, a literal translation here is *“John also was immersing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there.”* Baptism is immersion, and it requires more than a trickle of water.

John makes a parenthetical statement about John the Baptizer: *“(for John had not yet been put in prison).”* John’s gospel was written several years after John the Baptizer was imprisoned and then beheaded.

Verses 25-26 introduces the main part of our lesson today: *“Now a discussion arose between some of John’s disciples and a Jew over purification. And they came to John and said to him, ‘Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness – look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him.’”* This is the only time in John’s gospel that anyone other than Jesus is called *“Rabbi.”* I don’t know that there’s any significance to this, but I thought I would point it out.

I have a question for you:

IF JESUS WAS BAPTIZING AT THIS TIME, WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE OF IT?

First of all, it’s explained in John 4:2 that Jesus baptized no one; it was His disciples who did the baptizing.

But what was this baptism for? The answer has to be that the disciples of Jesus were baptizing for the same reason John baptized: for repentance. It was a ceremonial cleansing or purification for those Jews who would prepare themselves for the coming of the Christ, the promised Messiah. It could not have been baptism for the forgiveness of sins, for that would be introduced after the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus on Pentecost in 30 A.D. by the apostle Peter.

Let's look at John's answer to the discussion between one of the Jews and his disciples about purification, which was the purpose of baptism. This led to their commenting to John about all the people responding to Jesus and His disciples. They were baptizing more people than John was baptizing.

First, he says:

"A PERSON CANNOT RECEIVE EVEN ONE THING UNLESS IT IS GIVEN HIM FROM HEAVEN."

In other words, John explained that it was God's doing, that He gave John the response that was needed and He gave Jesus the response that was needed, and that God ultimately decided who responded to John the Baptizer and who responded to Jesus. He reveals the meaning of his statement when he reminds his disciples and the Jewish inquirer that he said he wasn't the Christ; he was the one who went before Christ. Then he explains that he was the friend of the bridegroom, not the bridegroom. Finally, he explains that Christ must increase, and he must decrease.

To state it plainly, God's plan was for Christ to have preeminence over John.

He says:

"I AM NOT THE CHRIST, BUT I HAVE BEEN SENT BEFORE HIM."

The Baptizer reiterates what he had been saying all along: "I am not the Messiah you're looking for; I am just His forerunner." Then he compares Christ and himself to a bridegroom and what we would call "the best man." According to Jewish tradition, when a bridegroom was ready to call for his bride, the best friend of the bridegroom would run ahead of him, announcing his arrival.

Then he says:

"HE WHO COMES FROM ABOVE IS ABOVE ALL."

John knew that he was the son of Zechariah born to Elizabeth just six months before Jesus was born, and he knew that Jesus was the Son of God born to Mary. In other words, he knew that Jesus was *"from above."*

“John could call to repentance and to baptism in water, but he could not give new birth and the Spirit because he was not from above and could not speak from above. In short, he could not save to the uttermost; only Jesus could do that” (College Press NIV Commentary, John, p. 108).

Jesus was not only from above; He was **“above all.”** Jesus is the highest authority in all creation. Jesus is higher than any human, higher than Mohammed, higher than Buddha, higher than any Hindu god. Of course, these are all false gods. **“No one”** can’t be taken literally because there were those who did believe Him. But they were few and far between. By and large, His own people didn’t believe Him. They decided to have him crucified. Few really believe Him today. So many in the world believe only in humans. They are called “Humanists” or “Atheists.” Many believe only in Mohammed. They are called Islamists. They believe Christians are infidels. Many believe in Buddha. They’re called “Buddhists.” Many are “Hindus.” So, Jesus is not believed by most people. This should be no surprise, since most people, even most Jews, have not believed him.

Then he says:

“WHOEVER RECEIVES HIS TESTIMONY SETS HIS SEAL TO THIS.”

Note verse 33: ***“Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true.”*** People in those days put their seal on documents whose conditions they agreed to. In that day, everybody had their own seal. Today, we put our signature on them. So, when we accept Jesus, we testify to the truth of what He says. What’s more, when we accept Jesus, we accept God. To not accept Jesus is to not accept God; to do this is to regard both as liars. This is why Muslims really don’t believe in God; if they did, they would accept Jesus as the Son of God. In truth, they are the infidels, not us.

Finally, he says:

“WHOEVER BELIEVES IN THE SON HAS ETERNAL LIFE; WHOEVER DOES NOT OBEY THE SON SHALL NOT SEE LIFE, BUT THE WRATH OF GOD REMAINS ON HIM.”

Let’s take these statements one at a time:

1. ***“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.”***

What does *believing in the Son* involve? Is it simply acknowledging who He is? We know better than that, don’t we? We know that to *believe in the Son* is to trust and obey, as the great hymn puts it.

Notice the present tense verb here: ***“has eternal life.”*** Butler comments: ***“One who has an abiding faith has also an ever-present assurance of eternal***

life” (p. 124). In 1st John 5:13, the gospel writer says something very similar: ***“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.”*** What a comfort this is! When we know we have been obedient to the Lord, we can quit worrying about whether or not we’re saved. Amen?

2. ***“Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”***

Here is a place where I like the NIV over the ESV. This part of the verse is intended to be the antithesis of the first part. The NIV has it: ***“but whoever rejects the Son...”*** This conveys the intended meaning.

The message here is clear: To believe in Jesus is to be saved; to reject Jesus is to be lost. It can’t get much plainer than that.

IN CLOSING...

Allow me to repeat some teaching I’ve done in the past:

- The New Testament was originally written entirely in what we know as “koine” Greek, which was “the Greek of the street” so to speak, as opposed to classical Greek.
- The Greek word “BAPTISMA” means “immersion” or “submersion and emergence.”
- When the New Testament was finally translated into English, in 1525, by William Tyndale, the word “BAPTISMA” was not translated; it was transliterated or “Englishized” because converts were often sprinkled or had water poured on them instead of being immersed. By using the words “baptism” and “baptize,” the original form of the ritual could be obscured and eventually ceased, as it has been in many church groups.
- To be true to the meaning of the Greek, verse 22 and 23 of John 3 would read, “...he remained there with them and was immersing. John also was immersing at Aenon near Salim because water was plentiful there...” You can do the same to every instance where the words baptism or baptize are used.
- Therefore, if you haven’t been immersed, you haven’t really been “baptized.”

Let me know if you have questions about this or if you would like to discuss being baptized.