

COMMENTARY ON JOHN

LESSON NUMBER 11

“JOHN 1:25 And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet? ²⁶ John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; ²⁷ He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. ²⁸ These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.” John 1:25-24)

THERE STANDETH AMONG YOU, WHOM YE KNOW NOT

INTRODUCTION

The body of Pharisees that were sent to find out the identity of John were not satisfied with his answers to this point. He had told them of who he was not, and particularly identified who he was. *"He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias"* (John 1:23). From the text, it appears they did not even consider what John had said. He had identified a particular person – a word identified with “comfort,” declaring a radical, and hitherto, inexperienced change: *"Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it"* (Isa 40:4-5). From this it is apparent that their religion had robbed them of all hope. They did not even think in terms of a promised blessing or benefit. They no doubt thought of a religious system, not a time of moral and spiritual change. A spirit of “*deep sleep*” had been poured out upon them (Isa 29:10-12), so they could not even think of the kind of change that was introduced in Eden, promised to Abraham, and announced throughout the Prophets. One could deliver the book of prophesy to them, and when asked to read it they could only reply, *"I cannot; for it is sealed"* (Isa 29:11). They simply could not associate John the Baptist with “*the voice of one crying out in the wilderness*” that was prophesied by Isaiah. Therefore, they continued to ask questions just as though John had given no satisfactory answers. This same practice continues today among those whose minds have been blinded because of their spiritual obstinance. They cannot learn because God will not teach them. He will not confirm the identity of the Savior to them, and they cannot recognize the validity of the Gospel that is preached by those who are sent by God. This is a phenomenon worthy of consideration.

WHY BAPTIZEST THOU?

“John 1:25 And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?”

IF THOU BE NOT. These men thought their questions were so sufficient that, if answered satisfactorily, they would offer enough evidence to the Pharisees who sent them. However, what John had answered was a not enough for them. **The reason is that John was thinking with God in mind, and they were thinking with their traditions in mind.** This remains a problem of monumental proportions in the professed Christ community. Rather than the Word of God shaping the thought patterns of religious men, their particular sectarian posture

determines how they think. Therefore, within the framework of "Christianity," there are people who think like "Catholics," "Pentecostals," "Baptists," "Restorationists," "Presbyterians," "Quakers," etc. All of this is done even though the mandate has come down from heaven that we ought to "all speak the same thing," and be "perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor 1:10), having "one mind" (Phil 1:27; 2:2; 1 Pet 3:8). As an example, the Pharisees believed there would be a resurrection, and that there were angels, as well as spirits. The Sadducees, with whom they had a formal identity did not believe that any of those existed (Acts 23:8-9). Therefore, in the time of our text, there was a Pharisee-kind of thinking, a Sadducee-kind of thinking, and, now, the way in which John the Baptist thought.

They pressed the question concerning John's identity because there was no place in their line of thinking for what John was teaching, and for what he said about himself. It is important that this be seen. Sometimes the failure of people to understand what you have said is not because you have failed to be plain enough. It is rather because there is no place in their thinking that they can conveniently fit what you have said. If this is the case, the fraudulent way of thinking has to be thrown down so that a right way of thinking can be established. For this reason, we are apprised of the Lord's provision of spiritual weaponry that is effective in "casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God" (2 Cor 10:5).

WHY BAPTIZEST THOU? John's *did* "baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Mark 1:4). That was a new thing. Almost all commentators mention that the Jews practiced baptism for proselytes—Gentiles who adopted the teaching and manners of the Jews. However, there is no such baptism specified in the Law. In fact, it did not even begin until well after the Babylonian captivity. Jewish history provides the following: "Baptism was required to complete his [proselyte] admission. When the wound caused by circumcision was healed, he was stripped of all his clothes, in the presence of the three witnesses who had acted as his teachers, and who now acted as his sponsors, the "fathers" of the proselyte (*Ketubh.* 11; *Erubh.* 15:1), and led into the tank or pool. As he stood there, up to his neck in water, they repeated the great commandments of the law. These he promised and vowed to keep, and then, with an accompanying benediction, he plunged under the water. To leave one hand-breadth of his body unsubmerged would have vitiated the whole rite (Otho, *Lex. Rabb.* s.v. Baptismus; Keisk. *De Bapet. Pros.* in Ugolino, vol. 22)." McCLINTOK & STRONG'S **Let be clear, that this is wholly insufficient when considering Scripture.** I cannot see the Holy Spirit appealing to Jewish tradition when affirming anything remotely associated with the coming of Christ Jesus.

What, then, is the thing that drove their question? First, there were "divers washings" associated with the Law – ceremonial cleansings. They are mentioned in Hebrews 9:10. Speaking of the First Covenant, "Which stood only in meats and drinks, and **divers washings**, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation" (Heb 9:10). The Greek word translated "washings" is "baptismos," and is translated "baptisms" in the following versions: New Revised Standard, and Young's Literal Translation. The point of these washings was not immersion, although that was involved, The accent was on the cleansing, or washing, that took place beneath the surface of the water. One of the primary meanings of the word "baptize" is "TO CLEANSE BY DIPPING OR SUBMERGING, TO WASH, TO MAKE CLEAN WITH WATER." THAYER Under the Law, this was a cleansing ceremony, **but it only yielded a ceremonial cleansing.**

However, the Prophets spoke of a time when another kind of washing would occur – and it would not be a mere ceremony. "I will cleanse them from all their iniquity" (Jer 33:8). "I will cleanse you" (Ezek 36:25), "I will cleanse them" (Ezek 37:23). Ananias told Paul his sins would be "washed away" when he was baptized: "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and

wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). This is what Paul declared takes place in Christ: *"but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God"* (1 Cor 6:11). In his letter to Titus, Paul mentioned *"the washing of regeneration,"* or *"the washing of rebirth"*^{NIV} (Tit 3:5).

This is precisely how John's baptism was described: *"the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins"* (Mk 1:4). The questioners could not see this as being accomplished by anyone other than Elijah, the Prophet, or the Christ Himself. Why, they queried, was John baptizing at all if he was not one of those prophesied personalities – all connected with the promised salvation.

THERE STANDETH ONE AMONG YOU

"²⁶ John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not."

JOHN ANSWERED THEM. John will answer them in strict accord with what has been revealed to him from above. Later he will tell them that the reason he was baptizing is that at His baptism, the Messiah would be made known by the Spirit descending and remaining on Him (John 1:33). His answer is given with that in mind.

I BAPTIZE WITH WATER. John was, indeed a baptizer, which is the meaning of *"John the Baptist"* (Matt 3:1; 11:11-12; 14:2; 16:14; 17:13; Mk 6:4,24,25; 8:28; 7:28,33;9:19) – *"the Immerser,"*^{CJB} OR *"baptizer."*^{ERV}

All four Gospels record this statement. Matthew reads, *"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance"* (Matt 3:11). Mark reads, *"I indeed have baptized you with water"* (Mk 1:8). Luke reads, *"I indeed baptize you with water"* (Lk 3:16).

There are two things associated with John's baptism.

FIRST, UNTO REPENTANCE. John's baptism was *"the baptism of repentance"* (Mk 1:4; Lk 3:3; Acts 13:24; 19:4). Matthew reads that it was *"unto repentance."* Other versions read *"for repentance,"*^{NASB} *"to those of you whose hearts are changed,"*^{BBE} *"who have changed your hearts and lives,"*^{CEB} *"so that you might turn from sin to God,"*^{CJB} *"to amendment of life,"*^{GENEVA} *"so that you will change the way you think and act,"*^{GWN} *"those who repent of their sins and turn to God,"*^{NLT} *"to reformation,"*^{YLT} and *"because of repentance [that is, because of your changing your minds for the better, heartily amending your ways, with abhorrence of your past sins]."*^{AMPLIFIED} The word translated *"unto"* (eis) is precisely the same word used in Acts 2:38: *"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for (eis) the remission of sins."* However, a stipulation was added: *"in the name of Jesus Christ."* Also, an additional promise was given: *"and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."* When Paul encountered some disciples in Ephesus, he asked them, *"Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?"* When they responded they did not even know there was a Holy Spirit, he asked them, *"Unto what, then, were ye baptized."* They responded *"unto John's baptism."* Paul then summarized John's baptism: *"John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on Him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus"* (Acts 19:4).

SECOND, FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS. John's baptism was *"for the remission of sins"* (Mk 1:4; Lk 3:3). Other versions read, *"for the forgiveness of sins,"*^{NASB} *"unto remission of sins,"*^{ASV} *"as a sign of forgiveness of sin"*^{BBE} *"in order to be forgiven,"*^{CJB} *"so that God could forgive them,"*^{LIVING} *"to obtain the forgiveness of sins,"*^{WILLIAMS} *"for a release of sins,"*^{ABP} *"Then your sins will be forgiven,"*^{CEV} and *"in order to obtain forgiveness of and release from sins."*^{AMPLIFIED}

BAPTISM INTO CHRIST. Baptism into Christ involves several things that **were not inherent**

in John's baptism with water. ¹ We are baptized into Christ's death (Rom 6:3). ² In baptism, (*"wherein"*), we are also *"risen with Him"* (Col 2:12). ³ In baptism we experience the circumcision of Christ, and are *"quickenened,"* or made alive (Col 2:11-13). ⁴ We are *"baptized into Christ"* (Gal 3:27). ⁵ We *"put on Christ"* (Gal 3:27). ⁶ We were *"baptized into one body"* 1 Cor 12:13). ⁷ We receive the gift of the Holy Spirit according to God's promise (Acts 2:38-39). Baptism into Christ is unique, and must be so presented.

THERE STANDETH ONE AMONG YOU, WHOM YE KNOW NOT. Other versions read, *"there is one among you of whom you have no knowledge,"* ^{BBE} *"Someone greater stands among you, whom you don't recognize,"* ^{CEB} *"right here in the crowd is someone you do not recognize,"* ^{NLT} and *"Among you there stands One Whom you do not recognize and with Whom you are not acquainted and of Whom you know nothing."* ^{AMPLIFIED}

It was not until the next day that John saw Jesus and said, *"Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world"* (John 1:29). It is also not clear whether this was before Jesus was baptized or after it. It is quite possible that Jesus was in the crowd prior to stepping forward to be baptized. I am inclined to think that was the case, and that John unknowingly had a ministry to Jesus Himself assisting in His preparation to commence His ministry.

Here John divulges that although the Christ was absolutely unique, **it was not the kind of uniqueness that men could recognize.** At this time, Jesus was thirty years of age (Lk 3:23). The people in Nazareth, where He lived, had no idea who He was, identifying Him as *"the carpenter's son,"* and the oldest of four brothers and some sisters (Matt 13:55). When He was twelve years old, the *"doctors,"* or experts in the Law, together with others heard the young man's questions and answers and *"And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers"* (Luke 2:47). However, they had no idea who He really was. In fact, at that time, even Mary and Joseph were not clear on the matter, not realizing that He had to be about His *"Father's business"* (Lk2:49).

It ought to be here noted that those who make efforts to make Jesus relevant to the people, accenting how He understand their problems and wants to help them develop a good life, have actually managed to hide who He really is.

HE IT IS

"²⁷ He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. ²⁸ These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing."

HE IT IS. Other versions read, *"He is the One,"* ^{NIV} and *"even He."* ^{RSV} The point here is that **there is One who has the priority** – the One who is responsible for carrying out the will of God. Until His coming, Jesus said *"Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist"* (Matt 11:11). At the time John was ministering, he was actually the most important minister on earth. However, he was going to yield the preeminence to the One coming after him – or the one whose ministry came after his own ministry.

WHO COMING AFTER ME. Other versions read, *"His ministry follows mine,"* ^{NLT} and *"will soon begin His ministry among you."* ^{LIVING} This coming refers to the commencement of Christ's ministry among men – when He began to go about, *"doing good, and healing all who were oppressed of the devil"* (Acts 10:38). Of Jesus coming into the world, it is written: *"And again, when He bringeth in the Firstbegotten into the world, He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him"* (Heb 1:6). Of the purpose of His coming, Jesus Himself said, *"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly"* (John 10:10). Jesus said that after He returned to the Father, *"I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you"* (John 14:18). To

those in Christ John wrote, *"And we know that **the Son of God is come**, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life"* (1 John 5:20). Concerning His return in glory, Jesus said, *"And if I go and prepare a place for you, **I will come again**, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also"* (John 14:3).

As with John, so it is with us: Jesus has the preeminence in all things. His coming is always related to Him doing something, commencing something – carrying out the will of God. Every other work is secondary to the work of Jesus. Because He Himself is preeminent, what He does is preeminent.

IS PREFERRED BEFORE ME. Other versions read, *"who has a higher rank than me,"*^{NASB} *"has surpassed me,"*^{NIV} *"ranks ahead of me,"*^{NRSV} *"He has been put before me,"*^{WILLIAMS} *"He is not in second place to me,"*^{MESSAGE} and *"is preferred before me."*^{AMPLIFIED} Most later versions omit this phrase, which is not justified, for it also mentions two other places in this chapter (1:15,30), which is included in the other versions. The preference is that of God–i.e. **God prefers His only begotten Son to even the best and premier of men.** He was born after John, and commenced His ministry after John had embarked on his. Yet, He outranked John, and therefore John's ministry would yield to His. Whatever men do, if it causes their will and action to take the precedence over Christ, they are usurpers. Such people have, even though they are vastly inferior to Jesus, *"trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace"* (Heb 10:29).

I AM NOT WORTHY. John states He is not even worthy to be a slave of Jesus – to loosen his shoes from His feet! And if this was affirmed by a man who was superior to all who were born before him, what can be said of those who came behind him – in birth, and in life. Jacob once said, and there is a sense in which we can say it also, *"I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant"* (Gen 32:10).

For anyone to be greater than John the Baptist, they have to be *"in the Kingdom of heaven"* (Matt 11:11), or *"the Kingdom of God"* (Lk 7:28). They must be partakers of things that were not, by reason of the time, available to John the Baptist. Not being made *"partakers of Christ"* (Heb 3:14), *"partakers of the Divine nature"* (2 Pet 1:4), *"partakers of His promise in Christ"* (Eph 3:6), automatically make men inferior and unqualified for the blessing of God.

WORTHINESS. Jesus spoke of those who *"shall be **accounted worthy** to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead"* (Luke 20:35). That obtainment is by the grace of God, and through faith – but it involves a very real worthiness. There is a rather unique worthiness that the apostles experienced: *"And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were **counted worthy** to suffer shame for His name"* (Acts 5:41). There is a very real manner of life described as walking *"**worthy** of the vocation wherewith ye are called"* (Eph 4:1). In fact, we are admonished to *"walk **worthy** of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God"* (Col 1:10), and *"walk **worthy** of God"* (1 Thess 2:12). Paul wrote to the Thessalonians concerning their *"persecutions and tribulations,"* saying they were *"a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted **worthy** of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer"* (2 Thess 1:5).

WHERE JOHN WAS BAPTIZING. I gather than this place was chosen for baptizing for the same reason John was baptizing in Aenon near to Salem, *"because there was **much water** there"*

(John 3:23). Baptism requires such a place.