

## COMMENTARY ON JOHN

### LESSON NUMBER 36

*John 3:22* “**After these things came Jesus and His disciples into the land of Judaea; and there He tarried with them, and baptized.** <sup>23</sup> **And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized.** <sup>24</sup> **For John was not yet cast into prison.**” ..... John 3:22-24)

#### **A LOT OF BAPTIZING**

### INTRODUCTION

Jesus has finished speaking with Nicodemus (John 3:1-21). Only John records that meeting, and it was “*by night*” (John 3:2). We do not know the length of the time Jesus spent with Nicodemus, but I doubt that it was brief, persuaded the Spirit gave John a summation of the conversation. At any rate, our text confirms that the Lord Jesus did not tire of speaking of the things of God. He would certainly not fit into a religious structure that provided for a few minutes of declaring and hearing the things of God. Remember how He once said, “*My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work*” (John 4:34). It is questionable if Jesus would even occupy a place where there was planned religious brevity. One should learn from the revealed procedures of the Law, the activities of the Temple, and the reports of Apostolic activity, that the work of God was not done in short spurts, and that it requires extensive commitment and activity. Therefore, our text begins with the words, “*after these things*.” This is the language of Divine purpose and objective, It describes a God-ordained chronology of times and events that were involved in the Lord doing His Father’s will, which Jesus “*came down from heaven*” to do (John 6:38). In our own measure, and in strict accordance with our position in the body of Christ, it is frequently possible to review a period of our lives and perceive the working of God in it – how He clearly directed the course of our lives to accomplish something specific. In the life of Jesus, this was always what was happening, and is frequently the subject of exposition. It is also the reason for the expressions, “*that it might be fulfilled*” (Matt 1:22; 2:15,23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35;21:4; 27:35). As we learn to “*walk in the light as He is in the light*” (1 John 1:7), “*live by faith*” (Heb 10:38), and “*walk in the Spirit*” (Gal 5:16;25), we will grow in assurance and confidence as we perceive God working in us both to will and to do of His own good pleasure (Phil 2:13).

#### **A LOT OF BAPTIZING**

*John 3:20* “**After these things came Jesus and His disciples into the land of Judaea; and there He tarried with them, and baptized . . .**”

**AFTER THESE THINGS.** As I have mentioned “*these things*” refer to Jesus doing the Father’s will, in Divinely designated places. “*These things*” is a summation of “*the works of My Father*” (John 10:37). He referred to them as “*the works which the Father*

*hath given Me to finish*" (John 5:36). They were activities in which *"the works of God should be made manifest"* (John 9:3). These were the *"works"* of which Jesus said, *"the works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me"* (John 10:25). These works were so significant that Jesus said, *"though ye believe not Me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in Me, and I in Him"* (John 10:38). That is how significant *"these things"* are – what Jesus began *"to do,"* as well as *"teach"* (Acts 1:1).

The role of what Jesus did, as well as what He said, is reflected in the words of John: *"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name"* (John 20:31). The reason for the power of this witness is twofold. First, this is *"the record God has given of His Son"* (1 John 5:10-11). Second, God imparts *"power"* to this record that is *"unto salvation"* (Rom 1:16), working through it to convince the heart of the reality of Christ and His work.

**CAME JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES.** At this point, *"His disciples"* is a general term for those who were following with Him. *"The twelve"* had not yet been chosen. However, they would be chosen from this greater number of disciples. As it is written, *"And when it was day, He called unto Him His disciples: and of them He chose twelve, whom also He named apostles"* (Luke 6:13). Of the apostles, Paul is the only one who was not chosen out of the disciples. However, even he had to spend time with the disciples before he officially began the work of an apostle (Acts 9:19; 13:1). The carrying out of special assignments in the work of the Lord is always preceded by participation and faithfulness among the followers of Jesus. This is also seen in the choosing of the first deacons, who were assigned to manage the distribution of daily food to the widows (Acts 6:3). I do not say that it is impossible for a special servant to arise who has not been observed by the disciples – like John the Baptist, and Saul of Tarsus. However, it appears to me that is an exception to the general rule, and would involve a work that was not at all common.

The phrase *"with His disciples"* occurs ten times in the Gospels (Mk 3:7; 8:10,34; 10:46; Lk 8:22; John 6:3,22; 11:54; 18:1,2). The prominence of this group in Christ's ministry is seen in *"His disciples"* being mentioned one hundred and forty-four times in the Gospels. Although *"publicans and harlots"* did come to Jesus, He is never said to have been *"with the publicans,"* or *"with the harlots."* Neither. Indeed, is He said to have been *"with the scribes,"* or *"with the Pharisees,"* *"with the chief priests,"* or *"Sadducees."* Although He was often surrounded by multitudes, He is never said to have been *"with the multitude,"* or *"with the multitudes,"* or even *"with the people."* However, He is frequently said to have been *"with His disciples."*

It is not strange, then, to read of Jesus going places *"with His disciples."* Although there are some rare occasions (two) when it is said His disciples *,"followed Him"* (Matt 8:23; Lk 22:39), the most common references say His disciples were *"with Him,"* while multitudes *"followed Him."* **Jesus' ministry is generally represented as being accomplished with His disciples.** Exceptions are His ministry to the woman at the well, and probably Nicodemus. To this day, Those who are *"in Christ"* are the ones where His presence is found (Matt 18:20; Rev 2:1). However men choose to think about the matter, the reflection of Jesus is intended to be seen in His people (Col 1:27; 3:11; Rom 8:10; Gal 4:19; Eph 3:17). If the church projects a distorted image of Christ, the ramifications of that circumstance are serious beyond measure.

**INTO THE LAND OF JUDAEA.** This was the southern part of the promised land,

with Galilee being the Northern part, and Samaria the central part. This is where Jerusalem was located, and it was the place where Jesus would offer Himself to God for the sins of the world. This was also the part of the land in which Jesus was born (Matt 2:1). John the Baptist began his preaching here (Matt 3:1), and *"great multitudes from Judaea"* followed Jesus (Matt 4:25).

**THERE HE TARRIED WITH THEM.** Again, Jesus spends time with His disciples – His *"friends"* of preference (John 15:14). This suggests they had left other pursuits. He left the city for an apparent wilderness area. Coming to Him was more difficult.

**AND BAPTIZED.** What a remarkable commentary on baptism! After reading such a thing, how could anyone in any way oppose baptism? John tells us that Jesus Himself did not baptize, it was done under His authority: *"Though Jesus Himself baptized not, but His disciples"* (John 4:2). This was done during this interim period between the covenants, and after the administration of the Law and the prophets, which were *"until John"* (Matt 11:13; Lk 16:16). During this time the work was not to wrap up the Old Covenant, but to prepare for the New. The ministry of both John and Jesus were in that direction.

### **THERE WAS MUCH WATER THERE**

*"<sup>23A</sup> And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there . . ."*

**AND JOHN ALSO.** Here you have baptism taking place under the two premier people in the world at that time – the primary being Jesus, and the secondary being John. This was a time when they could minister simultaneously, although the time of John's preparatory ministry would conclude – as he himself knew. He affirmed publically, *"He must increase, but I must decrease"* (John 3:30). The reason he gave was, *"He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: He that cometh from heaven is above all"* (John 3:31).

This confirms that the ministry of John, and the ministry of Jesus, when He went about doing good, and healing all who were possessed of the devil, did not belong to the Old Covenant, and not even to the New Covenant. This was an interim ministry that provided for a transition to the New Covenant, which could only commence when the New Covenant had been sanctified, or ratified by *"the blood of the covenant,"* which was shed by Jesus (Heb 10:29).

As is characteristic of superior things, and particularly of the New Covenant, it is the *"increase"* of the superior that brings the inferior into a state of obsolescence, when it is no longer the basis of God's dealings with men. This is the point made in the third chapter of Second Corinthians. Just as the rising of the sun emits a brightness that exceeds the light of the moon, so the New Covenant has a glory that surpasses, or excels, the glory of the Law. *"For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory"* (2 Cor 3:9). The New Covenant has a *"glory that excelleth"* (2 Cor 3:10). The New Covenant is a *"better covenant,"* and the *"better"* always outdoes, outshines, and supercedes the lesser.

The glory of Christ continued to grow. During this time, without competing with one another, John and Jesus ministered simultaneously, with John preparing and handing over His disciples to Jesus. Then, when Jesus was glorified, and His blood was offered in the higher realms, glory characterized the New Covenant which caused the Old Covenant and the ministry of John to be swallowed up by that glory, bringing an end to their prominence.

**IN AENON NEAR TO SALIM.** Aenon was in Southern Galilee, which was the northern part of Canaan, Judea being the southern section. Jesus conducted no major ministry in Samaria, excepting for a two-day ministry at the well of Jacob, when the people of Samaria came out to hear Him, having heard the testimony of the woman the Savior confronted at that well. Apart from that, Jesus was only noted for going *"through Samaria"* (Lk 17:11; John 4:4). *"Samaria"* is only mentioned six times in the Gospels (Lk 17:11; John 4-9). Therefore, the ministries of both John and Jesus were mostly in Galilee and Judaea. Galilee is mentioned sixty-one times in the Gospels, and Judaea is mentioned twenty-six times.

**BECAUSE THERE WAS MUCH WATER THERE.** The reason for John baptizing in Aenon is mentioned: *"because there was much water there."* Other versions read, *"plenty of water,"*<sup>NIV</sup> *"water was abundant there,"*<sup>NRSV</sup> *"a lot of water,"*<sup>CEB</sup> *"a great deal of water"*<sup>DARBY</sup> *"water was plentiful there"*<sup>ESV</sup> *"many streams."*<sup>MONTGOMERY</sup>

A lot of water is not needed to sprinkle or pour water upon an individual. In both cases, all you need is a container. But in the case of baptism, a lot of water is needed. Instead of water being put on the person, the person is put into the water.

It is tragic that the institutional church has so garbled the subject of baptism. Heretical teachings include declaring that baptism is not essential, and that it has nothing to do with salvation. Some groups practice baptism by sprinkling and others pouring. This is a most arresting thing – that the powers of darkness have authored confusion about an ordinance, concerning which there has been so much revelation. It is associated with the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). It is identified with being put into Christ's death, and into Christ Himself (Rom 6:3-4). It is connected with newness of life (Rom 6:4), the circumcision of Christ (Col 2:11), and the operation of God (Col 2:12). It is also linked to the answer of a good conscience toward God (1 Pet 3:21), and putting on Christ (Gal 3:27).

The way men were prepared for the Christ was by being baptized by John unto repentance and for the remission of sins (Mk 1:4). Jesus Himself was baptized at His own insistence, affirming that it was to *"fulfill all righteousness"* (Matt 3:15). Jesus commanded His disciples to *"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"* (Matt 28:19). Early believers were commanded to be baptized (Acts 2:38; 10:47). There is no sound reason to diminish the idea or necessity of baptism, or to assign it a place of lesser significance.

Sectarianism has taught people to refer to "the mode of baptism," affirming that this is an area where man can choose how they want to have it done. This is not only wrong, it is foolish. There is no such thing as a "mode" of baptism. Baptism itself is the mode – a burial (Rom 6:4), a planting (Rom 6:5). It is the *"form of the doctrine"* (Rom 6:17) – the re-enactment of Gospel encapsulated in an ordinance: the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

## **THEY CAME**

<sup>23B</sup> . . . *and they came, and were baptized.* <sup>24</sup> *For John was not yet cast into prison."*

Jesus had relocated in Judaea, tarrying, or lingering there with His disciples. He was not there, however, for rest and relaxation. Instead, He spent the time baptizing, or, as elsewhere made known, having His disciples baptize the people (John 4:2). If you can see it, Jesus still has His disciples baptize the people, and I cannot imagine Jesus having His disciples do something that was not really necessary.

**THEY CAME.** Other versions read, *"they were coming,"* <sup>NASB</sup> *"people were constantly coming,"* <sup>NIV</sup> *"people kept coming,"* <sup>NRSV</sup> *"they were arriving,"* <sup>ABP</sup> and *"People were going to him."* <sup>GNB</sup>

Most commentators say this verse applies to those who came to John. That is not how I see it. Rather, these people were coming to Jesus, who is the Subject of exposition. John is brought into the picture as an *"also"* consideration, not a primary one. The next verses begin with people reporting to John that Jesus was baptizing, and that *"all men come to Him"* (John 3:26). Therefore, the people coming to Jesus for baptism is the point of this dialog. John makes a frequent point of the people coming to Jesus (John 6:24; 8:2; 12:12).

Jesus Himself commented on people coming to Him. He left no doubt concerning WHY they came to Him.

1. *"All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out"* (John 6:37).
2. *"No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day"* (John 6:44).
3. *"It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me"* <sup>NKJV</sup> (John 6:45).
4. *"And He said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto Me, except it were given unto him of My Father"* (John 6:65).
5. Following His vicarious death on the cross, Jesus said this condition would prevail: *"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me"* (John 12:32).

**People coming to Jesus, whether during His earthly ministry, or following His exaltation to the right hand of God, is the result of Divine working.** There are at least two benefits to be realized in knowing and believing this. First, it accounts for our own coming to Jesus. Second, it confirms how the earth, as promised by God, will be covered with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isa 11:9; Hab 2:14). That is not a depiction of a time when there is but *"a remnant."* It may appear as though such a thing is impossible, but it is not when this truth becomes part of our thinking. It probably seemed impossible to many that people without any apparent leader, would flock out to hear a Man who had suddenly burst upon the scene, preceded by multitudes flocking to another who, unbeknown to them, was preparing the way for that Man. It appears to me that God will not cause this grand embrace of the knowledge of God until it has been unquestionably confirmed that men – even godly men – cannot accomplish this on their own. We may be nearer to this time than some suppose. After all, nothing that even approaches the magnitude of that promise has occurred in two thousand years.

Here, in our text, in a tiny segment of the world, God worked something that clearly established His power to affect men. He had already established that He could turn the heart of a king (Prov 21:1). He raised up the spirits of men to rebuild the Temple (Ezra 1:5). He once *"raised up the spirit of their kings of the Medes against Babylon"* (Jer 51:11).

**AND WERE BAPTIZED.** These were not people who were taken by others to hear about baptism. They came to be baptized, and they were baptized. Multitudes, coming to be baptized and being baptized. All of this was sparked by a message – a message that God used to draw the people. This was true initially of John the Baptist, and ultimately of the Lord Jesus Christ. The same thing happened on the first Pentecost after Jesus had been enthroned on the right hand of God. *"Three thousand souls"* were baptized (Acts

2:41). Next an additional five thousand men were added (Acts 4:4). Then, *"multitudes both of men and women"* (Acts 5:14). A message was being preached that had power (Rom 1:16). It was a message with which God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit could work – and They did.

**JOHN WAS NOT YET CAST INTO PRISON.** Later, when Jesus *"heard that John had been cast into prison, He departed into Galilee"* (Matt 4:12). That is where John had been preaching. Herod imprisoned John for the sake of his wife, after John had rebuked him for marrying her – his brother's wife (Mk 6:17-18). However, John's ministry was not completed at this time, so he was continuing to prepare people for Jesus. God used him and his message to cause people to come to Jesus, as well as first drawing them to John. How marvelously the working of God is seen in these reports.