

Baptism of Our Lord

January 7, 2024

St. Mark 1:4-11:

“The Reality of What We Have Been Given”

- I. Extrication.
- II. Righteousness.
- III. Eternal Life.

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Dear Friends in Christ,

C. Gregg Singer was an American historian and theologian who was involved in the formation of the conservative, Calvinist, Presbyterian Church in America. He wrote . . .

All liberalism in our society today is a denial of Biblical truth; the liberal leadership of our day - social, political, economic and educational (and I must include church) - is dedicated to the destruction of historic Christianity, not necessarily by the Communist method of open force, but by the more subtle method of replacing it with fables of human invention (Inspiring Quotations, Compiled by Albert M. Wells. Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1988, p.107.108).

“Replacing it (the Bible) with fables of human invention.” Fables is defined as, “fabricated stories that convey a moral lesson.” One who teaches fables is called a *fabulist*. . . A *myth* is defined as “a traditional or legendary story, usually concerning some being or hero or event, with or without a determinable basis of fact or a natural explanation.”

My college professors of theology were *fabulists* and *mythologists*. I once asked a Professor of New Testament studies that if the Bible is full of fables and myths then just what is the purpose of Jesus? I was very sincere. I wanted to understand. He cleared his throat and said, “That’s a good question,” then went off on a tangent of gobbledygook without ever answering my question. I wasn’t a Christian then, but now I fully understand the historical importance of the Bible and God’s love in Christ. I understand the consequences of life without that love. Look at the mess in all things! Life’s only possession without Christ’s love and Word is death and eternally existing in death, fully aware of who you are and where you are. Without end. It’s not a fable or a myth.

We’re examining *The Baptism of Our Lord* . . .

THE REALITY OF WHAT WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN

I. Extrication.

As I thought about the attempts to write off God’s Word as fable and myth, I re-read an item that was written by David F. Burgess some 35 years ago. You might remember it. It was about a drummer boy in Napoleon Bonaparte’s army who lost his footing and slipped into a chasm in the Alps while the army was marching. Burgess wrote:

He (the boy) was not seriously hurt but was unable to extricate (free) himself without help. He began to beat on his drums to attract attention. His comrades heard him, but they could not break rank without orders from the commander. Such orders never came. The drummer boy finally began beating out his own death march. Hardened soldiers could not keep from sobbing as they passed by, but Napoleon was not moved. He was too busy conquering the world to remember an insignificant boy who had been clumsy enough to lose his footing (Encyclopedia of Sermon Illustrations, CPH, St. Louis, 188, pp.197-198).

Bonaparte lived a fabled, mythical life...for awhile... believing nothing would stop his conquering.

Our text begins with, “John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (v.4).” And a few verses later these words: “In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan (v.9).” The perfect, sinless Son of God was baptized into John’s “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” He would stand with us - take to Himself our sin - suffer the punishment for our sin - secure our forgiveness and eternal life. The only real fable is trying to explain death as a normal or natural part of life. That’s a fable - a myth - a delusion!

We should well know and understand the words: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...(Jn.1:1,14a)." Let's try it this way: God heard the drum beat of our sinful, dying lives. God saw and didn't just march on. God in the flesh, Jesus, came to suffer our punishment, our hell, to free us from hell. To love us to eternal life!

II. Righteousness.

In fact, going to St. Matthew's account we're given this insight:

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness (Mt.3:13-15)."

You see, this was the goal of Jesus: to do everything necessary to take our place as man, the great sinner, and He is God, the only One who could pay for our sin. Commentator Harold E. Wicke wrote:

It was John's obligation as God's messenger and Jesus' obligation as the Promised One to inaugurate God's plan of salvation ... "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor.5:21)." Officially the work of redemption began here and was completed on Calvary. (*Mark, The People's Bible*, Northwestern Publishing House, 1998, p.16)

Let's go back to the Scripture Wicke cited, 2 Corinthians 5:21: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." In and of ourselves we are not righteous. But in Christ we are! We are counted as righteous, without sin.

When asked if they're going to heaven when they die, have you ever heard a person say something along this line: "I believe in God and love Him." Have you ever asked someone, "What do you mean when you say 'I believe in God' and 'I love Him?'" What do they believe about God? Is loving God a means to earn God's love? If you love God, do you ever pass along some gossip about someone, or stretch the truth about something (lie), or use God's name in vain, or tell an off color joke, or hate someone, or ignore someone you can realistically help, or make excuses for ignoring worship, studying Scripture, praying, sharing Christ?

I pray this incredibly familiar Scripture is implanted in our hearts and minds? - "For by grace (God's undeserved love that you cannot earn) you have been saved through faith (faith that God worked in you, not you worked in you). And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Eph. 2:2,9)."

And so, Christ was baptized as a sinner in need of cleansing, yet without sin in and of Himself. He would take our sin to Himself and continue the journey to do everything necessary to win our eternal life. It started at His conception, was celebrated at His birth, continued at His baptism then the march to Calvary. Approval of His work is underscored by the fact that the Three Persons of the Trinity participated in the wondrous moment:

And when he (the Son) came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit (the Holy Spirit) descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven (the Father), "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased (vv.10,11)."

Father, Son and Holy Spirit doing everything necessary so we would be reckoned as a righteous people; perfect and pleasing to God through faith and faith alone in all that Christ did for us.

III. Eternal Life.

And so it is that while Jesus' baptism is His taking on our sin and winning forgiveness and eternal life for us. Our baptisms join us with Him in His death and resurrection. Paul writes:

“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

“For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin (Rm.6:3-60).”

We know the sin and struggle with sin are still there. We never say, “It’s okay to sin. God will forgive me.” We battle. Yes, we have our flops and failures - but we battle. Our baptisms then draw us to this Word: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rm. 8:1).” And that’s **the reality of what we’ve been given**. God help us to share that with others while there is still time...because time is running out!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott