

9.13.20

Matthew 3:7-12

**John the Baptist: The Man, The Message Part 3
Baptism of the Holy Spirit: Healing Fire?**

This morning we want to continue our look at John the Baptist by focusing on his God given message.

Let's begin this morning by reading our passage in Matthew 3.

Matthew 3:7-12, "But when he (John) saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees (the religious leaders of the Israelites) coming for baptism, he said to them, 'You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore, bear fruit in keeping with repentance; and do not say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit remove His sandals; He (Jesus) will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.'"

Last week I spoke of who the Pharisees and Sadducees were. They were the religious and political leaders of the nation of Israel. But they were not who they portrayed themselves to be.

Here we see John call them brood of vipers. Later Jesus had many other terms He uses for them. Terms like white washed tombs, blind guides, sons of the devil, hypocrites, fools and more.

Jesus and John saw these religious leaders for who they really were. Individuals who were in places of authority in the church of God but they had not surrendered their lives to God. They truly didn't know God or know His ways. And because of this they were not sharing the truth of what a relationship with God was to be and therefore, they were responsible for sending people to a god-less eternity. Because of this Jesus or John did not have any patience with these individuals.

A couple quick historical things here and then we will see what God has for us in this passage.

First, most of the Jews believed that because they had Jewish blood in their veins, because they were direct descendants of Abraham, they believed they were automatically included into the promises God made Abraham. But just having the blood of Abraham wasn't enough. Abraham was saved through his relationship and faith in God. You can read through Genesis about how Abraham interacted with God, following His lead most of the time.

This intimate relationship was lacking in the leaders of the Jewish church and John, through the Spirit of God, had something to say to them. Look back at verse 10 & 12.

“The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. His (Jesus’) winnowing fork is in His hand and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

God's patience with the religious leaders had run out. He was ready to move on. If you were not with God then you were against Him. If you were not producing spiritual fruit through an ongoing relationship with God, especially as leaders of His church, then you were going to be cut off, cut down and thrown into the unquenchable fire which is hell. The floor of the church of God was going to be cleansed.

Praise the Lord we have a relationship with Jesus Christ and are covered by His blood amen? Our salvation is found in Jesus and we do not have to worry about an axe at the root of our tree. We are the wheat which will be gathered in the barn, into heaven. Our salvation is secure but this doesn't mean that we are completely off the hook so to speak.

Look at verse 11. **“As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”**

John the Baptist testifies to the fact that he is baptizing with water for repentance. Later in Acts 19 Paul was visiting with some believers in Ephesus and look at this exchange.

Acts 19:4-6a, “Paul said, ‘John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is Jesus.’ When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them...”

There was the baptism of John for repentance and the baptism of Jesus which included the Holy Spirit.

For some reading about two different types of baptisms, John's baptism and Jesus' baptisms, has been confusing. But the reality is, baptisms, ritual cleansings, washings had been around the Jewish church since it was given to Moses by God.

In order for someone to come into and serve in the tabernacle of old, the tabernacle God had Moses set up in the desert, the tabernacle which was the dwelling place of God on earth, this person had to go through a purification process which included cleansing with water.

This is the thought John is sharing with the people. Someone from God is coming and if you want to be part of what He is about, then you need to repent and cleanse yourself in preparation.

In the Christian church we tend to think that water baptism started with John, moved on with Jesus and has come to us today. But that is not the case. Baptism was around for 1,500 years before Jesus came on the scene.

Now, I didn't want to spend a lot of time on water baptism. We do it today as a public testimony of our acceptance of the cleansing, purifying work of Jesus in our life and the fact that we have died to our old life and we have been reborn in Christ. But there is more of a baptism that John says Jesus will do and it is here I wanted to focus on a bit this morning.

John says this in **verse 11**. **“As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”**

John shows great humility here, recognizing who he is in relationship to the coming Messiah. Jesus is mightier and I am not even fit to remove His sandals says John.

But John the Baptist does something else that is surprising. He speaks about the Holy Spirit. What is surprising about this is the fact that this is a new concept to the people, especially the thought about being baptized by the Holy Spirit. John was way beyond his days in his understanding of what God and Jesus were going to do in people's lives.

But here is where I wanted us to focus. **When Jesus' comes He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.** What do you suppose John meant when he said fire? You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

Earlier John used fire as the place where the trees that don't bear fruit and the chaff would go. What does he mean being baptized with fire in connection the Holy Spirit?

Well, I think we would first jump to the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the church. Scripture tells us that

Acts 2:3, “there appeared to the (disciples) tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and resting on each of them...then they were filled by the Holy Spirit.”

There is no real significance in the use of the wording of the tongues concerning fire here. Meaning, if you watch a fire you see that it leaps this way and that. A tongue of fire is a part of the fire that is jumping in a certain direction.

But I do think the mention of fire here is important and fulfills what John the Baptist is speaking about in his teaching.

We are seeing quite a bit about fires today aren't we. We are watching the devastation on the news in California and Oregon. Loss of lives and homes is occurring as the fires are ravaging those states. We have been watching the news on the fires here in Colorado and we have been breathing the smoke from all the fires.

But one of the good things that is occurring through the fires is the burning off of the old, dead trees and undergrowth and allowing new growth to come up in its place.

I know someone who has a cabin up in Gould where the Cameron Peak fire has been burning. That whole area has been devastated by beetle kill. Most of what you would see in that area was dead trees. The person who owns that home said as much as she hates to see the fires she knew it needed to happen. Her cabin is safe but as I said before, the area was littered with dead trees that needed to be burned off.

I wonder if this is what John the Baptist had in mind when he said that Jesus would come and baptize people with the Holy Spirit and with fire. I wonder if he was telling the people not only were they going to receive something great straight from heaven, the Holy Spirit, **but...**

1. People were going to experience the cleansing, purifying work of the Holy Spirit in their lives

Just as the fires are burning off the dead trees and brush the fire of the Holy Spirit will burn off the remnants of our old life and the junk we have picked up along our journey here on earth.

God's patience, grace and mercy with His children will never run dry but His desire and plan for each of His children is that we are as productive as possible for His kingdom during our stay here on earth. He knows that when each of us come into a relationship with Him there is a lot of extra, unnecessary baggage we are carrying from our old life. It is His desire to remove all that unnecessary human baggage from us so we can be as productive as possible for His kingdom during our stay here on earth.

Look at these scriptures. Jesus was talking with His disciples but what He is saying applies to us as well.

Put following scripture and point 2 on same slide

John 15:16, "You did not choose Me but I choose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain..."

God called you in a relationship with Him. By the power of the Holy Spirit, He drew you into a relationship with Him. He drew you into a relationship with Him so you could spend eternity with Him in heaven but also...

2. God drew you to Him so you would **produce** spiritual fruit that would remain for eternity.

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In John 15 Jesus spoke a lot about fruit bearing. He states this in **John 15:5**, “**I am the vine, you are the branches; they who abide in Me and I in them, they bear much fruit, apart from Me you can do nothing.**”

Those who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior are called the branches. You connect to Jesus who is the vine and it is His life giving Spirit that brings salvation to you as well as the ability to bear fruit.

Jesus said in **John 15:8**, “**My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and so prove you to be My disciples.**”

What kind of fruit? The same fruit He used to draw you to Him. Wasn't it God's love, forgiveness, kindness and patience with you that finally won you over? When you were hard hearted and didn't pay much attention to God He was still there, loving you, being patient with you and willing to forgive you just for the asking. This is the same kind of fruit God wants to produce in you so others will see His love in you and be drawn to Him.

We get to be fruit bearers in the Kingdom of God. I have said this before...this is a big deal. This is a great privilege, to be used by God in this way.

Put following point 3 and scripture on same slide

But here is part of the truth of being in a relationship with Christ. We are given free will in that relationship.

3. Even though we come into salvation it doesn't mean that we will avail ourselves to be fruit bearers

Being a fruit bearer for God is what is expected but it doesn't always happen, not at least at the level God can and would make it happen with someone who is willing.

But look at Jesus says in **John 15:2a**, “**Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away;**

What Jesus means by saying that He takes away the branches, branches being those who are in relationship with Him, He takes them away, I am not sure. I think it might be that He sets them aside and doesn't put as much of His energy towards them. Not that He isn't willing but the branch is not willing to avail itself to Him.

I think we all know this to be true don't we? We have all experienced the ebb and flow of our relationship with Christ. Sometimes things are just flowing great and you can sense and see spiritual fruit flowing in and through you. Other times, it is like you are in the desert. Not much is flowing at all.

But we also know there are some who are not availing themselves to Christ at all. They had a great saving experience, and that they are saved is not the question, but their availability to be ongoing fruit bearers for Jesus doesn't seem to be happening.

But for others. For others they are bearing fruit, at least a little. It is these I believe Jesus desires to spend more time with, give more energy to because He sees their availability to Him working in and through their lives.

Put following scripture and point on same slide

But for them, this is what occurs. **John 15b, “...and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.”**

4. Jesus prunes those who are already fruit bearing

Jesus does this at different levels and in different ways so they can bear more fruit. It is the pruning process that I believe John the Baptist was talking about when he said the Holy Spirit would come with fire.

Fire burns off the dross. Burns up the old wood, the dead and dying stuff so new growth can occur. The pruning of Jesus in our lives does the same thing. It removes the old, unproductive parts of our life, allowing more of the true life of God to grow in its place, producing kingdom fruit, everlasting fruit.

Now this pruning process in our lives is okay when it occurs a little bit at a time. Some of the things we need trimmed off is fairly simple. A little snip here and a little snip there. No problem.

But maybe there are some bigger issues in our lives that are taking up room and not producing fruit. For these attitudes and human ingrained traits that God wants to remove, bigger snippers are needed.

And for the really hard cases, for those deep, deep sin issues, pride issues, human traits that God wants to remove from our lives, well, there might be heavier equipment He'll need to use.

What processes God uses is really up to you to a degree. By staying in an intimate relationship with God and by being obedient to the leading of His Spirit, God will remove some of the things He wants to remove. You can go willing and allow Him to do His pruning work. It may not be easy but probably easier than if you go kicking and screaming.

Some things God wants to remove takes a little tougher processes. Things we don't like to think about but only these things will accomplish the deep work, deep trimming in us God wants to do so we can bear more fruit. What needs to be done and how it needs to be done in every individual's life is up to Him. For us, we just need to hold on to Him and have faith in His work in us.

In closing Paul wrote this. **Philippians 1:6, "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus."**

Fruit bearing for the Kingdom of God. It is your calling.

John the Baptist was a man who had insight into things of heaven that no other person knew. He knew Jesus was bringing the Holy Spirit. He knew that the Holy Spirit was going to be associated with fire. I think he might have known what that fire was all about. It was a purifying fire. A purging fire. A fire that would remove all the old dead wood in our lives, allowing new spiritual fruit to be produced.

In closing I wanted to read this... When this life is over, when you face God in the next life, His desire for you and our desire for ourselves is to hear the words, well done my good and faithful servant...

I asked you to bear fruit and you did. You availed yourselves to trimming I needed to do. It wasn't easy but through Christ I gave you the strength to not only endure but to be productive for My kingdom. Well done. You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share in your Master's happiness.