

Three Revelations

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John the Baptist was the forerunner of our Lord's earthly ministry. Their mothers were cousins, but this was by no means the reason for John's interest in Christ. The Apostle John is very clear that John the Baptist was "a man *sent from God*" (John 1:6).

A REVELATION FROM HEAVEN

To fully understand the significance of this we need to compare several passages of Scripture. First, consider Matthew 21:23-25:

"And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?"

"And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things."

"The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves..."

Proving themselves to be anything but honest inquirers, these religious leaders refused to answer our Lord's question. The proper answer was obvious, however, even to them.

John the Baptist's ministry is aptly summed up in the phrase "the baptism of John," and it is clear that his ministry had its origin in a *direct revelation from heaven*. Notice how John himself confirms this as he says,

"And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost." (John 1:33)

Thus we learn that the Father in heaven communicated directly with John, and this fact makes all the more significant Luke's words concerning his ministry:

"...the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness" (Luke 3:2).

John's ministry came to Israel as a result of a direct revelation from heaven. He was, in the truest sense, "a man sent from God."

A NEW BEGINNING

It is also important to remember that the ministry of John the Baptist marked a new beginning in the national life of Israel. "The law and the prophets," Luke 16:16 tells us, "were until John"—that is, they prophesied *exclusively* until John began his ministry—"since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it."

"The law and the prophets" had long foretold the blessings that awaited Israel in her kingdom. Now, *with John*, begins the announcement that the longed for kingdom was "at hand." At long last, the promised kingdom was actually within the grasp of the nation, hence we read of John:

"In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea,"

"And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matt. 3:1, 2).

This was the very heart of his message as “he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Luke 3:3). In Acts 13:24 the Apostle Paul summarizes John’s ministry in these important words:

“When John had first preached before his [Christ’s] coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.”

Luke does not leave us in doubt as to the purpose behind all this:

“As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”

Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth:”

“And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” (Luke 3:4-6).

John was “a voice crying in the wilderness” of Israel’s unbelief, calling on the favored nation to repent and prepare herself to receive her Messiah, to ready herself to function as “a royal priesthood” and “an holy nation” in his presence and kingdom.

Thus it was that John introduced Israel to her Messiah, identifying Messiah to Israel (John 1:31) and identifying Israel with the Messiah. Luke 7:29, 30 indicated that “the baptism of John” was “the issue of the day.”

A GREATER REVELATION

Another great revelation about the person and work of Christ was given to and through the Apostle Peter in Matthew 16. The passage reads thus:

“He saith unto the, But whom say ye that I am?”

“And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

“And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.”

“And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

“And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matt. 16:15-19).

There are actually *two* revelations here. First, the *Father* had revealed to Peter just who Jesus was—the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Then our Lord *added*, “And I say *also* unto thee.” In other words, “Here is something additional”—a further revelation.

And what was this additional revelation? Simply that he would of a surety build his church on the solid rock of his Messiah-ship. Nothing—not even “the gates of hell” could hinder him from that purpose.

The next few verses clearly demonstrate why it was necessary to emphasize this at this point:

“From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.” (Matt. 16:21).

The time so clearly marked by Matthew is important, for Israel had resolved herself in her rejection of her Messiah. Thus our Lord was not on his way to the *throne* just yet. There was something else for him first—the *tree*! As he *begins* to tell his disciples about his impending death and resurrection—facts they never grasp until *after* his resurrection (Luke 18:31-34, John 20:9)—he looks to the future with the promise of the completion of his kingdom purpose and assures them of their part in it. It would only *delayed* for a while—not abandoned.

The cross was not to be the end for Israel. The mercy of God would offer then *another* opportunity of repentance and of a genuine “new beginning” through the coming of the Holy Spirit.¹

Thus on the day of Pentecost Peter spoke with full authority as he warned his nation that “God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.” (Acts 2:36).

Luke’s record of what follows is very significant.

“Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” (Acts 2:37, 38).

Notice that Peter’s message to the nation in Acts 2:38 is essentially identical with John’s message in Luke 3:3. Thus the “gospel of the kingdom” preached by John is simply updated by Peter in light of the further historical developments of the cross, the resurrection and ascension of Christ and, now, the coming of the Holy Spirit. Peter simply preached this gospel in this expanded form as “the gospel of the circumcision.” (Gal. 2:7, cf. Acts 3:25, 26).

Those who are familiar with the record of the book of Acts know all too well that although the nation was favored with the witness of *God the Father* through John, *God the Son* in person in their midst, and finally, *God the Holy Spirit* in the believing remnant of the Pentecostal church, yet she continued on “stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears,” until Stephen could cry: “...ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.” (Acts 7:51).

THE GREATEST REVELATION OF ALL

Just as the time had ripened for the Lord Jesus Christ to be “revealed from heaven in flaming fire” to punish his enemies, we are introduced to *another*, indeed to an even greater revelation than had hitherto been made know.

Our Lord, now ascended up “far above all heavens,” reached down and saved Saul of Tarsus and gave him a further revelation—a revelation of his *grace*. Paul offers us his “ordination certificate” in these words:

“But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.”

“For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (Gal 1:11, 12).

“For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,”

“If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:”

“How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery...” (Eph. 3:1-3).

And this further revelation from heaven, given to the Apostle Paul, clearly marks a new beginning—not just for Israel, however, but for the whole world! Now, in “the dispensation of the grace of God,” Israel’s kingdom is held in abeyance while God is forming a spiritual unit of believers called the Body of Christ. Today, believing Jews and Gentiles are being placed into “one body” on an absolutely equal basis, simply by faith in the finished and accomplished redemption provided for all men by Christ at Calvary. And it was to Paul that this great “message of grace” was first made know by direct revelation from the ascended Lord in heaven’s glory.

In this regard, I Timothy 2:4-7 is quite revealing:

“Who [God] will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.”

“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;”

“Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”

“Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity.”

We *now* have the full floodlight of revelation on all that Christ accomplished at Calvary for “all men”! And Paul clearly proclaims himself to be “the due time testifier” of these great truths. Titus 1:2, 3 should be read in this connection.

We see then that Paul too was “a man sent from God”—and what a glorious message of a new beginning Christ has sent down from heaven for us today through him. We now know that through his work at Calvary Christ has provided “a ransom for all,” the law has been abolished (Col. 2:14), Satan has been vanquished (Col. 2:15), the shadows of religious rituals and ceremonies have been done away (Col. 2:16, 17) and today even the humblest believer is declared to be “complete in Christ,” having been “blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” No wonder Paul writes:

“Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;”

“Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:”

“To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:” (Col. 1:25-27).

May we who have thus come to rejoice in the revelation of the riches of God’s grace to us in Christ, like Paul “also labor” that others too may hear and rejoice with us in “the unsearchable riches of Christ.”

¹ It is to this *new* beginning that Peter refers in Acts 11:15. Pentecost did not mark the beginning of a new *dispensation*, but rather of a new *experience*—that of the indwelling Spirit as *promised* by Joel and others.