

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: February 1, 2009

The Testimony of John the Baptist

by Dan Trygg

"And he was preaching, and saying, 'After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals. ⁸ I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.' ⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; ¹¹ and a voice came out of the heavens: 'You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.'" Mark

1:7-11
"The next day he [John] saw Jesus coming to him and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is He on behalf of whom I said, "After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me." ³¹ I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water.' ³² John testified saying, 'I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. ³³ I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, "He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit." ³⁴ I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God.'" Mark

John 1:29-34

We have spent the last two studies describing the setting of John the Baptist's ministry. **John came preaching good news.** The people were to make ready the way for the Lord. They would see the salvation of God (Lk. 3:6). **This was not a soft message, however.** The Kingdom of Heaven was at hand. **They were to repent,** change their perspective about their lives in relation to God and be baptized in water, confessing their sins. **Then, they had better be sincere and bring forth legitimate results ("fruits") of this change of mind and heart by practical acts,** such as treating others fairly, helping the poor, speaking the truth, and not being abusive or greedy (Lk. 3:8-14). Their Master was coming with an axe to cut down fruitless trees, and a winnowing fork to separate the good from the useless chaff. They had better not relax and think that everything was OK between them and God just because of their heritage or background. It didn't matter that they came from a family or nation that identified with belief in God. **What mattered was what their own personal allegiance to God was, ...and that would be reflected by the fruit of their behavior.**

John's listeners got the heavy implications of what he was saying. They were crying out, "Then what shall we do?" They *knew* that they had not been seriously living for God. They *recognized* that they had been coasting, ...*assuming* that they were "pretty good" people, when in reality they were using that as an excuse to live for themselves. **From what John was saying, however, they recognized that if God was coming with an axe to cut down fruitless trees, they might be among those who wouldn't pass inspection!** The good news was that God had sent John as a messenger to tell them of His coming, ...*ahead of His arrival...*, to offer them amnesty and a chance to get their affairs in order. **If only they would admit their faults and past failings, be willing to die to their selfish past and identify themselves afresh as "God-followers" through a water baptism, He would overlook their past sins and give them the opportunity to serve Him.**

We often do not "get" the clarity of the word picture that these first century listeners would have grasped. To so many, religion is just a compartment of their lives. Many think they can throw God a bone, ...by performing some weekly (daily) ritual..., and then they can go on living their private lives of sin, or selfishness. God is not interested in your "rituals". God hates religion and hypocrisy (Isa. 1:10-15; Amos 5:21-24; Mic. 6:6-8; Psa. 51:6,16,17). Satan has sold people a lie, conning them into thinking they can have their own lives and just acknowledge God from time to time. **As far as God is concerned, there are no "private lives". You are either His servant, or you are not.**

This word picture of the "Kingdom of God is at hand" and "prepare the way for the Lord" comes from a time and worldview of kings, lords, and subjects. There were no "private citizens". You were either a king, or you served a king. **If a king was coming, you had the choice to get ready for him by showing him your allegiance, cooperation and service, ...or you took the opportunity to mount a defense against him, to keep him out of your territory. You were either his loyal subject or you were his enemy.** You were either working faithfully on his behalf, or you were shirking your duty, or (even worse) you were actively working against him. **When the king passed through an area of his dominion, he would inspect things, look at his properties, examine his flocks and herds, talk to his subjects, go through the legal and civil records, to make sure things were being done according to his policies and commands. If they were not, there were consequences:** People would lose their positions. They would be replaced by others who promised to carry out the king's wishes. Sometimes the unfaithful would not only lose their positions, but they would be punished, as well. Sometimes, as they say, "heads will roll", when the king did not find things according to his liking. Shirkers and sluggards were punished, rebels were not tolerated and those who would collaborate with the enemy were executed. **This is the background word picture for John's message, "Prepare the way for the Lord! Make his paths straight!** Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand! Change your perception of things, for the King is coming! Put off your old ways, confess your past sins, die to your old self, and appeal to God for forgiveness! Then, bring forth the fruits worthy of a genuine change of perspective and allegiance."

John's message did not stop there, however. Remember, the focus was on the One who was coming after Him. John was sent to prepare people for *Him*. **John was sent to bear witness about *Him*, even to identify Him when He came. What did John have to say about the One who would come after him?**

(1.) **He would be much more powerful than John.** "After me comes One so much more powerful than I, that I am not worthy to loosen His sandals, or carry them" (Matt. 3:11; Mk. 1:7 – John is not adequate to be like the lowliest servant to this One who is coming. The power of His life and ministry were on an entirely different plane. John did no miracles, but Jesus did [Jn. 10:41]).

(2.) **He would be a human being of higher rank or standing than John.** "He is a man (John was looking for a male human being, not God, to fulfill this role) who is of a higher rank than I, for He existed before me" (Jn. 1:30,31 -- This is interesting in light of the fact that John was six months older than Jesus. Either John is talking about Jesus' pre-incarnate existence, or that Jesus was greater than John, even before He had started His ministry. Either notion goes beyond any natural understanding of things.).

(3.) **He would "baptize" people with the Holy Spirit.** "I baptize you with water for repentance, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Matt. 3:11-- What does the phrase "baptize you with the Holy Spirit" mean? The word picture is compared to water baptism, an immersion, dipping or washing in water. Immersion, dipping or washing with the Holy Spirit would imply a spiritual cleansing and empowering. If a baptism with water was symbolic of spiritual cleansing, "washing" by immersion in the Holy Spirit is the real thing. The new covenant will be marked by the receiving of a new heart and a new spirit from God – Ezk.11:18,19.).

(4.) **He would come to sort out and judge people.** "His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor" (Matt. 3:12 -- What does that mean? He will sort and sift people, and is coming to clean house. Could the comment about a "threshing floor" be a reference to the fact that the Temple was built on the site of a threshing floor [I Chron. 21:14-22:1]? Was this also God's judgment on, and clearing away of, the corruption of the Temple worship that had developed over the centuries?).

(5.) **He would come to gather some to Himself, while rejecting others.** "He will gather His wheat into the barn, but will burn the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:12 – The first part was fulfilled in Jesus' recruitment of disciples, an objective which He also extended to us. We are given the expansive command to make disciples of all nations [Matt.28:18-20]. The burning of the chaff is a clear reference to judgment. Note that "chaff" is the useless outer hull of the wheat. What is not useful to God is rejected.).

(6.) **He will take away the world's sin.** He is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29 – This would seem to be a reference to a sacrificial lamb of some kind. [Ex. 12; Isa. 53]).

(7.) **He is the Son of God, the King of Israel.** "This is the Son of God" (Jn. 1:34 – To the Jew, this was a title for the king of Israel. It had been applied to David [Psa. 2], and extended to other kings [II Sam. 7:12-16]. In Jesus, God did one better than what even the Jews expected. Jesus was not only the King, He really *was* the Son of God in a very literal way they could not have foreseen.).

(8.) **John would be able to recognize Him, when He came.** "I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water." ³² John testified saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. ³³ I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, "He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.'" (John 1:31-33 – God *told John what to look for*, and he testified that he saw the very sign that God had indicated to them.).

(9.) **John had been sent to introduce Him to the house of Israel.** "I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water." (John 1:31 – God had made numerous promises and prophecies to Israel regarding His salvation plan. It was only fitting that the Savior of the world should make His appearance there, and be introduced to those to whom the promises had first been given. John was sent to set the stage for His coming, and then to identify Him when He came.)

(10.) **His ministry must increase and expand, while John's would fade away.** "He must increase, but I must decrease." (Jn. 3:30 – John was not at all jealous of Jesus. Rather, he was *delighted* with His success. John's whole purpose was to prepare the way for Him. It was only fitting that, after introducing Him to the world, John would be prepared to step off center stage into the shadows.)

Probably the best summation of John the Baptist's life and ministry comes from one of his early disciples, one who *responded* to John's testimony about Jesus and left the Baptist to follow "the Son of God", John the son of Zebedee. He wrote, "There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the Light, but *he came* to testify about the Light" (John 1:6-8). **John the Baptist had been uniquely prepared and equipped to give testimony about Jesus that propelled Him powerfully into His short, three and a half year ministry.** Steeped in the scriptures, John pondered the OT prophecies and also developed the ability to hear from God himself. Through this, the Lord was able to teach him what was about to take place in his time, and use him powerfully to prepare the way for the Lord. **What about you? Are you pondering God's purpose for you in this time in history? Are you willing to testify and live for Jesus, so that others may come to know Him and find their place in His Kingdom purposes?**