

The Theology of John the Baptist **John 1:29-34**

John chapter 1. Our text is verses 29 to 34. First we'll pray and ask God's blessing. Please join me in prayer. Father in heaven, we pray you would bless your word to us, that you would grant understanding of mind, and obedience of heart. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Starting at John chapter 1, verse 29: ²⁹“The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’ ³¹I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.’ ³²And John bore witness: ‘I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’” ³⁴And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.” Amen.

The Apostle John is now using the words of John the Baptist as the vehicle by which he continues his teaching. Thus far, we know that he has taught us that Jesus is the eternally pre-existent Word of God, or the Word that was with God, and that indeed the Word was God. He taught us that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. And he taught us that, though Jesus, taking upon flesh and coming to this world, He was not known by His own people.

It's important that we remember this. I just want you to look back in chapter 1 of John, verse 9. ⁹“The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.” So first of all, John speaks of the world. But then he narrows his vision down to the Israelites, down to the Jews. In verse 11, he says, ¹¹“He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.” And then in verse 12, he narrows it down even further: ¹²“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

You see a similar thing in John chapter 3. If you would just very quickly turn forward to John chapter 3. There I want us to start reading the famous verse, the one that many people just sort of know straight off by heart, verse 16. You see a similar pattern: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” So what's that saying? God sent His Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.

But then John narrows it down. ¹⁸“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

The main point that I want us to see there for the moment is simply this: God's work of love for the world aimed at saving a particular people *out* of the world. It's there before us. God loved the world. He gave His only begotten Son. But it doesn't say, therefore, every person in the world is saved. Those who were saved were those who put their faith in, or believed in, the name of Jesus Christ, in the name of the Son of God—those who come into the light. Light and darkness.

Why do I think that's important? Because John the Baptist uses the phrase, “²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’” Here's the thing. If you want to interpret that broadly, if you want to say, “Well, doesn't that mean, therefore, that all the sins of the world must have been taken away?” Well I ask you a question: How is it that anybody is going to hell? How is it that anybody is being punished in all eternity? If their sins have been paid for, what are they paying for?

It's a pattern in the gospel that when John speaks of the “world,” as far as I'm aware, he is never speaking literally of every single person *in* the world, but is speaking of an elect, or a select representation of the world—people from every tribe and nation, people of every type, whether they be poor, wealthy, noble, common—you name it. It's a representative group *of* the world.

If the Lamb of God has taken away the sin of the whole world, on what basis can God judge anyone? There must be a different meaning behind “world” than every single person in the world; otherwise, every single person in the world is saved, and we know that that's not true. We know that that's just simply not the fact. Not every single person is saved. Not every single person does believe. Not every single person does come into the light.

So John the Baptist, as I said, becomes the vehicle by which John the Apostle deepens, or extends his teaching about this one who is the Word. I mean, it's pretty amazing that in the first eighteen verses of the prologue we have the Word, the eternally begotten Son of God, the one who takes upon Himself flesh, the one who comes into the world. That's enough to blow your mind. But then there's more, and the introduction to the “more” is John the Baptist.

Let's look at it. Verse 29: “The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’” This one who is the Word came to die as a Lamb—“the Lamb of God.” Now what's the picture there? Well how well do you know your Old Testament?

How many lambs do you know in the Old Testament that could be called “the Lamb of God,” the Passover Lamb? Or how about the lamb of the daily sacrifice? Or how about the lamb that was caught in the thicket when Abraham took Isaac up the mountain? Is it any one in particular? I don't think so. I think all of those lamb pictures, or metaphors in the Old Testament, were pointing towards the one coming who would be *the* Lamb of God.

So let's trace out this picture, or this idea of the Lamb of God through Scripture. We'll start in Genesis chapter 22, at verse 1:

“¹ After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’
² He said, ‘Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.’³ So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.⁴ On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar.⁵ Then Abraham said to his young men, ‘Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.’⁶ And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together.⁷ And Isaac said to his father Abraham, ‘My father!’ And he said, ‘Here I am, my son.’ He said, ‘Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?’⁸ Abraham said, ‘God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.’ So they went both of them together.”

And there already you have the picture—a lamb in place of a firstborn son; someone else supplying the blood; someone else or something else, a substitute, paying the price. God had every right to demand a son. God had every right to demand the life of Isaac. But God was going to provide a substitute, and Abraham may well have spoken more than he knew when he said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering.”

We know the story. Just as Abraham’s about to slay Isaac, the angel of the Lord spoke and said—looking down to verse 12: “¹² ‘Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.’¹³ And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns.”

It’s not hard to see the picture there, is it? Isaac was lost, he was gone, he was done for. He was as good as dead. And God provides a substitute, a sacrifice, a lamb from God. So the price that would’ve been paid in the sacrifice of Isaac was transferred onto the lamb, supplied by God.

Let’s move forward in Scripture to Exodus, chapter 12. Once again, we should be fairly familiar with this when looking at the lamb of the Passover, the Passover lamb. We know the story well, I’m sure. And in this story, every family in Egypt was to lose their firstborn—every single family, including the people of God. This is a judgment of God. It’s representative of the judgment of God on all humanity. Even God’s people were to lose their firstborn—unless or if there was a way to change it, to avert that judgment. What was the way? Verse 5:

“⁵ ‘Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats,⁶ and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight.

“⁷ ‘Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it.⁸ They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it.⁹ Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts.¹⁰ And you shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn.”

Just drop down to verse 12: “¹² ‘For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. ¹³ The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.’”

The blood of the lamb. It’s the judgment of death upon the firstborn of every family, including the people of God, the very people whom God was rescuing. It’s a general judgment of death, and it’s the blood of the lamb who averts the judgment in the houses of the faithful. And I’ll tell you what, if you’re an Egyptian, and you lived next door to an Israelite, after you’ve seen the previous nine plagues, what kind of fool would you be if you didn’t bring along a lamb and join in? And it tells us in the book of Exodus that many did. Many left the land of Egypt with the Israelites. They joined themselves to the people of God, because they’d seen the works of God, and they were led to conviction.

Let’s keep moving forward. Stay in the book of Exodus, and move to Exodus chapter 29. Now God is giving Moses the laws concerning worship and the tabernacle, and at verse 38, he speaks of an offering. Exodus 29, verse 38: “³⁸ ‘Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs a year old day by day regularly. ³⁹ One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight.’” A lamb must be offered.

You see, there’s a picture. In all of the Old Testament worship where animals are sacrificed, there’s a picture, and the picture is this: You’re guilty and you deserve the penalty of death. But if something innocent pays the price of death, something that did not commit the sins—if your sins are imputed to that innocent one, and that innocent one pays by blood, you will be forgiven. Now they had to sacrifice day by day. No lamb was enough to pay the price of the sin of a man. But it was a temporary pointer, it was a temporary sign, pointing to the people.

It’s the gospel every day—the gospel every day. There is a lamb; the price of sin is averted by the blood of the lamb. There was also a trespass offering, in which a lamb was sacrificed. And the owner of the lamb would lay his hands on the head of the lamb, in a picture transferring his sins onto that lamb—the lamb bearing the price and the burden of sin, for the wages of sin are death—and that blood shed by a lamb averting the wrath of God.

Move forward to the book of Isaiah, chapter 53. We’re in the middle of the fourth “Servant Song,” as it’s often called, where it speaks of one, and we know with our New Testament eyes who this is speaking of. This is speaking of Jesus. We’ll start reading at verse 6:

“⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ⁷ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.” The Lamb. We know this is speaking of Jesus. We know from the New Testament, where it’s applied, for example, by Peter in First Peter chapter two, directly to Jesus.

We know this is speaking of Jesus, and here He is. He's the Lamb—"Like a lamb led to the slaughter." And notice the way that Isaiah first of all describes us as sheep, verse 6. "All we like sheep have gone astray"; and in verse 7, He's "like a lamb that is led to the slaughter." You see the identification. Now we're not sheep, we're people; and Jesus was not a lamb, He was a man, truly God and truly man. That's what we're meant to see, that a man paid for the sins of man.

But this man, this Jesus Christ, this fully divine God-man, both man and God—this one paid the price of our sins. This one is the perfect and acceptable sacrifice offering. This is the offering that ends all offerings. The blood of the Son of God has been shed—and in the book of Acts, it says in one place, "God purchased His people with His own blood." God in Christ shed His blood, we can say. God in Christ, through the flesh and blood of this true divine man, this perfect sacrifice, shed the blood that washes away sin and that pleases God for all eternity—for all eternity, my friends.

This is it—this the great sacrifice. Nothing more precious nor more valuable than the blood of Jesus can be imagined. Nothing. No gold, no silver, no diamonds, no jewelry, no wealth of the world. Nothing compares to the blood of Christ, because there's nothing else that can take a vile and filthy sinner and make him or her clean. There's no other way to be separated from your sins, my friends. There is no other way than to be washed in the blood of the Lamb.

But let's follow this picture of the Lamb through to the end. Turn to Revelation chapter 5, and we'll read from verse 1: "¹ Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals." And I'll stop there and just explain that pretty much every commentator I've ever read explains that this scroll is a title deed. This is the title deed to all the world, the title deed to all humanity. The possessor of this scroll is the possessor of all.

"² And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?' ³ And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, ⁴ and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. ⁵ And one of the elders said to me, 'Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.'

"⁶ And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷ And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. ⁸ And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, ¹⁰ and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.'"

He was looking for a lion from the tribe of Judah, but what he saw was a Lamb—a Lamb standing and looking as though it had been slain. And that Lamb has now taken the scroll. He's the one worthy one, the one man who could inherit God's creation.

This was God's intention for the first Adam. There's not a whole lot of point in talking about "what-ifs," but the what-if is this: If in the Garden of Eden, Adam had survived the testing and the temptation, if Adam had passed his parole, so to speak, Adam would have been enthroned at the right hand of God, ruling over God's physical creation. But there's not much point dealing with the what-ifs, because we know what really happened. Adam did not pass the test. Mankind in the Garden fell into sin.

But now, finally, a Man who is a lion from the tribe of Judah, who is the Lamb of God without spot or blemish—that one perfect sinless sacrifice—now finally, the man, the lamb, the lion, who is called in other places in Scripture "the second Adam" or "the last Adam"—the last Adam finally reaches the place where God always intended him to be, and he's a man, a lamb, and a lion. The Lamb—the perfect, pure, holy Lamb.

And isn't it good to think, my friends, that we as God's people, that our King sits upon the throne as a lion—He is mighty and all fear Him, and He can and will destroy all who rebel against Him. And He's a lamb—He is sympathetic, He identifies with us, He understands our weakness, He understands this world that we live in and the temptations we face from day to day. And as a lamb, He shed the blood that cleanses us in His sight. And He's a man. We can relate. We can speak. We can have relationship with a lamb.

My friend, you can't really have relationship with a lion, and you might be able to keep a lamb as a pet, but you can't talk to it, and it won't talk back to you. But Christ Jesus, the God-man, sits enthroned in heaven, with that scroll of ownership opening upon His very lap. He's the one who breaks the scrolls. He's the one who is worthy. He's the one who rules now as God in Christ, ruling all of creation, interceding for His people, ruling over all of providence. The Lamb of God. That's where this picture that John the Baptist gives us of the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world leads us to. It leads us to worship in the very throne room of heaven.

But let's keep reading. John chapter 1, verse 30: "This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.'" Notice he says, "a man." Now I've already stressed this, but it's worth stressing one more time. "This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.'"

The Apostle John has taught us two things. He's taught us that the Word is God, the Word is divine, and the Word is eternal; and he's taught us that the Word has become a man—truly God, truly man. My friends, you've got to cling to that. You must cling to that. That is the basis of Christian doctrine, that Jesus Christ is both 100% God and 100% man.

We must have Him being 100% God. Why? Because only God, only the sacrifice of the Son of God, is of enough value to wash away our sins. If I die a million times, I can't even pay for my own sins. And none of you can pay for your own sins. But if God in Christ dies once, He pays for the sins of all who will believe. Only God, in Christ, can pay the price of our sins.

But he must be a man. Why must He be a man? Because God created mankind to bear His image, and our first covenant father was Adam. And that covenant father led us into darkness and corruption, through sin. And so we need another man, another covenant father, another head, another negotiator, another intermediary—somebody who can bridge the gap between man and God that’s been caused by sin. And yet, that someone must be a man so that you and I can identify with him.

I can’t identify with God the Father, pure Holy Spirit that He is. And I don’t mean He’s *the* Holy Spirit, I mean He is a spirit who is pure in nature and essence—incorruptible, can’t be approached, never been seen by human flesh. He’s only ever been seen by one—the Son, and only ever been revealed through one person—the Son. So I need a man who can get me from humanity to divinity, and the man who can do that is Jesus Christ.

“After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.” You see, He was before John, because John is a worshipper of God. So he’s saying that God is now man, and man has become a God, in Christ Jesus. In Christ Jesus. We’re not gods. If you want to use a very small “s”, we’re all sons of God, but in Christ. We’re not divine. We’re not divinity. We’re partakers of divinity, which is a mysterious term used by Peter in Second Peter, but we ourselves are not divinity.

Verse 31: “I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.” Now remember back to last week, and how John was baptizing the people of Israel, and in baptizing the people of Israel, he was saying to them, “You’re as good as Gentiles. You’ve been separated from God by your sins, and you need to be converted, just as a Gentile needs to be converted.” And the reason that John was baptizing with water and saying these things was that Jesus might be revealed to Israel.

Verse 32: “And John bore witness: ‘I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.’”³³ I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, “He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.”” Now we need to look carefully at this. The Spirit descends and remains upon Jesus, and it is Jesus who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.

Now, I want to say a few things. First of all, you don’t explain what this means by running forward to the book of Acts. You don’t explain what this means by running forward to the day of Pentecost, when it says that they were baptized in the Spirit, and the subsequent days of Pentecost, as the apostles took the gospel out into the nations and other peoples were baptized in the Spirit. That’s not where you understand what’s going on.

You understand what’s going on by going back into the Old Testament, because John is an Old Testament prophet, and he’s speaking from the Old Testament of the Saviour who is to come. So we need to go back and draw some meaning from the Old Testament as to what this is all about—about the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, and what it means when he says that people will be baptized in the Holy Spirit.

So let's start at an earlier Old Testament reading, which is Isaiah chapter 11. It's important to remember that John says he saw the Spirit descend and remain, or rest. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him. Looking at Isaiah 11, verse 1: "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. ² And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD." We'll just stop there. We read the whole passage earlier.

John wants us to see that Jesus is the one that was spoken of here in Isaiah. What does he say? Just looking at John 1, verse 32: "And John bore witness: 'I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained,' or rested, 'on him. ³³ I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, ''"—John wants us to look here now at Isaiah chapter 11 and understand that this is who he is speaking of, this is our connection back into the Old Testament.

Jesus is the fulfillment of Isaiah chapter 11. The shoot from the stump of Jesse. Jesse is the father of King David. So it's from the house of King David. You know, when a man writes poetry, he tries to think of different ways to say the same thing, instead of repeating himself over and over again. So the "stump of Jesse," the "house of David"—he's saying the same thing.

So this one, this Jesus, is He who was born into and from the house of David. Remember, John wrote this gospel last of all. Matthew, Mark, and Luke were already in circulation. John wrote this gospel last of all. He was the last of the gospel writers. And he is working on the assumption that everybody knows the birth of Jesus; that everybody knows, for example, from the gospel of Luke and the gospel of Matthew, that Jesus was born of David, or the house of David; that everybody knows that Jesus accepted the title "Son of David," when people called out, "Son of David, have mercy on me."

John the Apostle expects us to already have that as background information when we read his gospel. And he uses John the Baptist to point to this Jesus, and say, "This Jesus is the fulfillment of Isaiah chapter 11. He's the one upon whom the Spirit rests. 'And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.'"

Now in that reading that we took in Revelation chapter 5, where the Lamb took the scroll, what did it say about the Lamb? It said that the Spirits of God were upon the Lamb. Now most of the commentators would tell you that that also is just a poetic way of talking about the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of God was upon the Lamb, and from the Lamb was working in all the earth.

Let's go a little bit deeper into this idea, then, of the Holy Spirit resting upon someone, and someone being baptized in the Holy Spirit. I want you to go to the book of Numbers, chapter 11. Here we're in the Exodus and the trek through the wilderness. Starting at verse 1:

"And the people complained in the hearing of the LORD about their misfortunes, and when the LORD heard it, his anger was kindled, and the fire of the LORD burned among them and consumed some outlying parts of the camp. ² Then the people cried out to Moses, and Moses

prayed to the LORD, and the fire died down. ³ So the name of that place was called Taberah, because the fire of the LORD burned among them.

“⁴ Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving. And the people of Israel also wept again and said, ‘Oh that we had meat to eat! ⁵ We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. ⁶ But now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at.’

“⁷ Now the manna was like coriander seed, and its appearance like that of bdellium. ⁸ The people went about and gathered it and ground it in handmills or beat it in mortars and boiled it in pots and made cakes of it. And the taste of it was like the taste of cakes baked with oil. ⁹ When the dew fell upon the camp in the night, the manna fell with it.

“¹⁰ Moses heard the people weeping throughout their clans, everyone at the door of his tent. And the anger of the LORD blazed hotly, and Moses was displeased. ¹¹ Moses said to the LORD, ‘Why have you dealt ill with your servant? And why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me? ¹² Did I conceive all this people? Did I give them birth, that you should say to me, “Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a nursing child,” to the land that you swore to give their fathers? ¹³ Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me and say, “Give us meat, that we may eat.” ¹⁴ I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me. ¹⁵ If you will treat me like this, kill me at once, if I find favor in your sight, that I may not see my wretchedness.’

“¹⁶ Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Gather for me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them, and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you. ¹⁷ And I will come down and talk with you there. And I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you may not bear it yourself alone. ¹⁸ And say to the people, “Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat, for you have wept in the hearing of the LORD, saying, ‘Who will give us meat to eat? For it was better for us in Egypt.’ Therefore the LORD will give you meat, and you shall eat. ¹⁹ You shall not eat just one day, or two days, or five days, or ten days, or twenty days, ²⁰ but a whole month, until it comes out at your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have rejected the LORD who is among you and have wept before him, saying, ‘Why did we come out of Egypt?’” ²¹ But Moses said, ‘The people among whom I am number six hundred thousand on foot, and you have said, “I will give them meat, that they may eat a whole month!” ²² Shall flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, and be enough for them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, and be enough for them?’ ²³ And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Is the LORD’s hand shortened? Now you shall see whether my word will come true for you or not.’

“²⁴ So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD. And he gathered seventy men of the elders of the people and placed them around the tent. ²⁵ Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. And as soon as the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied. But they did not continue doing it.

“²⁶ Now two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the Spirit rested on them. They were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. ²⁷ And a young man ran and told Moses, ‘Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.’ ²⁸ And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth, said, ‘My lord Moses, stop them.’ ²⁹ But Moses said to him, ‘Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!’ ³⁰ And Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp.”

Now what do I want us to see in that story? I want us to see something. How is it that Moses was a prophet and an intercessor? By the power of God’s Holy Spirit. God had a man called Moses, and Moses was bearing the burden of leading God’s people. How is it that God was to lighten Moses’ burden, that other people would share the burden and minister to Israel? They were to receive the same Spirit that fell upon Moses. What did Moses state was his desire? That *all* of the Lord’s people were prophets; that all of the Lord’s people would receive this Spirit.

No nowhere is this called “the baptism of the Spirit,” I know. But the point here is fairly clear. The Holy Spirit was upon Moses, Moses could not bear the burden on his own, the Holy Spirit was therefore given to seventy elders, who shared the burden, who prophesied. It means they preached the word of God. They would also have become intercessors. Remember Moses’ complaint: “I can’t bear them. I can’t intercede for this great number of people. I can’t bear this burden of being their leader.” And God took seventy people, and by the power of His Spirit, he made seventy men to share the burden with Moses.

Well, last week we looked at the prophecy in Deuteronomy, where John the Baptist was asked, “Are you the prophet?” Now what was that question about—“the prophet” who would be a prophet like Moses that everyone would listen to? “Now one greater than Moses has come, upon whom the Holy Spirit rests.” One who bears the burden of God’s people; one who not only bears the burden of sin, but intercedes for God’s people. And this one is greater than Moses, but doing a work to which Moses pointed. Moses was the type, Jesus is the antitype. Jesus is the fulfillment of that prophetic type. He’s everything. He’s greater than Moses was. He’s the bearer of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit rests upon Him. And through Him, he’s going to baptize people with the Holy Spirit.

Now I want us to follow through a little bit more on this. Turn to the prophet Jeremiah, Jeremiah chapter 31. We often look at this. Why? Because it’s such an important passage. Jeremiah 31, going to verse 31. This is God speaking:

“³¹ ‘Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. ³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.’”

And I make the point that in the book of Hebrews, this very prophecy is applied to the church—of the church, of the New Testament people of God. And so the book of Hebrews tells us how we are to interpret this prophecy. The people of God will be given, what? A heart upon which is written the law of God. He will put His law within us, He will write it on our hearts. “I will be their God, they shall be my people.” On what basis will this be done? It’s the very last sentence in the reading: “For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

Now what has John said about Jesus, the Lamb of God? What’s He going to do? Take away the sin of the world. And He is the one upon whom the Holy Spirit rests, and He is the one who is going to baptize in, or with, or by the Holy Spirit. You see the very close association that’s being made between having your sins cleansed and receiving the Holy Spirit.

There’s a little more spoken of it. Move forward a chapter in the book of Jeremiah to chapter 32, and drop down to verse 38. “And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.” Now who’s He speaking of? He’s speaking of the same people He was speaking of before in chapter 31. “They shall be my people, and I will be their God.³⁹ I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them.⁴⁰ I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.⁴¹ I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul.”

“I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.” You see, this is repeating the same idea—using different words, same idea. A person who has received this heart upon which is written the law of God, which is the law of holiness—it’s God’s law; the law that Jesus fulfilled and obeyed, in all perfection; the law which tells us about the righteousness of God, and the righteousness and the holiness that God requires of us. These people are receiving the Spirit of God, that they may live before and obey God.

One more passage I want us to look at. Turn forward to the book of Ezekiel, chapter 36. We’re going to read from verse 22, but before we read this, I’ll make a point. What did Jesus say to Nicodemus? “Lest you be born of the Spirit and of water.” Let’s hear, Ezekiel 36, starting at verse 22:

“²² Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came.²³ And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.²⁴ I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land.²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.²⁸ You shall dwell in the land that I

gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. ²⁹ And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses.”

Now I want you to look at verse 27: “I will put my Spirit within you.” Verse 29: “I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses.” Back up to verse 25: “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses.” Verse 26: “I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you.”

What’s the picture? Cleansing from sin and being given the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. They can’t be separated. It’s the two sides of the one coin. It’s the same story. You can’t be saved and not have received the Holy Spirit. You can’t receive the Holy Spirit and not be saved by the cleansing from your sins. The Spirit and the cleansing come together through the mediation of Jesus Christ.

Do you understand why I say it’s a mistake to rush forward to the book of Acts and try and understand what this baptism of the Holy Spirit was in the book of Acts, without first understanding the biblical historical background—the point of what’s happening in the book of Acts when you have tongues of fire, when you have people prophesying in unlearned tongues? That’s what you need to remember there, they are speaking in known languages. They themselves have never learnt those languages, but they are speaking in known languages that other people understand.

When you have these amazing signs and miracles being done by the apostles, what do we see? We’re seeing the signs that confirm the work and the power of the Holy Spirit, the signs that confirm that by putting your faith in Jesus Christ, you are cleansed from your sin and receive the promised Holy Spirit, promised in the Old Testament—the Holy Spirit which Moses spoke of when he said, “I wish that *all* the people of God would receive the Spirit.”

Jesus is fulfilling Old Testament prophecy, and Jesus’ apostles, preaching the gospel of Christ—His death, His resurrection, His rule over all things, His ascension to the right hand of the Father—they’re preaching the message of salvation, the message which divides a person from their sins, and as they are divided from their sins, they receive the Holy Spirit.

If you want to ask me how I see the doctrine of baptism of the Holy Spirit, I’ll tell you straight—I believe that all who are truly saved are baptized in the Spirit, and I don’t believe that baptism in the Spirit is necessarily a secondary experience that some Christians experience and not others. All who have the Spirit can be said to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. One of the reasons I say that is that the Holy Spirit is God, the eternal infinite God. And on a very simple basis, you can’t divide infinity. There’s no such thing as a fraction of infinity, because infinity is infinite. If you have the Holy Spirit, you have the presence of God.

I’m not denying that we do, as Christians, have at times special moments, hours, of visitation where God, by His Spirit, through the work of His Spirit, deals with us in a way that makes us sometimes painfully aware of His presence. I’m not denying that Christians cannot have great and wonderful experiences by the power of the Holy Spirit at times. But what I’m saying is that that’s not the normal Christian life. The normal Christian life is faith and obedience in Jesus

Christ, being fed by the word of God, understanding and obeying Scripture. And all who have this life, all who have this cleansing, have the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

In First Corinthians, speaking to a troubled church where some were speaking in tongues and some were not, Paul says that *all* of them have been baptized by the one Spirit into Christ—all of them. Every member of the church, from the weakest, newest, most immature member in that church, through to the elders of the church, he says, “You *all* have been baptized by the Spirit into Christ.” And isn’t that wonderful? I mean, Christ baptizes us into the Spirit, and it appears that the Spirit is baptizing us into Christ.

You know, all things come back to God. All things come back to Christ. He’s the center of our thoughts, and He should be the center of our vision as Christians—the Lord Jesus Christ, who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. John chapter 1, verse 34: “And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.” As I said to you earlier, I’m not going to go deeply into that. John chapter 5 is all about the Son of God, and the relationship of the Son to the Father. And God willing, we’re going to get to John chapter 5, and we’ll go into it as deeply as we can at that time.

But this is the faith of the apostles. Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God? That’s the question that they asked, and it carried a weight. What does it mean to say that Jesus is the Son of God? Well, John the Baptist will tell you that the Son of God is the Lamb of God, the one upon whom the Spirit rests, and the one who baptizes you in the Spirit, in order that the Spirit will baptize you into Christ. That’s the Son of God. Believe in Him, put your trust and your faith in Him.

If you know God, the only way you know God is because you know God the Son. There is no other way to God. No one comes to the Father but through Him. In how many different parts of Scripture is that said, in one way or another? In Matthew chapter 11, He says, “No one knows the Father but the Son. And no one knows the Son but the Father, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.” This one, this Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour, man and God, the Lamb of God, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Son of God—He is our salvation.

Quite frankly, my friends, it’s as simple as this: Put your faith in Jesus, and you’re putting your faith in God. Rest upon the works of Christ, and you’re resting upon the works of God. You want salvation, you want to know that you’ve been cleansed from your sins, you want to know that you have eternal life? It’s to be found in Jesus Christ, and nowhere else, and in no one else.

And there aren’t many ways to the top of the mountain. You know, forget that nonsense. There’s one way to the Father—the Lord Jesus Christ. There’s one person who reveals the Father to mankind—the Lord Jesus Christ. There’s one person who can separate us from our sins—the Lord Jesus Christ. There’s one person who can baptize in the Holy Spirit, giving us a willing and obedient and faithful heart—the Lord Jesus Christ.

There’s no other way, there’s no other person, there’s no other Saviour. Look to Jesus Christ. Put your faith in Christ. Love the Lord Jesus Christ. You want to know God the Father? My friends, get to know God the Son, for He is the image of the Father. He and the Father are one,

and His mission is to lead you to the Father, that you may worship God the Father in Spirit and in truth—the purpose for which humanity was created. Let's close in prayer.

Father in heaven, I pray that you would indeed grant to us a clearer vision of Jesus. May we know Him better, may we understand Him more deeply, may we love Him more truly, may we be made and remade into His image, that we would be pleasing to you. And may we be used by you to lead other people to Jesus. These things we ask in His name. Amen.