

The Mind of Christ Week 19
June 5, 2019

We're are going to be in John 1:19-28. The Testimony of John (NASB)

⁹ This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰ And he **confessed** and did not deny, but **confessed**, "I am not the Christ." ²¹ They asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he *said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." ²² Then they said to him, "Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?" ²³ He said, "I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as Isaiah the prophet said." ²⁴ Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵ They asked him, and said to him, "Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" ²⁶ John answered them saying, "I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know. ²⁷ It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." ²⁸ These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

It is a new section tonight but it has some similarity to some of the sections we have been through because that's the way it is – the next section. I don't get to pick. It is all chronological here.

In the NASB the title is given by A. T. Robertson, "**The Testimony of the Baptist to the committee of the Sanhedrin**". Since John's testimony was true and commanded by God, then what he says about Jesus gives us insight into His thinking and being. The text says 'the Jews sent Priests and Levites from Jerusalem' in verse 22. So it doesn't say, **specifically** Sanhedrin" but it's a fair deduction because *they* were the authorities. It says they were sent from the Pharisees, and most, or part, of the Sanhedrin was Pharisees – and Sadducees as well. It may not have been the **entire** Sanhedrin but just a few; maybe just a caucus like we have today. The Democrats have a caucus; the Republicans have a caucus. So maybe this is a caucus of the Sanhedrin; and they got together and said we want to know more about this man, John, so let's send a delegation over there to question him. They probably sent some of their staffers over there to go over and find out about John and bring them a report. A word associated with John is the word **witness**, (martyria) "□□□□□□□□" – the testimony given. So when you have a witness, it is a testimony that is given. So why does Jesus need this **testimony**? Why did it add to the credibility of His credentials? Or **what** did it add? Actually, the answer is 'it didn't add anything to His credentials. It didn't add anything to His credibility'. So the question is, "Why did He need it?" Well, He did not need the testimony of man. He included it for the sake of those He was trying to reach. A similar statement is found in John 2:25, "**He did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person.**" Jesus did not need

anyone to testify concerning man. He didn't need testimony about Himself, nor did he need anybody testifying about what is in man. He knows us. He knows what is in man. He didn't need the testimony one way or another. But Jesus saw that the testimony of others as an aid to reaching those who needed this evidence. However, the evidence provided by his own works and nature **should** have been enough.

It's one of these things where, when Jesus received the testimony of others, He was doing it for the benefit of those who were *listening*. He wasn't doing it to actually add additional proof to His own deity or His Messiahship.

So, actually, these Jews wanted to know who **John** is. The buzz is that he might be the Messiah, himself ... and that could be a fair deduction. He was stirring up a lot of excitement out there in the desert. So I think it may have been a reasonable assumption that he was the Messiah.

What a travesty it would have been if John had let this attention go to his head. Have you ever thought about, **what** if John had been a different kind of **man** and all these people were coming out to him and being baptized by him? They were listening to his preaching and ... **he** was a popular guy. **Then** they came out and said, "Well, are **you** the **Messiah**?" Now, he would not have had to come right out and say, "Well, yes, I am." He could have just left some doubt because it appealed to his ego.

The word "confessed" is used twice in the text. **20 And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ..."** The word confess means to assent, (homologo) "□□□□□□□□" – to concede or admit, even to covenant, to be in agreement with another. So perhaps these Jews stated the idea, **first**, that John was **not** the Messiah and John merely **agreed** with them. But this seems to be made stronger by using the word "confessed" twice. He did not **deny** – used in this way.

So they want to know who he is. Maybe **they** suggested, "I don't think you're the Messiah and he said, "Oh, I confess. I confess. I don't deny it. I'm not denying that I'm not the Messiah. He's agreeing with them. The word, deny, is to contradict. He did not contradict them, nor disavow or reject what they said. It's another way of saying John **agreed** with them. He most assuredly was not the Christ. So in this text, in this situation, he puts to rest any conclusion that he might be the Christ.

The word (Christos) "□□□□□□ζ" is the word Christ and means the anointed One and it is comparable to the word Messiah as used in the Old Testament. The Greek word Messiah (Messias) "□□□□□□□" meaning anointed. This is just a transliteration from which we get the word **Christian**. And because the word **Christian** is the corollary of Messiah, then we are followers of the Messiah. We are followers of the Anointed One.

The mere fact of the discussion shows an expectation of the coming of the Messiah. So they are **searching** for the Messiah. They are **looking** for the Messiah. There is an expectation, so that is not unusual for them. It was common during this time to be

looking all over the place to see any signs for anyone who might fit the bill of the Messiah. They have been fooled before, though. So, the searching out of any rumor or possibility by His **arrival** would not be unusual for them to go check him out.

Jesus lived with this expectation as the true fulfillment, and had to contend with this honest as well as dishonest inquiry. In other words, there are **some** people who might come to Him inquiring, and they may have had an honest **heart** as to whether he was the Messiah. There were others who may have had a dishonest inquiry, like King Herod. He wasn't an honest broker. He wasn't looking for the King because he wanted to worship Him, but because he wanted to **kill** Him.

There are different reasons and motives that people would come and investigate whether or not John the Baptist or Jesus might be the Messiah. So, they had to be careful because some people would want to do Him harm, and other people might want to actually know the truth about the matter.

Since John denied being the Christ, they asked him if he were Elijah, or the prophet. This whole thing about being the reincarnation of Elijah sprung up because of a misinterpretation of Malachi 4:5-6.

Malachi 4

5 “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the **great and terrible** day of the Lord. *6* He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.”

So if we take it literally, it says Elijah is going to come back before this terrible day of the Lord. This **terrible** day is the introduction of the Messiah. The Jews did not think it was going to be a terrible day for them; they thought it was going to be a terrible day for their enemies. The Messiah was going to come and bring destruction on their enemies so it would be a terrible day for the enemies of the Jews. So they thought, well, maybe God would raise up Elijah and send him back; so they asked the question, “Are you Elijah?”

Some took this literally and others as a figurative Elijah. (I don't have time to get into it now, but there is a really good article on this on page 1255 of the **Key Word Study Bible** regarding Malachi 4:5-6). * I added at end of this lesson.

In Matthew 17:1-6, Jesus **did** meet with Elijah, remember, on the Mount of Transfiguration. So, Elijah, in a sense **did** come back, and he also met with Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration. Some say that Moses never entered the Promised Land but actually he did on the Mount of Transfiguration. He stood in the Promised Land. In Matthew 17:10-13, Jesus was asked about the interpretation of the Scribes that Elijah must come back first. So Jesus was asked about this. This is interesting; they

are the kind of rumors that are floating around and Jesus has to wade through all the common misconceptions that people have. So, in Chapter 17 verses 10 to 12

10 And His disciples asked Him, “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” **11 And He answered and said, “Elijah is coming and will restore all things;** **12 but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.”**

Well, do you think that Jesus’ answer clarified it for them?

Carole: In the next sentence, yes ... it sort of does, because in the next sentence it says, **13 Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.** {See Rod’s explanation below - **** two pages down**}

Rod: Yes. Right. **But** did that clarify that or did they think John the Baptist was actually **Elijah**?

Ruth: They already saw Elijah. And this says that Elijah is coming ...

Rod: But by now, he had already come. By this time, John the Baptist was dead.

Ruth: But Elijah had already come and gone, too

Rod: Yes – In the transfiguration.

Brian – He had already risen. They weren’t supposed to tell about that until after He had risen. **9 As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, “Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”**

Ruth: But **Jesus** said **after** He had talked to Elijah, He said **Elijah is coming**. So is he expected again?

Rod: I don’t know. There is a lot of room for interpretations here. ******

What is going to happen with Elijah? --

Here is my point in why we’re discussing this. **One** is because the Bible discusses it. It mentions it several times. **The second** reason is because, like I said, Jesus, in coming into this environment (the first Century) He was *immersed* into the culture of the thinking of the time. And it was not just simply the secular thinking of the time but also the religious thinking at this time. In a sense, He had to wade through all of that. He could have just blown it off as a silly question, but He didn’t. He answered the question. But sometimes the answers didn’t necessarily clarify to the full extent. It left them a little bit wondering.

Brenda: When did they think Elijah was coming again?

Ruth: It says, “Before the last day.” Malachi 4:5 says, “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet *before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.*”

Rod: Well, actually some people think that of the two witnesses in Revelation; one of them is Elijah. But I digress on that one. That’s a whole different matter. **BUT**, I am of the opinion that this is not the reincarnation of Elijah. John the Baptist was an Elijah-like figure. I think that is the essence of this. But Jesus tells them that Elijah already came, and his purpose was to ‘restore all things’. More on that later...

Just as he was not recognized, and killed, so the Son of Man will not be recognized. In the same way they misunderstood **John** and misunderstood who he *was*; (and this is really the point), they are going to misunderstand who **Jesus** is as well.

Remember, Jesus told them that they were pretty good at interpreting the weather (Matthew 16:2-4), you can look at the signs in the sky and say the weather will be this way or that way, but you’re really **not** very good at interpreting the signs of the times. What Jesus was doing with some of these discussions was, He was discrediting *those* who were trying to discredit **Him**. He was trying to say, “You guys are having a hard time trying to figure this out, aren’t you? You are all over the page when it comes to opinions about these things. And so, if you’re so confused, why are you judging *me*? Why do you think you can sit on judgment of me when you’re more confused than I am? I **know** who **I** am. I **know** what the truth is. And so I think a lot of this discussion that Jesus had with people, in His mind, was saying, ‘Let’s run that out a little bit. Let’s run these questions out a little bit and I’ll show these people that they really, in many respects, don’t have a clue. They’re like sheep without a shepherd. They need someone to teach them about these things.’

Back to the statement that the disciples **did** understand that He was talking about John the Baptist (Matthew 17:13 ‘*Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist*’) the question is, ‘**at what point did they understand it?**’

My point here about Matt. 17:13 is that, in another place Jesus talked about the resurrection before He was raised, and people didn’t understand about that either.

{Matthew 16:21 says, “²¹ From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.” ²² Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!” **to which Jesus answers** “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”}

Remember Jesus talking about tearing the temple down and raising it up in three days in John 2:19? “Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in

three days.” But *after* the resurrection, **that’s** when they understood it. So when you get a biographical note here in the text that says they understood it; it doesn’t mean that they understood it *in the time that he actually said it*. It could be that they understood it later when they put it all into perspective. There are a lot of things, even the disciples misunderstood about this. **** So be careful when you read that, because that’s not Jesus saying that they understood it; that’s Matthew writing this about thirty years later saying they understood it. And he doesn’t tell us when they “got it”.**

There’s a website to learn more about the “Elijah and the Prophet” verse –

Hebrew4Christians.com Look for: “**Jesus as a prophet like Moses**”

https://www.hebrew4christians.com/Articles/Like_Moses/like_moses.html

In Deuteronomy 18:15, Moses said, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen; you shall listen to him.”

So when they asked John, “Are you the prophet”, *that’s* the one they’re referring to!

They’re not thinking about Isaiah or Jeremiah; they’re thinking about **the** prophet that Moses said would come – a prophet **like** him – like Moses.

Stephen refers to this in Acts 7:37 as part of his defense (when they brought him before the council in Acts 6:12). Steven says, “**This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren.’**”

In Matthew 16, Jesus Himself asks His apostles, “Who do men say that I am?”

¹⁴ They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

¹⁵ “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do **you** say I am?”

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

The conclusion that man makes as to **who Jesus is** makes all the difference in the world for every aspect of his life. The identity of Jesus is foundational to the faith, and Jesus lived with tension of knowing how crucial it is; and knowing that so many would misrepresent Him, ignore Him or simply reject Him.

In other words, it’s a small thing if you don’t know who I am. It’s a small thing if you don’t understand ‘me’. You will not be in any eternal jeopardy, I don’t think, if you can’t figure out who I am. But *if you miss the identity of Jesus*, you missed it all ... because **everything** hinges on who He is. And if He is *not* who He says He is; nothing else matters. But if He is the Son of God, if He is the Messiah, then *everything* changes at that point.

So, in Jesus’ mind, He labored to make Himself known and understood and accepted.

I mean, all of us want to be understood. All of us want to be accepted. All of us want to be known. That’s at the core of relationships – wanting to be known. To know that

at least one other person in this world “gets me”, “understands me” – there’s something about that on our DNA. But there is really a different level to that with Jesus. This was not about *ego*. This was about the *object of faith*; believing in His name. So it was critical that they understood His identity.

These Jews wanted an answer. They came looking for an answer to bring back to those who sent them – verse 19. The word for answer is (apokrisis),

“□□□□□□□□ζ”.

It is a response. If you connect this with 1 Peter 3:15, Peter says, “but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.”

Here are two words that go together: Apokrisis meaning an answer or response, *but it leads to* what you “give” to that answer, *you give* an apologia (□□□□□□□□□) ... you give a **defense**. So, someone seeking an answer deserves a *defense*; they deserve a logical explanation of what they’re seeking. That’s what Jesus told **us** that we are to do with seekers – those looking for answers.

So if you put those two together, you come up with *that* full equation. So, once we know who *Jesus* is, then, like John, we will know who *we* are and what our job is in **relationship** to Him. There is no way we can know who we are until we first know who Jesus is.

John’s answer is the same as Matthew 3:3, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make ready the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight!’” Once the Jews had determined that John was not Elijah, the Prophet *nor* the Christ, they wanted to know (and this is kind of a little odd to me) – they wanted to know why he was baptizing. Well, if you’re not the prophet and you’re not Elijah and you’re not the Messiah, why are you out here baptizing? What are you doing? Maybe it would have made sense to them if he had been one of the other three ... but why did they ask that? What was it about *baptism* that they connected it with the authority of Elijah or the prophet or the Christ? How did the Jews view John’s baptism? What did it mean to them? (I refer here in my notes about an article I read by Ed Barnes of the London Church of Christ <http://www.loudoncoc.org/news/00n0509.htm>).

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It’s called “A Pre Christian History”

“In general ceremonial cleansing in Jewish practice it was associated with purification of the body and the process of a Proselyte becoming welcomed as a convert to Judaism, usually done after circumcision, (for males), and without clothes.” When they had the ceremonial purification; in their baptism you went in without any clothes on. We have changed that a little bit. (Giggles) We might have more people coming to church if we baptized with no clothes – or fewer people. I don’t know. It depends –we might have a different **kind** of people coming to church.

Anyway, John was baptizing all who came to him – men and women with *evidence* of repentance and the desire for the forgiveness of sins. How did John get the Jews to

break with their position and practice regarding these washings? In other words, they had a certain *understanding* of ceremonial washing. But it didn't involve what John was doing. John was doing something *totally different* than ceremonial washings of his time.

So the question is, how did John get **them** to do something that was radically different from something they had known all their lives. It would be, kind of like me (and I've been immersing people all my life), starting to sprinkle people. That would be a paradigm shift for **me** to even think of baptism in terms of anything other than immersing people in water. And I'm just using that as a illustration to say – they had a certain **thinking** about ceremonial washing, but what John was doing was totally different from *that*. It had a whole different purpose to it ... feel to it. [Baptism was] out here ... not in some kind of sterile environment – a holy environment, but in the **muddy** Jordan River? And yet they're coming out there. It's like Namaan having to get **his** head around ... 'well if I have to get dunked here, why am I going to do it in the Jordan? I'm going to go back to my home land in Syria get in a pure river over there.

So how did John persuade so many to accept his authority to baptize them? I mean, again, I think we have become so familiar to this, but if you were just walking down the street, or down the beach one day, and somebody said, "Repent! Be baptized for the forgiveness of your sin!" would you just let them dunk you in the water? Or would you want to know, "Wait a minute. Who sent you? What authority do you have to tell me this? Who do you think you are?" I mean, I might run away, get higher up on the beach, before the man dragged me into the water.

These Jews wanted to see if it was tied to who John was ... where did his authority come from? Is it rooted in who you are? Who **are** you? They had the "top three" and he wasn't any of those. So, any one of **them** would not have been questioned, perhaps, but when John denied being any of those the question is, "why do you do it"? Now you might say, "What difference does **that** make?" Well, this came up again. John's answer was 'his association with One they didn't know.' That's the **first** thing he said. 'The One who comes after him' is the **next** thing he said. And **third**, he said; 'One so great that John was not even worthy to untie his sandals.'

John is saying, "If you want to know about my authority, it is because I am associated with or I'm **connected** to somebody who is going to come after me ... Somebody you don't even **know** about. He's not even on your radar. You haven't even **considered** this person as being the Messiah, the prophet or Elijah. And I'm not even worthy to untie his sandals." Now **that** has to get their attention. Where did this guy come from? Who is this **other** guy? John simply connected his practice of baptism with Jesus' ministry. His authority was a transferred authority; not his within himself.

Jesus' authority will be challenged throughout his ministry and here is where we come to Matthew 21:23. "[When He entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of](#)

the people came to Him while He was teaching, and said, “By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?” Jesus was asked this question in Mark 11:27-28 also – a parallel passage.

Do you remember when the Sadducees came to Him with the question, and I’ll answer your question if you answer mine? “²⁹ And Jesus said to them, “I will ask you one question, and you answer Me, and then I will tell you by what authority I do these things.” And *this question goes right back to the question of authority that they were asking John on that first day that Jesus was introduced!* The question Jesus asked them was, “From what source was the **baptism** of **John**? Was it from Heaven or from men?” Jesus didn’t deny that John the Baptist had to have authority to do what he did. And that really raises the question – anything we do spiritually we have to have authority for it.

Sue heard me say that this week. We were studying with someone and the question came up, and I made the statement, “I don’t have the authority to tell you one way or the other about **that**. What I **do** have the authority to do is to tell you what the Bible says.” I don’t have the authority to pronounce heaven and hell judgment on you about whether you are lost or saved. I **do** have the authority to tell you what the Bible says.” And there **is** a difference between the two.

So we need to know what we have the authority for, but Jesus’ question was a great question. So, John the Baptist, he baptized. Did he do it from a heavenly command or did he get this authority from some men? This presented **them** with a dilemma! Their choice was either to obey him or reject him. And they had the dilemma because they thought John **was** a prophet! Maybe he wasn’t **the** prophet but they thought he was, at least, **a** prophet. And at least the **people** thought he was. John was pretty popular with the **people**. So they **knew** they were trapped. If they said that his authority was from **men**, they would have been in trouble with the **people**. If they had said that his authority was from **heaven**, Jesus would say, “Then why didn’t you **obey** him? Why didn’t you **listen** to him?”

So the question of authority of John the Baptist is also critical because anyone who comes and represents God or Jesus, they have the authority to do so.

John says, “I baptize in water, **but**...” And in another place, Matthew 3:11, John contrasts his baptism in water with Jesus’ baptism in the Holy Spirit and in fire. Water seems so benign compared to the Holy Spirit and fire ... the baptisms of transformation or destruction. A contrast between life and death that Jesus held in His hands was **chilling**. If baptized with the Spirit, eternal life followed – the **preservation** of human being, eternal life, the spirit of the man. Jesus had the ability to baptize in the Holy Spirit and preserve a man eternally. But if baptized with **fire**, it was the **destruction** of the human being – the destruction of the soul. John’s baptism seemed so weak when he compares it to Jesus’ baptism. John’s baptism with water was just a **minor** thing when compared to what Jesus could do.

So John struggles; it seems to me, not to take any credit or to inflate his importance. He can merely administer water baptism, but *the true operation of the spirit of man by the Spirit of God – only Jesus can administer*. Through John's testimony Jesus received recognition of His exalted place and His power.

And this is the irony of Jesus. Those who knew Him best were continually exalting Him, putting Him in a place of great authority deserving to be worshipped, but we see Jesus *remain humble, remain a servant* even as He held life and death in His hands. There are men who hold physical life and death in their hands. Pilate thought **he** held that kind of life and death in his hands ... over *Jesus*, and **Jesus** thought that was kind of funny because He knew that, ultimately, he had no power over Him whatsoever. But Jesus *literally has* the power of life and death in his hands over every one of us. So, perhaps this is one of the greatest miracles of Jesus ... to be endued with such **greatness, power and majesty**, to hold our very **lives** in His hands, to be able to release our lives from the grip of death, or to crush our lives – snuffing out life; yet He was humble, and gentle and self-sacrificing beyond measure ... **and** a smoldering wick He would not snuff out and a bruised reed He would not break! Yet He had the ability to throw soul and body into Hell.

That kind of power under control is probably one of the greatest miracles that we can read about in the life of Jesus because it is **so** uncharacteristic of any other person who has walked on this earth when they have had that kind of authority in their hands. The extent of true humility can be measured against the very real greatness of Jesus' nature. The very One who had the *goods* and the *right* to boast, **emptied** Himself, *deflected* praise to his Father – He was constantly deflecting the praise to his Father – and treated us weak and miserable creatures with respect which we did not deserve.

Brian Henegar had a question about if it was clear to the people of the day, were they familiar with the prophecies? (Like Jesus typing the great commandment with helping others.) Is it something they would have known and been looking for? {I couldn't hear the wording...}

Rod: You know, I think they would, and I think that may account, somewhat, for the crowds perhaps, going out to John. It fit enough of what they knew to catch their imagination about that. But I think a lot of the interpretation of the Old Testament was limited. It was skewed in many ways because it was filtered through a certain way of looking at the Messiah Himself. It's one thing to go out into the desert for a spiritual revival, it's another thing to go out into the dessert thinking, 'this guy may be recruiting troops to go against the Romans'.

We may be going out here, and this might just be some kind of odd way of us signing up ... under the army of the Messiah. That's just a little different paradigm, because,

again, later on in John 6, they tried to take Him by force and make Him king. They had a skewed view of what this king whose way was being prepared for ... the way was being prepared for this king. They had a skewed view of who this king was so what kind of king did they have?

So, the testimony of John could have inflated Jesus' ego, but though true, it was merely a tool to use to bring others to the side of the Father who exalts every man. This is the mind of Christ.

So that is the end of this section. Are there any thoughts on this? I hesitate to start a new section tonight. The next is a continuation of John 1.

Sandra: John the Baptists mother and Father, Elizabeth and Zechariah, were aware that he was going to be something special. And he may have been brought up with what **they** thought about him ...

Rod: Yes they did. They had an indication of that. There is some speculation as to how much even John the Baptist knew about **his** destiny, if you will. I wonder if his mother told stories of when Mary came near when they were both in the womb and John leaped in her womb in Luke 1:41 ([When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb](#)). If it was memorable enough to get into the Bible as a story, it was memorable enough for Elizabeth and Mary to talk about that. "What was that?" And, of course, the circumstances of John's birth – First, Elizabeth was older. Second, Zechariah was struck dumb for a period of time and third, his being told what to name this child. So there were unusual circumstances.

I think God often created unusual circumstances in the lives of people to give them the idea – there's something up here. This is not normal. This is not what we normally see.

I think you're right. But at what point did God tap him on the shoulder and say, "Alright, John. I know you've had a sneaking suspicion all your life that you were being prepared for something. I'm going to tell you what it is now." And there does seem to be that signal – we've already talked about that prearranged signal: the one that when you baptize him and you see the Spirit come down from heaven, you're going to know that **that's** the One. That's going to be the unmistakable signal that you just baptized the **Messiah**. So, yes, I think you are right.

Are there any other observations or questions about all this? You know, I think one of the things about Jesus, or God, allowing for human testimony and witness to Jesus shows the accommodating nature of God. God knows us. God knows that we're just weak, that we need a lot of help, and so I think God does often go the extra mile with us in helping us to understand something.

God knows what appeals to us even though, technically, it's not necessary. Jesus can speak for Himself. He doesn't need a whole line of witnesses giving Him a character

reference. Can you imagine Jesus' application to become Messiah and he says, "Okay, do you have any references?" Well, this John the Baptist guy is pretty popular so most people know him. I'll just put him down for a reference. How about Moses? Let's put Moses down. That'll look good on my resume. Let me give you my credentials of all the work that I've done ... carpentry, yes, but also the miracles.

But if somebody is going to look at it that way, who is going to "credential" God? Who's going to "credential" Jesus? It's a little bit **absurd** to think He needs any **human testimony** to be declared the Messiah. So, it was an accommodation. **People** needed it. They needed some **body**, some **connection**, some **bridge**, and in some ways, that's what **we** are. Why does Jesus need our testimony? Why does He need **us** to speak up for Him ... to say, "I know Him"?

Well, sometimes people don't want to make a connection with Jesus unless they know somebody who **knows** Him. And **we're** the ones who **know** Him. So our human testimony, our witness serves that purpose. He doesn't really need it. He **is** who He **is**. Here's Moses in the wilderness; the burning bush. He has the idea, well, I'm going to Pharaoh and I'm going to be demanding that he "let my people go". I need to **at least** know your name, God. Who am I going to say **sent** me? I don't know if he was looking for a business card to put down in front of Pharaoh and say, "**Here's** who sent me." But God says, "You just tell him this, 'I AM that I AM'. I **exist** – as opposed to all those gods he worships. (*They don't exist. They're not real gods.*) So, if he wants to challenge a **real** God, as opposed to all those **fake** gods that he has all over the place in Egypt, we can **do** that. We can **do** it."

You know, Elijah didn't need to testify on Mount Carmel that God existed. God spoke for **Himself** when He sent the fire down from out of Heaven. Okay? And one day, and that's why it says that at the very end, every eye is going to see Him. Every tongue is going to confess. Every knee is going to bow.

And when Jesus comes again, I don't care how much testimony has been put out in the world about Him. **None** of that is going to make any difference. **He** is going to **speak** for Himself and nobody is going to be able to deny it. That's just the way it is.

Buffy: That will be an awesome day.

Rod: It will be an awesome day. A great day is coming. A sad day is coming. It depends on where you are.

Carole: It will be Shock and Awe – the real shock and awe.

* **Key Word Study Bible Malachi P. 1255** regarding Malachi 4:5-6

These last two verses of the O. T. as it is arranged in our English Bibles, point ahead to the coming of Elijah, one of the most unique figures of the O. T. That rabbis taught that Elijah would return to prepare for and announce the coming of the Messiah (See Mt. 17:10; Mark 9:11). Even in the intertestamental period, Elijah was seen as one of the great O. T. personalities (Sirach 48:1-12 a). When asked who he was by Jewish religious leaders from Jerusalem, John the Baptist denied that he was Elijah (Jn. 1:21), but perhaps he meant simply that he was not the actual Elijah reincarnated. This may also have been the point being made by the angel, when, in speaking to Zechariah in the temple, he said that John would go “in the *spirit* and *power* of Elijah” (Luke 1:17). Jesus publicly identified John as the one whom the Jews were expecting to come as Elijah (Mt. 11:11-14). After meeting with Elijah at His transfiguration, Jesus alluded to Malachi 4:5-6 as He explained to Peter, James and John that John fulfilled the prophecy about Elijah’s return (Mt. 17:10-13; Mark 9:11-13).

**** Rod:** I don’t know. There is a lot of room for interpretations.

{ * Carole – I didn’t share this in class, but in Judaism, when we celebrated the Passover when I was growing up, my parents always put a glass of wine outside the front door for Elijah – who was to be the forerunner of the Messiah. We did this every year. It was the custom. }

Baptism – Pre Christian

Ed Barnes: A Pre-Christian History – on Baptism

<http://www.loudoncoc.org/news/00n0509.htm>

WHEN JOHN THE BAPTIST came to the deserts of Judea "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" he was met with great success. Matthew 3:5 says, "People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River." Luke adds that crowds were coming out to be baptized by him. And, "When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too." (Luke 3:7, 21).

The Jewish people to whom John's ministry was directed were familiar with the concepts of repentance and forgiveness of sins (1 Kings 8:33-34; Isa 55:6, 7) even though complete forgiveness was not possible apart from the shed blood of Christ (Heb 9:15). But what about baptism? What familiarity did the Jews of the first century have with the practice of baptism?

The New Testament clearly points out that the baptism of John was from God. It came from heaven (Matt 21:25). It was administered for the spiritual purpose of proclaiming repentance and receiving forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4). But the act of baptism itself has a history beyond the Scriptures.

The Greek World

"The Greek word "baptizo" as used in Mark 1:4 ("And so John came, baptizing in the desert region . . .") was very common among Greek-speaking people; it is used in every period of Greek literature and was applied to a great variety of matters, including the most familiar acts of everyday life. Greek speakers and hearers understood the word at the time John was preaching; it had no doubtful meaning. It meant what we express by the Latin word 'immerse' and kindred terms; no one could then have thought of attributing to it a different meaning, such as 'sprinkle' or 'pour.'" (Boles, H. Leo Commentary on Matthew. Gospel Advocate Pub. Pg 74).

The Encyclopedia of Religion (McMillan. 1987. Pg. 59) continues by pointing out that the word baptism means to plunge, to immerse, or to wash; it also signifies, from the Homeric period onward, any rite of immersion in water. The baptismal rite is similar to many other ablution (the washing of one's body or part of it as a religious rite) rituals found in a number of religions..."

Pre-Christian Religions

The practice of baptism in pagan religions seems to have been based on a belief in the purifying properties of water. In ancient Babylon, according to the Tablets of Maklu, water was important as a spiritual cleansing agent in the cult of Enke, lord of Eridu. In Egypt, the Book of Going Forth by Day contains a treatise on the baptism of newborn children, which is performed to purify them of blemishes acquired in the womb.

Water, especially the Nile's cold water, which was believed to have regenerative powers, is used to baptize the dead in a ritual based on the Osiris myth. Egyptian cults also developed the idea of regeneration through water. The bath preceding initiation into the cult of Isis seems to have been more than a simple ritual purification; it was probably intended to represent symbolically the initiate's death to the life of this world by recalling Osiris' drowning in the Nile.

In the cult of Cybele, a baptism of blood was practiced in the rite of the Taurobolium: where one was covered with the blood of a bull. At first this rite seems to have been to provide the initiate with greater physical vitality, but later it acquired more of a spiritual importance. A well-known inscription attests that he who has received baptism of blood has received a new birth in eternity. However, the fact that this baptism was repeated periodically shows that the idea of complete spiritual regeneration was not associated with it.

The property of immortality was also associated with baptism in the ancient Greek world. A bath in the sanctuary of Trophonion procured for the initiate a blessed immortality even while in this world. The mystery religions of that period often included ablution rites of either immersion or a washing of the body for the purposes of purification or initiation. Other concepts said to have been associated with these forms of cultic baptisms included the transformation of one's life, the removal of sins, symbolic representation, the attainment of greater physical vitality, a new beginning, spiritual regeneration. It is believed that all ancient religions recognized some form of

spiritual cleansing, renewal or initiation that was accomplished through a washing or immersion in water.

Judaism

The liturgical use of water was common in the Jewish world. The Law of Moses required ablutions (washings) on the part of priests following certain sacrifices and on certain individuals who were unclean because of an infectious disease (Num. 19:1-22; Lev 14,15, 16:24-28). The natural method of cleansing the body by washing and bathing in water was always customary in Israel. The washing of their clothes was an important means of sanctification imposed on the Israelites even before the law was given at Mt. Sinai (Ex 19:10). The use of water for cleansing was used symbolically as well in such passages as Eze 36:25 where God says, "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities . . ." We do not believe that the practice of baptism for the remission of sins as taught in the New Testament was based in any way on the Old Testament, however the Old Testament washings with or in water that were for the purpose of physical cleansing can be seen as a type or shadow of New Testament baptism, which is for the purpose of spiritual cleansing (1 Peter 3:21).

Toward the beginning of the Christian era, the Jews adopted (as a custom unrelated to Divine guidance) the custom of baptizing proselytes seven days after their circumcision. A series of specific interrogations made it possible to judge the real intentions of the candidate who wished to adopt the Jewish religion. After submitting to these interrogations, he was circumcised and later baptized before witnesses. In the baptism, he was immersed naked in a pool of flowing water; when he rose from the pool, he was a true son of Israel. After their baptism, new converts were allowed access to the sacrifices in the Temple.

The Baptism of John

When John the Baptist came on the scene in the first century Jewish world, his teaching included the necessity of baptism. The people of his day were familiar with the act or practice of baptism as just discussed. However, John's baptism was not based on or authorized by the Jewish law or pagan religious customs and traditions. John was called to preach by God, armed only with the Word of God (Luke 3:2). Jesus tells us that the baptism that John taught was from heaven, not from men (Matt 21:25). When John preached a baptism for the remission of sins, the people heard and obeyed. They submitted to the baptism that had been authorized by God. It was the first time in human history in which a person had the opportunity to be baptized for the remission of his sins, pagan and Jewish religious customs, notwithstanding. A necessary refinement in the administration of baptism had to be made following the death of Jesus, however, as Acts 19:1-7 points out. Rather than submitting to the baptism of John, which was a baptism of repentance, we can now be baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.

Sources

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