

1. Jesus Was Introduced by John the Baptist

Today, we are beginning a new series of topics that will help us to teach our physical and spiritual children about the fact that Jesus came as the Servant. These topics will be taken from the book of Mark. One of the things we want to help our children learn to explain to others is why John the Baptist came before Jesus to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus.

Mark 1:1-3 says, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the Prophets: ‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You.’ ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.’” Here we see that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. The word translated “gospel” means “good news” and is used to describe the life of Jesus. It talks especially about the facts of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Mark wrote to help us understand the fact that Jesus came as the servant to carry out the will of the Father.

However, we begin this book by seeing that John the Baptist was sent ahead of Jesus to prepare the way for His coming. In these first three verses we see that John the Baptist was actually fulfilling two Old Testament prophecies about the one who would come before Jesus to prepare the people for His coming. Malachi 3:1 says, “Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” says the LORD of hosts.” We see that Mark began to talk about John the Baptist and his ministry by quoting the first part of this verse. Then the second verse quoted by Mark comes from Isaiah 40:3. That verse says, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.’”

In these verses, we see that John is described two ways. First, John is described as My messenger. In the time of the Old Testament, many kings would send a messenger ahead of them to announce the coming of the king. This helped the people get ready for the coming of their king. It also gave them time to smooth out the bumps and fill in the holes so that the king could ride into their village or city on a smooth road. We will see that John was not telling the people to prepare the road. Instead, John came ahead of Jesus to tell the people to prepare their hearts.

Second, we see that John is described as a voice. John quoted the verse from Isaiah 40:3 when he described himself in John 1:23. John did not focus on his own ministry. Instead, he chose to speak about the fact that he was just a voice preparing the way for the One that would come from the Father. John had this humble attitude throughout his ministry as he introduced Jesus. In John 3:30, John the Baptist said, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” John chose to point to Jesus instead of himself.

We also see the message that John shared as he prepared the way for Jesus. Mark 1:4-5 says, “John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.” The word translated “repentance” means “a

change of mind.” 1 Thessalonians 1:9 says, “For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” Here we see that this change of mind also produces an action. There are many things that are the most important things to people in their lives. Those things have become their idols. Here we see that true repentance causes a person to turn from those things, whatever they may be, to serve the living and true God.

The Jews would baptize Gentiles when those Gentiles became Jewish proselytes to show that they had received the true God by faith. In contrast, Mark 7:8 says, “For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.” Here we see that the Jews practiced many washings instead of obeying the commandments of God. That was why the message of John was so unusual. Here John called the Jews to show that they had received the true God by faith, just as the Gentiles, by the baptism of repentance. The message of John brought conviction to the hearts of many Jews and so they showed that they had come to true faith in the promises of God by the baptism of repentance.

John gave a promise with his message. The word translated “remission” is also translated by the word “forgiveness.” In Ephesians 1:7 Paul wrote, “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.” As a result, we see John said that those who repented of sin would receive forgiveness. The sacrifices in the Old Testament could never take away sin. Hebrews 10:4 says, “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.” Those who had true faith in the Old Testament had their sins covered until Christ came to take those sins away. Christ used this same word when He passed the cup to the disciples and said in Matthew 26:28, “For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” That is why Hebrews 10:17-18 says, “Then He adds, ‘Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.’ Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.” Forgiveness of sins also means that they are remembered no more.

People from throughout Judea and the city of Jerusalem went to be baptized by John in the Jordan River to show their true repentance. We see that those baptized by John were confessing their sins. The word translated “confessing” means to “*agree openly.*” Those who were being baptized by John were openly agreeing that they were sinners and were repenting of their sins. The fact that the Jews normally baptized Gentiles but were not normally baptized themselves meant that they wanted everyone to know they had repented of their sins and had true faith in the One that John promised was coming.

Mark 1:6-8 goes on to say, “Now John was clothed with camel’s hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, ‘There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’” We see that the clothing of John was unusual. 2 Kings 1:8 says, “So they answered him, ‘A hairy man wearing a leather belt around his waist.’ And he said, ‘It is Elijah the Tishbite.’” This verse shows that the clothing of John was similar to the clothing that Elijah wore and so that helped to remind the people that

Elijah was to come before the Christ. John also ate whatever food was available in the wilderness.

What John said about the One that was coming after Him was a key part of his message. First, John said that the One coming after him was so great that he was not even worthy to untie His sandal strap. That particular job was normally done by a slave. By this statement, John pointed out the greatness of Jesus and showed that John had a very humble attitude of himself. Here we see that John gives us an example for our own lives. Philippians 2:3 says, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.” This verse shows that we are to have the same humble attitude both toward the Lord and toward others.

However, the most important thing that John said was comparing the baptism of repentance with which he was baptizing individuals with the baptism of Jesus. John said that Jesus would baptize them with the Holy Spirit. It is important to understand the difference between the baptism with the Holy Spirit and the baptism by the Holy Spirit even though both happen at the moment of salvation. 1 Corinthians 12:13 says, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.” This verse describes the baptism by the Holy Spirit. Here we see that the Holy Spirit places us in the body of Christ. All Christians become a part of the body of Christ at the moment of salvation.

However, John promised that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit. Christ promised the disciples in John 14:16-17, “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.” Christ told the disciples in Luke 24:49, “Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.” Then in Acts 2:4 we read, “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” Jews (Acts 2:4), Samaritans (Acts 8:14-17), Gentiles (Acts 10:44-45), and the disciples of John the Baptist (Acts 19:6) all received the Holy Spirit as a group. After those initial times, Christ baptizes every person with the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation. Romans 8:9 says, “But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.” Here we see that every Christian has the Holy Spirit dwelling in us because that happens at the moment of salvation.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to understand that we are baptized with the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation so that we can serve the Lord in His strength instead of having to depend on our own strength. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand why we have been given the Holy Spirit.