

Sermons on Matthew

A Baptized Church *Matthew 3:11*

With Study Questions

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Matthew 3:11

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matthew 3:11).

Review

We are currently analyzing the first offensive of God's kingdom. What is this first offensive? Good deeds? Developing relationships? Establishing small groups? Producing a play or some primitive multi-media presentation? Political maneuvers? No. The genuinely effective, and biblical, methodology for the advancement of Christ's kingdom is the preaching of the word.

John the Baptist came preaching that people should repent. Repent means to turn from your present way of thinking to a different way of thinking. This transformation by the renewing of your thinking (your mind—Romans 12:2) includes every aspect of a person's worldview.

Initially (and most importantly) it includes changing our minds regarding the source, or object, of our redemption; our hope for salvation is in Christ and in Him alone (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). He tasted the death that we could not bear and imputes (credits) His victory over death to those who, by grace, put their trust in Him.

Repentance also includes bringing all our thoughts under His lordship. He is Lord of our homes, businesses, politics, hobbies, philosophies, methodologies, art, etc. To say we trust Christ with our souls but not with our ethics or economics is an act inspired by hypocrisy. Paul shuffles it forth in the way of a test.

For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things (2 Corinthians 2:9).

In his preaching, John was preparing the way of the Lord. Truly the turning point in history was looming. This turning point would be referred to as both great and terrible (Joel 2:31; Acts 2:20).

It would be terrible in that it consisted of horrific judgments and wrath (Matthew 3:7). John speaks of the burning of fruitless trees (Matthew 3:10). He speaks of the chaff which would be thrown into the unquenchable fire (Matthew 3:12). As we studied previously, there was an imminence (soon-ness) to the eternal judgment of God due to the imminence of an historical judgment upon Israel which had abandoned its faith, persecuted God's people, and killed His Son (Matthew 21:33-45).

Christians escape this baptism of fire not because of their inherent goodness but because someone received the baptism of fire in their place. Prior to the baptism of fire falling upon the nation of Israel, Christ would undergo a baptism.

**I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!
⁵⁰ But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished (Luke 12:49, 50)!**

Christ was baptized with God's judgment (His fire) on the cross that those who trust in Him might escape this judgment.

A Much Anticipated Baptism

But something great would concurrently take place with this baptism of fire (judgment). There would be the much-anticipated baptism of the Holy Spirit. The prophet Joel, writing five to six hundreds year earlier conveys,

And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions (Joel 2:28).

Peter, in the second chapter of Acts, confirms the fulfillment of this prophecy during the establishment of the early church (Acts 2:16-21).

A Hot Topic

Our question this morning is, just what is this baptism of the Holy Spirit? The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a sizzling topic. There are a variety of suggestions regarding the way the baptism of the Holy Spirit functions in the life of a Christian.

This discussion often reaches a fever pitch because what is at stake is the very touch-point of the Christian's experience with God. As the revivalist hymn so romantically asserts, "He walks with me and He talks with me." In our examination of the baptism of the Holy Spirit we should never seek to diminish the beauty and enjoyment of the Christian's time with God. But it would be very helpful (and frankly protective) to evaluate what that experience is and what it is not.

A Promise of Personal Power

It is commonly asserted that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is an experience in the life of a Christian which is subsequent (sometime after) to salvation. There are numerous things a Christian can and should do, it is thought, in order to receive this baptism. And when this baptism comes, the Christian can expect greater power in their Christian walk.

Not only do I think this is an inaccurate understanding of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, I find it to be a particularly pernicious (harmful) form of carrot-dangling in that it targets the most vulnerable members of Christ's kingdom. The smoldering wick (the struggling person—Matthew 12:20) is instructed on how to become an inferno—a spiritual dynamo. So often, sadly, the inferno is shortly thereafter doused and begins his search for another fix, another formula. The vicissitudes (ups and downs) of this type of life often lead to frustration, depression, and an assault on our assurance before God.

Three Points Regarding the Baptism of the Holy Spirit

So what is the baptism of the Holy Spirit all about? I intend to make three points regarding the Baptism of the Holy Spirit:

First I will ask, and seek to answer the question, "What can we do to make sure we receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit?"

Secondly, I will show that in the same way that John's allusion to a baptism of fire had a specific historic event in mind, his allusion to the baptism of the Holy Spirit had a specific historic event in mind as well, i.e., Christ's baptism of His church. We must figure out what that is.

Finally, when the Holy Spirit regenerates (gives us spiritual life) we immediately become part of the baptized church. Therefore the Apostle Paul, writing to a church, can rightly say, "For in one spirit we all into one body were immersed (baptized)" (1 Corinthians 12:13 NAGNT).¹

I. What Must I do to be Baptized by the Spirit?

¹ An interlinear translation.

Nothing

The answer to the first question is quick and easy. “What can we do to make sure we receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit?” “Tarry in prayer?” “Have hands laid on us?” “Give in to some urge or welling in our souls?” *None* of these are recommended in the Bible. What *is* recommended in the Bible? Nothing!

It will be of great interest to know that every account of the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5; Acts 10:44, 11:16, 19:6; 1 Corinthians 12:13) is *indicative*, not *imperative*. This is to say there is no exhortation to *be baptized*; there is no call to *seek* to be baptized by the Holy Spirit. Rather there is an indication of what would, or did happen.

The only instruction given by Jesus (or anyone else) that necessarily preceded the baptism of the Holy Spirit (other than being a Christian) was to go to Jerusalem and wait.

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 (Luke 24:49).

Clearly this is an allusion to the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

And being assembled together with *them*, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” He said, “you have heard from Me; ⁵ for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1:4, 5).

An Involuntary Event

Unless we’re going to argue that every Christian must make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in order to receive the Holy Spirit (an argument no one is willing to make and wouldn’t apply since Jesus set a time text on it—“not many days”), we must surmise that the baptism of the Holy Spirit happens involuntarily; which certainly seems in accord with the biblical accounts. Peter shared his experience among the gentiles:

And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. ¹⁶ Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, “John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 11:15, 16).

It doesn’t require much coaxing to get something to fall on you—simple gravity is usually sufficient. So Christians should not fret that they are somehow remiss in tapping into this particular brand of power. And if someone is proffering hoops intended to cajole the Spirit to land on you, at very least, ask for the biblical warrant.

II. Christ Baptizes His Church

Secondly, I will show that the same way that John’s allusion to a baptism of fire had a specific historic event in mind, his allusion to the baptism of the Holy Spirit had a specific historic event in mind as well, i.e., Christ’s baptism of His church. So what does it mean that Christ baptized His church?

Accomplished or Applied?

In order to properly grasp this second point it will be helpful to understand the terms *accomplished work of redemption* and *applied work of redemption*. The accomplished

work of redemption is what Jesus did two thousand years ago in order to save His sheep (His life, death, resurrection, ascension, etc.).

The applied work of redemption is the application of what Jesus, by His word and Spirit, is accomplishing throughout history (the fulfilling of the Great Commission—make disciples). A proper study of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, I believe, will result in recognizing it to be part of the accomplished work of redemption, not the applied work of redemption.

The verses we've already surveyed seem to make this quite obvious. There is both a geographical text "...tarry in Jerusalem" (Luke 24:49) and a time text "...not many days from now" (Acts 1:5). In other words, what we're talking about here is an historical event that should not be thought of as the norm for history. This will become clearer by examining what the baptism actually was.

Jesus Explains the Baptism?

Of what did the baptism consist? What was going to happen in Jerusalem in those days? Jesus explains what the baptism would actually produce. Let's backtrack a little:

Not Yet Glorified

"He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."³⁹ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified (John 7:38, 39).

This can be very confusing. If the Holy Spirit had not yet been given, how were the saints of the Old Testament saved? Certainly they weren't saved by works or pure intestinal fortitude! For that matter, what of the Apostles before Pentecost?

And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy,⁵³ and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen (Luke 24:52, 53).

Realizing the dangers of the temple for a Christian, this certainly doesn't appear to be the behavior of men devoid of the Spirit of God.

So we must understand that it was merely in a certain sense that the Holy Spirit had not yet been given. Why hadn't the Holy Spirit been given? The text tells us that He hadn't been given because Jesus was not yet glorified (John 7:39).

The glorification of Jesus would be the penultimate (second to last) accomplished act of redemption. The giving of His Spirit would be the ultimate or final act of the accomplished work of redemption. If the job of the Holy Spirit was to give witness of Christ (at least in the sense of the full expression of Christ in the New Covenant), it wouldn't make sense that the Holy Spirit would be given before Christ had completed His redemptive work.

In short, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit would happen after the glorification of Christ. And it would be done after the glorification of Christ that there might be an accurate record of what Christ had accomplished. Let's now move up a few chapters.

Bringing to Remembrance

After the washing of the disciple's feet, the Last Supper, and announcement of the betrayer, Jesus taught of the coming of the Holy Spirit,

These things I have spoken to you while being present with you.²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He

will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you (John 14:25).

**But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.
²⁷And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning (John 15:26).**

Apparently the coming of the Holy Spirit was a matter of revelation. The Holy Spirit would teach them *all* things and bring to the Apostle's remembrance *all* the things Jesus had said to them while being "**present**" with them "**from the beginning.**"

Hopefully we're beginning to see that this is not a repeatable event. Certainly we are not going to claim that the extent of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives is this full and infallible! And who of us has ever been in the physical presence of Christ?

The Apostles would become the authoritative message bearers for Christ. They are therefore referred to as the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20).

Even further on in the ministry of Jesus (after His resurrection) He appeared in the midst of the eleven (Luke 24:33) and gave this message regarding the Promise of the Father.

Then He said to them, "These *are* the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and *the* Prophets and *the* Psalms concerning Me."

⁴⁵And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. ⁴⁶Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, ⁴⁷and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸And you are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹Behold, 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" (Luke 24:44-49).

Again, the message to the Apostles is revelatory. The apostles would be "witnesses" (verse 48) of all the things Jesus did. Hints that this is not a repeatable event, but rather part of the accomplished work of redemption are, 1) they are told to tarry in the city of Jerusalem until the power comes; and, 2) that the witness-bearing is unique to those who had been with Christ from the beginning.

What Actually Happened at the Baptism of the Holy Spirit?

Let us go back to our goal of understanding the subsequent experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. With all this information as our backdrop we can understand this baptism as part of the accomplished work of redemption—namely a revelatory aspect of redemption. The accomplished work of Christ would not be much help to His church without their knowing about it—without the Scriptures.

In a very intimate setting the Apostles received the Holy Spirit when Jesus breathed on them (John 20:22). In a more public, and international,² setting the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost endowing them with miraculous ability to proclaim the gospel in foreign languages.

But it did not end there. Continual affirmation of apostolic authority took place as the Apostles went out from Pentecost and laid their hands on others who were not at Pentecost. The promise was made to the Apostles, the power was given to the Apostles,

² Since a distinction between the old and new covenants was one of international scope.

and during the apostolic age there was the subsequent pouring out of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of the Apostle's hands.

In an undiminished capacity (in terms of signs, wonders, and message), the power and authority of Christ was conferred to His Apostles who (and this should be awe inspiring) delivered the New Testament (which is the infallible and inerrant account of the redemptive work of Jesus) to the human race.

So the *Spirit baptizing* of the church is Christ endowing His church with His message which is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). And this baptized entity (the church—Christ's body) marches through history proclaiming His victory, preaching His word, administering His sacraments, making His disciples, teaching His commands.

Ezekiel likens it to a river that starts small then becomes an impassable deluge (Ezekiel 47:3-6). This is Christ's baptized church—His river, His ocean (Isaiah 11:9).

III. Part of a Baptized Church

So how does this affect me personally? As I mentioned earlier (and I hope you see the sense of this now) when the Holy Spirit regenerates us (gives us spiritual life) we immediately become part of the baptized church. Therefore the Apostle Paul, writing to a church, can rightly say, "For in one spirit we all into one body were immersed (baptized)" (1 Corinthians 12:13 NAGNT)³

Crudely put, when Christ saves us, He pushes us in His river and we become part of His immersed (baptized) church. So telling Christians that they must strive and maneuver and posture themselves to somehow receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit is like telling a person in a pool that they need to get wet. It can be cruel to the person and dishonoring to God.

There are not any magic tricks or incantations that somehow magically and mystically release the power of God in the life of the Christian. The proper exhortations to Christians are the imperatives that we see in Scripture: "Fear God and keep His commandments" (Ecclesiastes 12:13); "Excel still more" (1 Thessalonians 4:1); "Love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength" (Matthew 23:37); "Believe in Christ" (John 11:25). Those who are part of the baptized church will hear these things and seek to run this race.

³ An interlinear translation.

Questions for Study

1. What was the first offensive in the advancement of Christ's kingdom (page 1)?
2. What is repentance and what aspect of our lives should it affect (page 1)?
3. What baptism would accompany the baptism of fire (page 1)?
4. Why do you suppose the topic of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is such a hot topic (page 2)?
5. What must a Christian do in order to be baptized by the Holy Spirit (page 3)?
6. In what respect did Christ baptize His church (pages 4-7)?
7. Explain the difference between the accomplished and applied work of redemption (page 4).
8. Why was it necessary that Christ be glorified before the Spirit was given (pages 4, 5)?
9. With what did Christ associate the sending of His Spirit (page 5)?
10. Why do we see subsequent baptism of the Holy Spirit in Acts (page 6)?
11. How does this affect Christians personally (page 7)?