

A Baptism of Spirit and Fire

Good News of Great Joy Part 9

Luke 3:15-18

Manuscript and Discussion Guide for February 14, 2021

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Summary: John the Baptist promised two types of baptisms as he introduced Jesus' ministry, baptism by the Spirit and baptism by fire. What are the key characteristics of these two baptisms, and how do they relate to each other? The answer may surprise you! Join Stephen in exploring John the Baptist's first-century revival.

In 1867, Pastor Charles Spurgeon prepared to preach in the large Agricultural Hall in London. Renovations to enlarge the Metropolitan Tabernacle Church building were underway, where Spurgeon and his congregation of around 6,000 worshipped on the Lord's Day.

But for two months, the church met in this rather gargantuan Agricultural Hall for their services. It would be similar to a Civic Center today.

Curious people visited Sunday services to see what the fuss was about—crowds were estimated at 12,000 people or more on Sunday mornings.

As they prepared to hold their first Sunday worship service in the hall, a large platform had been built for the occasion and Spurgeon went over to test the acoustics when the building was empty—or so he thought.

He climbed the stairs to the platform, then took his place at the pulpit area, raised his voice and simply quoted **John 1:29; "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"**

Unknown to Spurgeon until sometime later, a construction crewmember was high in the rafters at work; he had paused to watch Spurgeon climb the stairs to the platform and then he heard Spurgeon speak that verse. And he immediately was overcome with conviction of his sin and right then and there, in the rafter, he trusted in Jesus Christ.

Steve Farrar, *Finishing Strong* (Multnomah Books, 1995), p. 37

It certainly didn't take a very long sermon—there wasn't a catchy outline—just the inspired text through which the Holy Spirit brought a sinner to realize he needed the Savior, this Lamb who had come to take away the sin of the world.

These words were originally delivered by the last Old Testament prophet we call John the Baptizer. He appears on the scene for just a few months, where he will raise his voice to deliver the word of God, and most importantly, introduce the Lamb, the Son of God.

Thousands of people are streaming out to banks of the Jordan River to see what all the fuss is about. And there they see and hear John preach, and the results are staggering. Corrupt tax collectors and hardened soldiers along with members of this crowd are coming under conviction—right then and there—and repenting of their sin.

We can't imagine today the stir this was creating in Israel.

Turn to the **Gospel by Luke and chapter 3** and let's rejoin the crowd here at the Jordan River.

John's Humility

Now verse 15:

As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ.

Luke 3:15

You have this incredible excitement here, stirring up the crowd. If there were paparazzi, the cameras would have been flashing and media trucks would be lining the banks of the Jordan.

This is heady stuff.

John is being mistaken for the Messiah. I mean, it's one thing to be mistaken for a bad guy, but for people to assume you must be the great Redeemer of Israel, why not take a few photos while you're at it? Sell some t-shirts and coffee mugs with little locusts painted on them—that would be his brand; he could sell some vials of honey with the label, "Honey eaten by John the prophet."!

This is how you do it; you monetize it; you merchandise your name.

If you go over to the parallel passage in **John chapter 1**, John doesn't fall for the flattery or attention or massive crowds coming to hear him preach.

They came and asked him, John's gospel records:

"Who are you?" He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." Are you the prophet?" And he answered, "No."

John 1:19b-21

No hemming and hawing, no exaggerating his resume.

Think about it; when they asked him if he was the Christ, the Messiah, he could have said, "You know that's a really nice compliment, but no, I'm not the Messiah. But did you know that when Mary, the Messiah's mother was expecting, she came and stayed for several months in

my home with my mother, and my mother was expecting me at the same time? *I mean, we go way back!*"

No, his answer was simply, "***I am not the Christ.***"

Well, "***Are you Elijah?***" And again, he could have answered, "You know, it's interesting you ask that question because an angel actually told my parents that my ministry would be similar to the ministry of that great prophet Elijah; we are so much alike."

But his answer was, "***I am not.***"

His answers got shorter with each question when we might have been tempted to talk longer.

Here it is again:

"Who are you?" ... "I am not the Christ." ... And they asked him, "Are you Elijah?" ... "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" ... "No."

John 1:19-21

None of this turned his head or his heart. This was not about him. I wonder how much more effective we would be as a church and as believers if we didn't care so much about what people thought of us, as long as they knew that we thought most about Jesus.

Luke gives us this same conversation, but adds this particular portion of John the Baptist's answer here; notice the first part of **verse 16:**

John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie."

Luke 3:16a

In his answer, he effectively says that Jesus is stronger and superior in His coming ministry.



How do you share the gospel in a humble manner, directing the attention away from yourself and toward Christ? How might humility change the way you interact with others?

John says: "What I am doing is external, but what Jesus will do is internal. What I am accomplishing is temporary, what Jesus will accomplish is eternal. I'm just the messenger—wait until you meet the true Messiah!"

And John uses an illustration here of a household servant's most menial task.

In this generation, sewers were undeveloped, and the garbage and waste of humans and animals were often right on the street where everyone walked.

Bruce Larson, [The Communicator's Commentary: Luke](#) (Word Books, 1983), p. 73

The lowest ranking servant in the household would take care of the filthy household sandals. John is saying here

that he's not even worthy to take care of the dirty sandals of the Messiah.

Bruce B. Barton, *Life Application Bible: Luke* (Tyndale, 1997), p. 71

Beloved, if Jesus Christ came into this auditorium today, we would also realize we're not worthy to untie his sandals; we would be thrilled to simply fall down at His feet.

This is John's humility. Now notice John's prophecy—the last part of **verse 16**:

John's Prophecy

"He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Luke 3:16b

The baptism of the Holy Spirit will be experienced, initially, at Pentecost as the Spirit of God descends and the church is created.

Every believer today is baptized with the Holy Spirit, and it doesn't have to be proven by anything ecstatic or unusual—it has to do with coming to life in Christ.

In fact, Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body— Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:13

We were—notice, that's past tense—baptized in the Spirit, and that took place when you were born again by faith in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit baptized

you; He immersed you at that point into the body of Christ—one body—the church of the redeemed.

And notice, we were **all baptized**—that is, every believer here in the church in Corinth, not just those who learned the books of the Bible by heart or those who never skipped their devotions or seemed to be really spiritual.

Over in *chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians and verse 29 and 30*, Paul makes it clear that not all of them spoke in tongues or performed miracles or did anything unusual, but they **all** had been baptized by the Holy Spirit.



What did you notice changed when you were first saved? Can you describe some ways you felt the Holy Spirit's presence in the hours and days after your conversion?

Every believer has been baptized at conversion. In fact, when you came to faith in Christ and experienced this immersion of the Spirit, a number of things happened that you probably didn't even realize; you didn't feel it, you didn't see it, but:

- You were **brought to life by the Spirit (John 3:3-6)**; it's actually impossible to be a Christian without being Spirit baptized—

immersed in the Spirit and inducted into the body of Christ.

- You also were **indwelt by the Spirit** as He moved in, when you trusted in Christ; He's literally made your body His Holy of Holies—His temple (**1 Corinthians 6:19**).
- You were also **sealed by the Spirit**. You probably didn't feel that, but you were stamped as it were with a seal—sealed like an ancient document to show that you're a part of God's private collection—the private property of God (**Ephesians 1:13**).
- You also are **enlightened by the Spirit** who opens your eyes to the truth of Scripture (**John 14:26**).
- You also began at that moment of conversion to be **reconstructed and reshaped by the Holy Spirit** who works in you that which He will complete when you finally see Jesus (**Philippians 1:6**).
- We are even now being **prayed for by the Spirit** who makes *intercession for us because in our weakness we do not know how we ought to pray, but the Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words . . . interceding for believers according to the will of God* (**Romans 8:26-27**).

Adapted from R. Kent Hughes, Luke: Volume 1 (Crossway, 1998), p. 118

I've been a Christian now for 45 years. From that moment on, the Spirit of God has been praying for me, in this special relationship in Christ—whether or not I've appreciated it, or felt it, or longed for it, or delighted in it, or depended on it, or thanked Him for it. He has faithfully now for 45 years and counting prayed for me and I have needed it more than I'm even aware.

How long has He been praying for you, according to the will of God?

Whenever you are under a dark cloud or in a confusing place or experiencing a difficult or painful or unsettled season as a believer, you have been baptized in the Spirit and He is even now faithfully praying for you.

So, this prophecy of John reveals the coming of the Holy Spirit who is now involved in every aspect of our lives, both seen and unseen.

Now John also prophecies of another event—a future fire; **the end of verse 16**:

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Luke 3:16b

What's this **fire** here?

In my study, I came across at least four different opinions on what this fire is. I don't have time to give you all of them, so I'll just give you the right one.

John makes it clear enough here in his own preaching that I'm surprised there are so many opinions; *notice his*

explanation here: **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire—notice verse 17:**

His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

Luke 3:17

This isn't something that looks like fire at Pentecost over the heads of the Apostles; they weren't immersed in literal fire. This isn't some reference to metaphorical fire of trials by which we are refined.

This is literal immersion in fire. And throughout the Old Testament, the prophets connected the final outpouring of the wrath of God to literal fire.

John is prophesying of that terrible, coming Day of Judgment when there will be an eternal divide of all humanity. God's people will be safely in His possession, but the chaff—those who rejected God—will be separated into everlasting judgment by fire.

Adapted from Darrell L. Bock, [Baker Exegetical Commentary: Luke](#) (Baker Academic, 1994), p. 324

Now the world of John didn't like this kind of preaching any more than our world likes it today.



Describe a time you shared the gospel, and someone became angry when you mentioned judgement or hell. How did you handle that situation? How can you love someone while telling them about hell?

But you simply have to carve out too much of the Bible in order to remove the idea of eternal judgment through fire.

The Bible that tells you about an eternal Heaven is the same Bible that warns you about an eternal Hell.

I've talked to a lot of people who believe in the idea of eternal joy but reject any notion of eternal judgement. A lot of people believe in Heaven but reject the truth about Hell.

But the Bible is consistent throughout and John is just the next guy in line delivering the same message.

In fact, notice in verse 18:

So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people.

Luke 3:18

You might think, this doesn't sound like good news! The phrase good news here is from the word for gospel—**he preached the gospel to the people.**

The immersing of believers into the life of Christ is the gospel, and so is the immersing of the unbeliever in fire.

And that means the gospel is bad news first but ultimately good news. In fact, the

reason the good news is really good news is because the bad news is really bad—but the good news tells you how to be saved from the bad news.

It's two sides of the gospel coin.

The world rejects the warning of any kind of judgement, and in so doing, they completely dilute the gospel and distort the mission of Christ who came to earth to pay the penalty for sin, from Adam's sin—who looked forward to the final sacrifice—to the payment of our sin, as we look back at the cross of Christ.

This is why Jesus came.

Why would Jesus have to come to earth to suffer and die, if you can get to Heaven without Him?

John is simply echoing the consistent prophetic message of another coming baptism of fiery judgment.

Listen to the prophet Daniel describe this terrifying scene of God's final judgment through Christ, who, by the way, will one day be seated as the Divine Judge over all mankind.

Daniel writes in chapter 7 and verse 9:

*As I looked, thrones were placed,
and the Ancient of Days took his seat;
his clothing was white as snow,
and the hair of his head like pure wool;
his throne was fiery*

*flames;
its wheels were burning fire.
A stream of fire issued and came out from before him;
a thousand thousands served him,
and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him;
the court sat in judgment,
and the books were opened.*

Daniel 7:9-10

I mean, this scene is nothing but fire. It's wrapped in fire, surrounded by fire, and ten thousand times ten thousand are being judged—that's a hundred million unredeemed people, a term that actually means they are humanly impossible to count—and they are about to be judged and then swept into a lake of fire forever.

Add to this text the writing of John the Apostle, not John the Baptizer, but John the Apostle, who describes in his tour of Heaven in the Book of Revelation this same terrifying scene.

God shows him the future and this final judgement at the end of human history and John uses the same vocabulary as Daniel, in ***Revelation 20:***

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place

was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. ... And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:11-12a, 15

Somebody might say, “Well I’m glad Jesus never talked like that, He was meek and mild and never condemned anybody.” Well, they haven’t read His preaching either.

He preached one sermon, recorded in **Matthew 25**, where he referred to a day of judgment when He will say to those who’ve rejected Him, and I quote:

“Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”

Matthew 25:41b

In other words, you will live forever in an eternal fire prepared especially for the chief opponent of God. By the way, the devil isn’t running Hell—he’s an inmate, forever.

Maybe right now you’re thinking to yourself that with all this talk of judgment and fire, maybe I’m just trying to scare you. Well, is it working?

I’d rather scare you with the truth than give you with empty promises.

Like the one I pulled from a newspaper article some time ago where someone supposedly answers Bible questions, although there isn’t much Bible in the answers whenever I’ve looked at it. Someone wrote in saying that Jesus was pretty clear that you can’t get into Heaven without trusting in Him for salvation.

This journalist wrote back that was way too restrictive. Everyone’s getting into Heaven as long as they are sincere in their faith. He even illustrated that a Buddhist monk will get into Heaven because of his sincerity; God will consider him to be an “anonymous Christian.” He explained that he got that catch phrase from a Jesuit priest—which explains it, because you won’t find it in the Bible. There’s no such thing.

But then this journalist went on to rebuke this individual for suggesting that someone might be judged by God. He wrote, “It’s not your job to tell people they are damned. God didn’t put you in charge of dispensing salvation tickets. God put you on earth to witness to your faith by keeping your heart open and your mouth shut.”

The News and Observer, Thursday, February 4, 2010, Faith Section

This is the popular gospel of the world. They don’t want to believe in damnation or judgment and they’re really not sure how to get into Heaven. And in the meantime, don’t try to warn anybody—just keep your heart open and your mouth shut.

Beloved, if you saw your neighbor's house going up in flames, you wouldn't go over there and plant flowers in their yard or walk their dog to show how open your heart is.

Just as Noah warned his world of the coming judgement by water, so we're commanded to warn our world of the coming judgment by fire.

In **Acts chapter 10**, Peter reveals something that Jesus had commanded them, although we are never given the actual event where Jesus gave his disciples this specific command: Peter the Apostle is preaching, and he says:

And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead ... that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

Acts 10:42-43

In other words, God the Father has appointed God the Son to serve as the final Judge in this great courtroom Daniel talked about and John the Apostle saw in session.

So get this: the same Savior who offers to forgive and save sinners will one day be seated on a flaming bench of holy justice no longer to save, but to judge all who refused Him.

And just look at our mission again:

Jesus ordered us to proclaim to the people ... that He is the one appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead.

Didn't Jesus know that we're supposed to keep our mouths closed?

Beloved, that journalist is wrong; Jesus is right. Judgment is ahead, no matter how sincere someone is. They can be sincerely wrong if they are trusting anyone but Christ.

I read a few months ago of a commercial airliner landing at an airport one night. They were flying into a small town in the US and their instruments, confirmed by the control tower, informed them that they were about 15 miles from their destination.

Somehow, they got distracted, saw some airport landing lights ahead, and they landed at what happened to be a small regional airport a few miles from their destination.

The landing strip wasn't long enough for a passenger plane and they nearly crashed the plane over a ledge before it skidded to a stop.

At the investigation, both pilots said they honestly thought they were landing the plane at the right airport. It was an airport; the lights were on; the coast was clear.

And the lesson was obvious; it doesn't matter how sincere you are in landing a plane if you're landing in the wrong place.

You might be a sincere Buddhist or a sincere Baptist; you might be a sincere Muslim or Mormon or Methodist—are you landing in the right place?

Luke will later write to his friend Theophilus that Jesus is the only way to the destination of Eternal Heaven, he writes:

And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

Acts 4:12

How clear can he make it? There is no one else—there is no other name *under*

Heaven—how wide is that? Under all of Heaven, there is no one else who can save us.

The mission of the church is to take this name—the name of Jesus—to the world. To invite them to come to Him as Savior, to be baptized by the Holy Spirit into the eternal family of God.

We have been ordered to warn the world of the good news and the bad news; that those who reject Him as Savior will one day stand before Him as Judge and hear him deliver the verdict that they are to be baptized eternally in the lake of fire.

What about you? Is He your coming Savior, or is He your coming Judge?

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