

94-10-23 Mark

My friends, when we look into the word of God, it's a great time to pause and to seek the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our souls so that we can understand and benefit from these things. Let's take a moment now as we approach the throne of grace and ask God's blessing on our study this morning. Father, we thank you for this day.

We thank you for the privilege we have of gathering together and fellowshiping, worshipping you, studying your word. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will enlighten us, help us to understand and apply the things that we see this morning. For we ask it in Jesus' name, amen.

Well, it is a strange thing when you have something exciting inside of you and yet your exterior has clogged sinuses and fuzzy sight and, you know, it's kind of like a fellow that's all wet coming in out of the rain and saying, I've just seen a very exciting thing and yet he looks bedraggled and he sounds bedraggled. I hope that my fuzziness this morning doesn't interfere with any other distractions for that matter. We had an exciting time in Sunday school this morning with some similar sound effects, but our adversary will do whatever he can to distract us, to lead us astray, to keep us from sinning.

I don't know about you, but for me it just makes me want to get up and sing Onward Christian Soldiers or whatever. So I hope I can convey that to you this morning. Ideally, somebody like me is sort of like the cameraman at a football game.

My cousin and good friend Norman Massey called me yesterday to tell me there was a great football game on TV. And for people, now some of you this isn't going to be a very good illustration, but for those of us that enjoy a good game of football, television is the greatest thing there is because it used to be you'd have to go buy a ticket and sit up and be looking down there and something great would happen, but there's a whole bunch of people standing up and cheering and you wouldn't see it. You'd say, well what happened? What happened? And you'd look and have to wait for the rush.

Now with television, they've got cameras all over the stadium and they've got close-ups and all of these fancy electronics and you can see it if there's a great play and they'll show it to you again and you never miss it. And when you watch the game, you get completely caught up in the action and you're pulling for your team and it's exciting to see great athletes displaying their talents and you forget. We don't often think about these guys that are operating the cameras and they've got to have good instincts.

They have to follow the ball. Sometimes there's a handoff in the backfield and you don't know which guy's got the football, but it seems like you'll say, wait a minute, Cameron's going in the wrong direction. But no, sure enough, here's the fellow with the ball and they've not only faked out the other team, but they've also faked out those cameramen give us the game.

They show us what's going on in the game, but nobody thinks about the cameraman. The emphasis is on the action down on the field. That's my view of the way a good teacher of the Word of God is, a good peer review, sometimes an instant replay, sometimes mini replays of what's going on, the real action that we should be focusing on.

And that's my job, to try not to be dazzling myself or to have a great delivery and somebody saying, boy, you know, he's got the most dynamic, because there are many men that have got greater gifts in that area, that God has in His Word. I know John the Baptist out there in his hair, shirt and so forth may not initially sound like the most exciting, but it's very motivating, it's very exciting. We introduced our study of the Gospel of Mark last week.

We pointed out a couple of things. John the Baptist fulfills some Old Testament prophecy, doesn't he? In the Old Testament, God had said, behold, I will 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.

We saw that this came from Isaiah, and we saw that John is talking about more than a highway construction project out there by the Jordan River. We saw that what he's really talking about is preparation in the hearts, that the mountains need to be leveled, the mountains and hills need to be made low, the valleys need to be filled in, the rough places need to be smooth, and the crooked places need to be made straight, so that the Lord can travel that path and His glory can return. His glory can enter the city of Jerusalem, which is its rightful residence there in the holy of holies in the temple.

We saw in Ezekiel where that glory had left, because Israel had not been living a life of faith. Israel had placed its trust in other things, had become distracted. Salvation is ours through Jesus Christ.

We, like they, but if we lose our focus, if we lose sight of that object of our faith, the glory of God that should be shining in our souls and in our lives may depart. And so there is a call to repentance. There's a call to return to those things that are important.

And this is the call in Israel. This is the call that John the Baptist makes. He says in verse 4 of chapter 1 of Mark, John came baptizing in the wilderness.

Now notice, this is not a baptism of salvation. He is not here preaching deliverance from the lake of fire, is he? He's preaching a baptism of repentance, a change of mind with a view toward the remission of sins. Now this is an important construction here, the way that this is worded, because sometimes like the King James says, a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

We know from many passages in scripture, the remission of sins does it. If it were as easy as taking a bath, as easy as being dunked in the water and brought back up, then many, many people could accomplish that without having a change of heart, without having a change of

attitude toward God. But this ritual, this baptism that John is preaching is a sign, and the way this is worded in the Greek without getting into all the gory details, this is in view of or with this in mind.

The baptism takes place thinking about the remission of sin. It's symbolic of the remission of sin, and it's a picture of that cleansing that takes place when we enter the plan of God through the blood of Jesus Christ. Now, John comes in the desert and he's preaching, and in the New Testament this is the earliest situation where we have the good tidings, the gospel beginning to be preached.

It's important to understand exactly what the gospel is. What is the content of the gospel? Is there more than one gospel? What is the content? What is it that John is preaching here in the wilderness? To understand that, we first need to get the idea, what is Israel expecting when they hear the word of God? What does that say? Well, these good tidings were first prophesied by Isaiah. Oddly enough, the same fellow who gave us Isaiah chapter 40 and said that the messenger would come and preach so that the glory of God would return, he also is the first prophet to delineate, to talk about exactly what.

So turn with me to Isaiah chapter 40, verse 9. Isaiah chapter 40, verse 9. We're going to see the phrase good tidings. And good tidings in the Old Testament world is the same type of term that gospel is in the New Testament. So Isaiah is going to tell us what the gospel is here in the Old Testament.

Isaiah chapter 40, verse 9. Isaiah says, O Zion, you who bring good tidings, get up into the high mountain. O Jerusalem, you who bring good tidings, lift up your voice with strength. Lift it up, be not afraid.

Say to the cities of Judah, Behold your God. Now this ties in nicely with the very first part of the chapter, doesn't it? Behold your God. The glory of God is the issue in the gospel.

It's the glory of God revealed. That's the message of the gospel. Look what he says in verse 10.

Behold, the Lord God shall come with a strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him. Behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd.

He will gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those who are with young. This is the good tiding that is a part. What are the elements of this message? First of all, it is the return of God.

It is the manifestation of God in an active way in the life of the nation of Israel. This is the gospel of the kingdom to Israel. God is going to once again manifest himself, his glory, and his power in Israel, just as he did in the days of old, just as he did in the days when he delivered them the good tidings that come, Behold your God.

By implication, by the gospel, for us, the good news is not only the great news that there is delivered, but relationship with God. We can behold God in his glory. We can behold God in his power in our lives.

This is the good tidings that come. Notice it says, His arm shall rule for him. This is God's strength, God's dominion.

We saw this in Colossians, the absolute authority that Jesus Christ has over everything in this world. Jesus says, All authority has been given to me in heaven and in earth. Now, that is an accomplished fact.

That has already taken place. So what does that tell us about the circumstances of our lives? What does that tell us about the intrusion of disaster or the intrusion of suffering or the development of good or evil in our lives? Who is in control of that? Who has absolute authority over every circumstance in our lives? Jesus Christ. God rules this world through Jesus Christ.

He is in complete control, particularly in the lives of those who belong to him. We cannot really complain. In fact, we are in error.

We are close to blasphemy if we complain about the circumstances of this life. Because who is in charge of those circumstances? Who has permitted that event or that person or that suffering or that trial in our life? It is in the complete control and is a part of the sovereign plan of God. To complain, to rail against, to be bitter about the circumstances in our life is to complain against the sovereign rule of God.

To complain against the absolute control and authority that Jesus Christ has. It is like a child who, when he wants a certain thing and his parents say, No, you may not ride your bicycle in the street. And the child gets upset and says, My parents are so mean.

Nothing I would like better than to get out on that nice asphalt and ride my bicycle up and down. I see no good reason why I should not be able to do that. And yet my parents say no.

My parents just spanked me and sent me to my room. What kind of parents are they anyway? If I could get a divorce from my parents, I would. They are awful to me.

They treat me badly. They never let me do what I want. They are always disciplining me, making me go to my room and denying me privileges.

We see that context and we understand that that child has a very limited view. Their parents are teaching them, right? If those children could understand that, they would accept the authority of their parents. They would accept the discipline that comes if we look back at the way our parents raised us.

And I don't like this. This is what God wants to do, is to manifest himself to us. To have us behold

your God.

He comes with a strong hand and his arms shall rule for him. Notice also, his reward is with him in verse 10. And his work before him.

Verse 11, he will feed his flock like a shepherd. This is the other side of God's relationship with us. Not only does he rule us, not only does he rebuke us and chastise us.

He chastises every son whom he receives and it's a sign of his love, the Bible tells us. But he also has reward with him. He has provision with him.

He will feed his flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs with his arms. This is the comfort of God.

The compassion of our God. To gather us into his arms when we need comfort. When we need encouragement.

When we are weak. When we are helpless. He gathers the lambs with his arms and carries them in his bosom.

What a wonderful picture of God's grace. When we are weak and helpless and unable to cope, he gathers us into his arms. This is the God that is being manifested.

His strength and his rulership. But also his wonderful grace and his love and his compassion. Out there in the desert.

Not only self-control. Turn a few pages over to Isaiah. Here we have another opportunity to see the content of the good tidings.

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news. Good tidings. Who brings glad tidings of good things.

Who proclaims salvation. Who says to Zion, your God reigns. Your watchmen shall lift up their voices.

With their voices they shall sing together. For the Lord has comforted his people. He has redeemed Jerusalem.

The Lord has made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations. And all the ends of the earth shall see. This is the message of the gospel.

The glad tidings that are proclaimed. The authority of God. The control of God.

Notice also the watchmen. Who lift up their voices. We had a very interesting study on the watchmen at the door.

We studied what it is to watch. We watch for the return from the plan of God and the priorities of God. We watch for things.

The watchmen lift up their voices. With their voices they shall sing together. For they see eye to eye when the Lord brings back Zion.

Personal relationship. Face to face communication with God. We approach God's throne directly.

Without intermediary. Bring both forth into joy. Sing together.

The Lord has comforted his people. Finally turn to Isaiah chapter 61 verse 1. This whole chapter actually is a wonderful description of what the good tidings are. The spirit of the Lord God is upon me.

He says in Isaiah 61. Because the Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor. He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted.

To proclaim liberty to the captives. And the opening of the prison to those who are bound. To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

And up to this point these are the very words that were taught by Jesus Christ in the synagogue. We see that in Luke chapter 4 verses 16 through 21. Jesus went into the synagogue and he stopped right at this point.

When he says to proclaim of our God. Because this is the distinction. John the Baptist is in the wilderness preaching the good tidings of the coming of Jesus Christ.

As the suffering servant. As the savior of mankind. As the deliverer of Israel.

And in many ways Israel missed that message. Because they were looking for something to happen in their lives. They were looking for something to happen from circumstances.

The rule of the Romans. The persecution that they endured from the Greeks. And from others who did not value their God or their religion.

And they wanted deliverance from circumstances and time. And they missed the message that John was preaching. Which was deliverance in the manifestation of the glory of God to individual people.

The opportunity for God's comfort. And God's rule in the soul. Notice here in verse 3. To console those who mourn in Zion.

To give them beauty for ashes. The oil of joy for mourning. The garment of the planting of the Lord.

That he may be glorified. This is God's purpose. God's glory.

And what is God's glory? It is the appreciation of who he is by us. By his creatures. Coming to understand God's character.

God's grace. His love. And also his mighty power.

This is the message of the gospel. This is the good tidings. This is what Israel was understanding good tidings to be.

Because they had the Old Testament. They had the book of Isaiah. So now when John comes preaching in the desert.

What does he say? In Mark chapter 1. Once again. He says he is preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Sin is man's problem.

Sin is what separates man from God. The inability to generate actions and thoughts and a life that pleases God. That is man's problem.

We are corrupted by inclination. We need deliverance from that. We need the remission of sin.

We need the solution. Solve that problem. But we know that before Christ came.

There was a means of remission of sin. Wasn't there? The Old Testament saints had a relationship with God. They believed in God by faith.

Abraham by faith. Isaac by faith. Jacob.

These men were believers. They had faith. And there was some method of dealing with their sins before Christ came.

Wasn't there? The Levitical offering system is often thought. The blood of goats and bulls is thought to have been the system whereby sin was remitted. But like all rituals, it was not the ritual that accomplished that purpose.

It was the recognition of an attitude in the soul by God. It was the recognition in the soul of believers in the Old Testament. And God, because of that, imputed righteousness.

Abraham believed God and it was imputed to him for righteousness. God was able to cover over the sins of Old Testament saints because Abraham believed God. Abraham trusted God.

And until the payment could come, God provided an advance on that payment and credited it to Abraham's account. John is preaching Old Testament faith. The cross has not happened yet.

Jesus Christ is not yet. We are still in the Old Testament economy. We are in the Old Testament

days.

John is an Old Testament believer. John's disciples are Old Testament believers. They function under the same system that Moses functioned under.

The same system that Elijah and his disciples had. Faith in the Old Testament pleased God. And God credited it to Abraham's account.

Looking forward to the time when Isaiah and Ezekiel, Jeroboam, all of those prophets who ministered in Old Testament days, away from dead works, and have returned. John the Baptist, like Elijah, is calling Israel to that same change of mind. Preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

He is teaching, telling people, you need to change your mind. But he adds an element that the Old Testament prophets did not employ. And that is water baptism.

Water baptism was a ritual which taught and foreshadowed the cleansing that would take place through union with Christ. It is a foreshadowing of the privilege that we enjoy. In and of itself did not accomplish anything.

And this is where we reach the point of this passage. One of the great things that is taught here, and one of the exciting things that we see, is John the Baptist is a picture of the whole Old Testament economy. The law.

We are familiar with the contrast between law and grace. Between the age when man, by man's energy, would try to keep the works of the law, and he could not. By the law comes the knowledge of sin, Paul tells us.

And the law showed us that we are inadequate. We are incapable of being able to please God. The law was a system of ritual.

The law was a shadow of good things to come. John the Baptist is teaching with a ritual. John the Baptist is performing a ritual of baptism.

John is preaching the same change of mind that John's ministry sums up and symbolizes the whole age of Israel. The whole Old Testament law economy. John the Baptist is not dispensing the Holy Spirit here, is he? John the Baptist is not yet preaching Jesus Christ.

He is saying, change your mind, return to the Lord, so that your sins can be covered, just like every other Old Testament saint's sins were covered. And this is the great thing that comes out of John's teaching, because what does he go on to say? 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. This is exactly what took place in the Old Testament days.

People would come and perform a ritual at the tabernacle or the temple, confessing their sins. What happened? If that ritual was accomplished in faith, God would recognize that faith and impute righteousness. But the goal was faith.

The ritual itself accomplished nothing. The same is true here in the ministry of John. These same people, all Jerusalem and Judea, have come out and have been baptized.

They've all gone under the water. They've all engaged in this ritual. What do we know about these people later on? Turn back just a few pages to Matthew chapter 27, verse 20.

Matthew 27, 20. The chief priests and elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. The governor answered and said to them, Which of these two do you want me to release? They said, Barabbas.

Pilate said to them, What then shall I do with Jesus, who is called Christ? They all said to him, Let him be crucified. This multitude, this crowd of people assembled below Pilate's balcony. Many of them are the same people that went out and were baptized by John.

All Jerusalem and Judea went out and were baptized. Crucify him. Release to us Barabbas, the murderer.

The ritual of baptism did not accomplish a change in the soul. Ritual external action does not work its way inside and change us, does it? Change has to begin on the inside through faith. Our faith pleases God.

God acts inside us to transform us. So John's ministry here in the desert is a ministry of ritual. He is calling Old Testament saints to a change of mind.

Why is that important? That change of mind is essential to prepare the way for the glory of God. God is about to manifest his glory in Jesus Christ. The inner change, the inner transformation that comes through Christ's work is about to be revealed.

Those who have not, even in the Old Testament sense, are not going to recognize and not going to be ready to see Jesus Christ and to accept Jesus Christ. The change of mind is necessary as a first step to accepting Jesus Christ. We have to recognize that before we are ready for some step, those of you that have had any contact with alcoholics and those organizations that try to help them, Alcoholics Anonymous is several people of mine.

One of the first steps that any organization, whether it's Allen, they will all tell you the very first step that they have a problem. They have to be willing to say, All alcoholics, like many other addictive behaviors, will go for a period of time. And there has to come a point of realization and recognition.

I really have a problem. That is a repentance. That is a change of mind.

This is what God asks of every person in the human race. All of us, when we see our problem of sin, we can't do anything about it. This is John's message with a view to it.

Nobody's going to change their mind if they don't feel that they're a bad person. This was the Pharisees' problem. I perform all of the rituals.

You cannot accept the solution day after day in Israel. God, in a very graphic way, was saying to Israel, Look, there's a problem here. We're having to kill and take life.

A perfect, unmarried... That is God's message to Israel. That is God's message to us. And that ritual says you have a problem.

The reality of Jesus Christ is what solves the problem. Ritual does not solve the problem and cannot. By and large, Israel did not understand the life of faith.

So John is preaching. John embodies and sums up the message of the Lord. You need new life.

This is what you need. But he is clear. John was cold with cannabis herring with a leather belt around his waist in verse 6. He ate locusts and wild honey.

He identifies himself. Kings, we find 2 Kings 1.8 if you want to make a note of it. This is the garb that Elijah wore.

He wore the hairy robe. One of the pagan kings, a messenger came to him and said, There's preaching out here saying things about you. The king said, What does he look like? Well, he's got a big leather belt and wears a hairy robe.

He's got wild hair. He said, This is the way John looks. John has this camel hair garment and a leather belt around his waist.

He identifies himself as Elijah. What is Elijah's mission? The very last verses of Malachi, my messenger, will come and turn. Whose sandal strap I'm not worthy to stoop down and loose.

I baptize you with water. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. This is the law.

This is the system of ritual speaking saying, There's something coming after me mightier than I. Something that has power to transform on the inside. Power to deliver mightier than I. I'm not worthy to touch his sandal strap. This is the law.

This is legalism. This is spirituality by works. Speaking and saying, All I can do is show you the problem.

I tell you what is coming. He is the solution. He is the answer.

I baptize you with water. I perform a ritual. I try to show you things in a teaching context.

He comes. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit is the power of God manifested in our lives.

It's the power by which God created the world. It's the power by which God raised Christ from the dead. This is the message that John is preaching.

He says, Don't get hung up. Watch for the one that comes after. Now, John is preaching in the desert.

The desert is the place where Israel received the law. They were out in the desert. And that's where they received the law.

John is out there preaching in that same desert. Giving that same message. John knew that many of those coming to him were not genuine in their motivation.

John knew this. John saw the Pharisees coming out. He knew their hearts.

John knew that a lot of them undergoing this ritual were not truly repentant. Thought of as holy and returning to God. And yet John baptized them anyway, didn't he? They asked him, if you look over in Matthew, it talks about the soldiers and the Pharisees and different ones coming to John.

This is a baptism of repentance. And he gives the details of what that was. Anyone can perform a ritual.

Anyone can go through the motions. It doesn't mean. Only if it is a reflection of what's on the inside does a ritual.

And it was meaningless. Many of them were disciplined by God. Many of them were weak and sickly.

Because they didn't observe the reality behind the ritual of the Lord's table. The ritual is meaningless. Actions that we perform are meaningless if they do not come from change of mind on the Holy Spirit and the Word of God.

The ritual by itself, the action by itself does nothing. The same people dumped in the Jordan are going to crucify them. Paul says, I tell you, even weeping.

They are enemies of the cross. Believers can be enemies of the cross because they get involved in. So when we look at the ministry of John in the wilderness, we're reminded of John's baptism was a ritual.

It did not have discernment. That ritual, it's not like the people that didn't have true faith and true change of mind wouldn't pop up. You know, if you go up to Salt Lake City in the Great Salt Lake, wouldn't it be nice if when these people came out to be baptized and John would try to dump

them, they just wouldn't go.

You couldn't push them in the water because they didn't have real faith. They didn't have a genuine change of mind. So why? Can't do the ritual for you.

You don't have genuine repentance. Ritual doesn't discriminate, does it? Anybody can do a ritual. An unbeliever can come in here.

An unbeliever can be baptized. An unbeliever can stand in a pulpit and teach the Word of God. We can't tell from actions.

We can't tell from rituals. John couldn't tell. He baptized everybody that came and he knew some of them were the worst hypocrites.

He had as much discernment about those things as the other disciples and the Lord Jesus Christ. Ritual has no discernment. Ritual has no power.

Getting somebody, talking a new believer into going and being water baptized doesn't do anything to them or for them unless it comes out of their faith, their change of mind, their understanding of what God has done. To browbeat someone into walking the aisle, to browbeat someone into saying a prayer along with us, to browbeat someone into baptism, to browbeat someone into church attendance, ritual, ritual, ritual does not change, has no power unless it is a manifestation of something. It was not produced in these people that were baptized.

He baptized all Jerusalem and Judea, but what did Jesus say about these same people a year or so later? You hypocrites, you brood of vipers, you whitewashed tombstones. Jesus condemned that generation. The very people that were baptized, they weren't changed by that baptism.

Nothing. It did not confer. Jordan River water isn't any more special than Arkansas River water.

It doesn't make a difference. There are people who go to the Holy Land, bring back little jugs of Jordan River water or Sea of Galilee water. It's just H₂O with some contaminants in it.

Has no power. The same can be said of the Mosaic Law. This is what Paul talks about in Romans chapter 7. I desire to do what is right in my mind, but with part two, the second point, what is the contrast between the baptism of John and Jesus' baptism? Jesus baptized with the Spirit.

The power to perform what is pleasing to God has been given to us at salvation in the baptism of the Spirit. There is an immersion in something that's got power. That's the very essence of God.

It's God himself. His sovereignty, righteousness, justice, love, eternal life. His truth, His love, His compassion, His omnipotence, His omnipresence, His immutability, His veracity.

All of the different things that make up the attributes of God. And it's a long list. They're all

embodied in God, the Holy Spirit.

And that's what we have been immersed in. That's what has been given. That's the power to live.

And we've got to seek it. Because just like the glory of God and the indwelling Spirit of God that seals us for salvation, will never leave us, can go away in our life. Israel was still God's nation.

The people of Israel were still God's people, even after His glory had departed the temple. They did not lose their identity and they did not lose their relationship. They lost the manifestation of God's power.

They lost the identity as a light. We've got to focus. John, as a third point, John the Baptist, like the Mosaic law, is associated with the wilderness, the place of no fruit, no production.

The wilderness is not a place of provision. It's not a place of blessing. The wilderness, remember in the Old Testament, it was contrasted with the land of Canaan, the land flowing with milk and honey.

There's a contrast there. A barren place versus a land of production and blessing. The wilderness is where the law was given.

Did you ever think about that? Why didn't God wait until they got to the land of Canaan, got to the land of promise and were living in Palestine, and then give the law? He gave it out in the wilderness. It's identified with the barren.