

Sent: Wed, Oct 9, 2019 1:34 pm  
Subject: Last Nite's MOB Study on Matthew 3

"And behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased!" (Matthew 3:17)

Matthew 3 takes a big leap forward in the account of the earthly life of Jesus with the abrupt entrance on the scene of John the Baptist, and the direct intervention by God the Father (following the baptism of Jesus!) in declaring, and authenticating in a voice "out of the heavens" what Matthew had already established through five fulfilled prophecies (from the Old Testament) recorded in Matthew 1-2: that Jesus was in fact the "beloved Son of God," and the long-awaited Messiah! The One in whom His Father was "well-pleased"!

Dr. Constable writes that "after 400 years without prophetic revelation, God breaks the silence, by speaking from heaven to mankind again"! Interestingly, the Old Testament ends, in Malachi 4:5, with the promise that God "was going to send Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord"! And, "in the fullness of the time" (as Galatians 4:4 tells us!)-a mere 400 years later--we see, in Matthew 3, the "abrupt" arrival of John the Baptist--a "type of Elijah"--"preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"! Matthew makes it clear that "he was the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he spoke of "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, making ready the way of the Lord" (quoting from Isaiah 40:3). Mark begins his gospel by calling it "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" and puts it this way: "Behold, I send My messenger ahead of You (speaking of Jesus) who will prepare Your way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness"!

So, who was John the Baptist? His early connection with Jesus, in their births, is intriguing! Luke 1 records how the angel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias, who was a priest, and announced that his wife Elizabeth (in her old age) "would give birth to a son" who should be given the name "John;" that he "would be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb" (vs. 15); and that he would be the "forerunner before Him (speaking of Jesus!) in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children..." (vs. 17) And how, when Mary (who "just happened to be a "relative" of Elizabeth)--and pregnant with Jesus--visited Elizabeth, the "baby in Elizabeth's womb leaped for joy"! (vs. 39-44)! Wow!

Luke adds, in vs. 80, that "the child (John) continued to grow and to become strong in spirit and lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel!" Meanwhile, after recording the account of Jesus' birth (in Luke 2), Luke records how Jesus "kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men"! (vs. 52) The Bible is silent about whether there was further contact and relationship between Jesus and John during the intervening years before the astounding events of Matthew 3! (You wonder!) We do know that John preceded Jesus in birth, in public appearance and ministry, and in death! And that Jesus would later say that "among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist"! (Matthew 11:11) Wow!

So, what was the mission and message of John the Baptist? Matthew 3:6 says he was baptizing people in the Jordan River "as they confessed their sins"! Jewish people came from afar to

confess their sin and be baptized, apparently believing that John was a genuine prophet, if not Elijah himself, as a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, and a "sign" of the coming of their long-awaited Messiah! Even some Pharisees and Sadducees (leaders of the two main religious sects of Jesus' day) showed up--perhaps out of curiosity, maybe just to be seen, but who apparently saw no need of "true repentance" since they were known for their rigid adherence to a whole set of legalistic and ceremonial rites added to the Law, and "had Abraham!" (in their bloodline)--which they considered was enough to be accepted by God! (Gentiles, they thought, were the only ones who needed to be baptized, if they were to convert to Judaism!) Well, John knew their hearts and called them out as a "brood of vipers"! (All of which foreshadowed their soon coming conflicts with Jesus!)

The "repentance" John preached was a "true turning from sin and to God" in anticipation of the coming of the Messiah, which was "at hand"! It was more than simply "being sorry" for sin! II Corinthians 7:10 says: "For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation (or, "leading to salvation without regret"!), but the sorrow of the world produces death"! Charles Swindoll calls it a "change in thinking that causes a change in direction"! And baptism "symbolized" that commitment!

John the Baptist said he was baptizing with water "for repentance," but that He who was coming after him "is mightier than I...and would baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire"! Baptism "with the Holy Spirit" is a way of referring to God's transforming work of placing His Spirit within us and changing our hearts "from the inside out"! The prophets spoke of this happening! Jeremiah (31:33) wrote: "Behold days are coming...when I (God) will put My law within them and in their heart, I will write it and I will be their God..."! Ezekiel (in 36:26) wrote: "I will give you a new heart and put a new "Spirit" with you...and cause you to walk in My statutes"! Interestingly, on the "day of Pentecost (in Acts 2:1-4) "tongues of fire" appeared to the followers of Christ, and they were all "filled with the Holy Spirit"! (Some also interpret the "fire" in Matthew 3:11 as picturing the judgment of those who would fail to repent!)

Well somewhat surprisingly, Jesus also asked to be baptized by John (much to the chagrin of John), since he knew that Jesus was without sin! But, in response to John's plea not to do it, Jesus replied that it was "fitting to fulfill all righteousness"! What did He mean? It was in accordance with God's will! He came to "identify" Himself with sinners and He would ultimately bear the sins of world on Himself on the cross! His perfect righteousness would become "imputed" to them (II Corinthians 5:21)! The act of baptism was a necessary part of the righteousness He would secure for sinners!

The baptism of Jesus also pictured His coming death, burial, and resurrection! And it "prefigured" the significance of Christian baptism and marked His first public identification with those whose sin He would bear! And so, He identified with us when He was baptized, just as we can (and should) identify with Him (and His death, burial, and resurrection) when we are baptized--not for salvation but as a public affirmation that we have been saved! (Have you been baptized?)

Well, equally important, when Jesus was baptized it became a "public affirmation" of His Messiahship (and Sonship!) by testimony directly from heaven! Verse 17 (our memory verse):

"And behold, a voice out of the heavens said: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased"!

And, finally, Matthew 3:16 says "the Spirit of God, descending as a dove, lighted upon Him..."--empowering Him for His mission which would lay ahead, initiating His public ministry! (We thus also see here the Trinity in action! The Son obeys! The Spirit anoints! And the Father speaks!)

Matthew 3! What a beautiful chapter! How wonderful to be part of the "men of the Bible"! The MOB!

Men, go with God this week and let your voice be heard!

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