

Monday, September 14, 2020

The Baptism of John the Baptist

Today we are beginning a new series of devotional on the topic of *Baptism in the New Testament*. I love the subject and hope you will be blessed by reading these. Of course, it is impossible to cover all the material thoroughly in the space we have. I hope our devotionals will encourage and inspire you to do more study and thinking!

John the Baptist was used by God to prepare the way for Jesus. In fact, in **Matthew 11:10** Jesus refers to John as “my messenger” quoting from the prophet Malachi, this also found in Mark 1. This messenger was sent to prepare the way for God’s son. That is exactly what John the Baptist accomplished.

Mark 1:1-5 - *The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:*

*“I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way” -*

“a voice of one calling in the wilderness,

*‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.’”*

And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

John’s message was widely received by the Jewish people in and around Jerusalem. Many generations had waited for their Messiah to come. John’s work was preparatory in nature. He was getting the world ready for the coming of Jesus, the Messiah.

John’s message was strong, direct and powerful. He called people to repent of their sins and to produce fruit showing that repentance.

Matthew 3:7-10 – *But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.*

The gospel writers tell us that John’s preaching was so effective that the whole countryside and all from Jerusalem confessed their sins and were baptized by John in the Jordan River. To baptize is to immerse. This is what the word means. Those who accepted John’s call to get prepared for the coming Messiah repented of their sins and were immersed for the forgiveness of those sins in the Jordan River. What a sight that must have been! Even Jesus, the sinless Son of God would come to be baptized by John. That is our subject for tomorrow!

Heavenly Father – We thank you for servants like John who poured out their hearts preparing people for the coming of your Son, Jesus. His sacrifice and commitment to get your message out to others is an upward call to us. Thank you for those who heard your message then and who continue to hear the message now. In Jesus name – Amen.

Tuesday, September 15, 2020

Baptism of Jesus

While John the Baptist was preaching in the wilderness of Judea, calling men and women to repent of their sins and to be baptized in the Jordan River, the gospel of Mark says that Jesus himself came the 65 miles from Nazareth to be baptized by John.

Mark 1:9-11 - *At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."*

Why would the sinless, son of God line up with the sinful people of his day to submit to John's baptism? It is a great mystery! These answers may not be adequate for you, I understand.

Matthew 3:13-17 – *Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"*

Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Although John tried to discourage Jesus and say that he needed to be baptized by Jesus, Our Lord was insistent that this happen, saying this would "fulfill all righteousness." What does that mean? Scholars have disagreed for years on particulars, but general areas of agreement are these:

1. Jesus was accepting God's plan/will for his life.
2. "Righteousness" for Jesus was being obedient to God and God's will.
3. Jesus identified with the people of his day at his baptism (unlike the spiritual leadership of Judaism who stood apart from the "common people.")
4. Dr. Jack Lewis, in his work on Matthew, suggests that "for some reason, not explained, it was a part of God's plan that he submit."

I was a student of Dr. Lewis' while at Harding Graduate School. He had a PhD. In both Old and New Testaments! I could not add much to his explanation.

Jesus, the sinless son of God let sinful people know that he was behind God's plan as seen in the ministry of John the Baptist. He shared in our humanity (**Hebrews 2:14-15** - *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil - and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.*) and was tempted in every way as we are, yet was without sin. (**Hebrews 4:15** - *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.*)

Thank you Jesus for your example and your obedience to the will of God for your life!

Father – We praise you for the example of your Son. May each of us learn to submit our will to yours. May we find joy in seeking a life of obedience and may we honor *you by loving the people of our day as Jesus loved those of his!*
In the name of Christ – Amen.

Wednesday, September 16, 2020

Go Make Disciples

As we continue our thoughts on baptism this week, we turn to the words of Jesus from Matthew 28, commonly known as “The Great Commission.” (Mark also has a version of this in Mark 16:15-16)

Matthew 28:16-20 - *Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

It had been a difficult week for the followers of Jesus. Many of them fled when Jesus was arrested by the Romans, only to return after the various resurrection appearances by our Lord.

Now they have met him in Galilee where they are both worshipping him and doubting. Jesus gives them a charge to go unto the whole world and make disciples of all the nations. This was a very tall order for eleven men who had their own struggles! The call is to “go make disciples.” to find those people who are willing to learn from Jesus, to follow him and be students of his. They were to baptize and teach these individuals to obey everything Jesus has commanded them. Jesus promised to be with them always. But first, they are told to wait:

Acts 1:1-8 - *In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”*

Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Jerusalem is about to explode with joy and power as God’s Holy Spirit will come upon the followers of Jesus. It will be a powerful time unlike any other and God will empower his servants with the Spirit to carry out the work Jesus had called them to do. But that is a story for tomorrow!

Heavenly Father – We thank you for the charge you have given your church to go and make disciple of all nations. We, as your followers are still learning how to do that in the best ways. Please open our hearts and our eyes that we might see people the way Jesus did. We love and praise you.
In Jesus name – Amen.

Thursday, September 17, 2020

Those Who Accepted His Message

Yesterday we were reminded that Jesus was preparing his followers to take God's message of salvation to the entire world. Luke tells us in the Book of Acts that Jesus' disciples were to wait there in Jerusalem until they had received power from the Holy Spirit. Please read **Acts 1** and **Acts 2** as you prepare for the devotional today.

As the Jewish people were celebrating the Pentecost in Jerusalem, God poured out his Spirit on the believers. Please read **Acts 2:1-10** carefully. This outpouring of the Spirit permitted Jesus' followers to proclaim the "good news" in a language all could understand. It certainly got the attention of the crowds and allowed Peter, one of the Apostles, to proclaim the death and resurrection of Jesus. (See **Acts 2:22-35**)

As Peter closes his message to the people, we read these words:

Acts 2:36-41 - *"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."*

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

The people are called to believe that Jesus, who was crucified, is now the Lord of all and the Messiah (the Christ) promised to Israel. This message by Peter brought much conviction to the hearts of people hearing it. They are called to repent (turn their minds in a new direction) and to be baptized (to be immersed in water) for the forgiveness of their sins and to receive the promised Holy Spirit. Amazingly, some 3,000 people responded to the gospel and were baptized that day!

Baptism played an important part in the gospel message. The good news was **entirely** about Jesus, his life, death and resurrection. We respond to that good news by believing it, turning away from a life of sin and being baptized into Christ. The people who were baptized formed the church there in Jerusalem and there was a spirit of love and togetherness around them (**Acts 2:42-47**). May God help us to hear his word!

With love,
Larry

Heavenly Father – We thank you for the life and sacrifice of Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Thank you for those who listened to your message and responded in those early days. Help us to have that same spirit of urgency about us as we share good news with others. We love and praise you. In the name of Jesus— Amen.

Friday, September 18, 2020

Paul's Conversion

No one created more trouble for the early church than Saul of Tarsus. He was a dedicated, zealous Jewish man who would stop at nothing to destroy the followers of Jesus. When Stephen was stoned to death, Saul was there as a witness and giving approval to Stephen's death. (**Acts 7:57 – 8:1**) As a great persecution broke out against the church, Saul actually went from house to house dragging people off to prison (**Acts 8:3**) He was feared greatly by the church and continued his work beyond Jerusalem.

I urge you to read **Acts 9:1-22**. This is the story of Saul's journey to Damascus where he is suddenly confronted by Jesus. This powerful story tells us that Saul is blinded for three days without eating or drinking. In Damascus, Ananias, a disciple of Jesus is told to go to Saul. Ananias is a reluctant servant, knowing much about Saul's past. The Lord then gives him more specific instructions:

Acts 9:15-16 - *But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."*

The conversion of Saul, whom we know as the apostle Paul would have seemed highly unlikely.

Many years later when Paul tells his own story to the Roman commander who has rescued him from the Jews who were trying to take his life, he tells him about his conversion experience there in Damascus.

Acts 22:14-16- *"Then he said: 'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'*

Paul understood the urgency of his decision. God had given him three days of fasting, praying and thinking about his life. He was a new believer in Jesus of Nazareth. He now believed that Jesus was alive and was Lord of all. God's servant Ananias now tells to get up and be baptized, washing his sins away by calling on the name of Jesus.

In keeping with the words of Peter in Acts 2, baptism is an important moment. It is placing one's faith and trust in Jesus' blood and being united with him in baptism to wash our sins away, calling on his name. We praise God for his plan!

Our Father – We thank you for breaking through to the heart of Saul. He has influenced so many over the years to put their hope and trust in your son Jesus. Help us to remember that you can reach anyone with the good news of Jesus. May we have the courage of Ananias and the heart of Saul to listen to you.

In the name of Jesus – Amen.

Saturday, September 19, 2020

Summary

When the early church began to spread the good news about Jesus in Jerusalem, they might not have anticipated all the opposition they received. However, Jesus had warned them earlier (see **Matthew 5:11** and **John 15:20**). The death of the Christian servant Stephen would cause a great persecution to break out against the church (**Acts 8:1-4**). Those who were scattered because of it were faithful to proclaim God's Word wherever they went!

That was the case in Samaria where many believed and were baptized (**Acts 8:12-13**). Remember, earlier Jesus had said to the believers that they would be his witnesses *"in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth."* (**Acts 1:8**) That was happening!

One story that touches our hearts is about an Ethiopian man who is responsible for the treasury of the Queen of Ethiopia. He is traveling one day after worshipping in Jerusalem. Please read the entire story found in **Acts 8:26-40**. Philip, a servant of the church in Jerusalem is sent by the Lord to intersect with the Ethiopian while he travels. The man is reading from the prophet Isaiah, but lacks understanding. God's Spirit leads Philip to the man to help him understand.

Acts 8:30-39 - *Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.*

"How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth."

The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.

Notice the Ethiopians humility as he asks Philip to explain the scripture to him. Please see the compassion and love of Philip as he started with the scripture from Isaiah and told the Ethiopian the good news about Jesus.

The good news included God's message about baptism. When they came to some water the man asked to be baptized. Their chariot stops and Philip and the man go down into the water where Philip baptizes him. What an amazing moment! Philip is taken elsewhere by the Holy Spirit and the man goes on full of joy.

Until now we have seen large groups of people hear the gospel and respond with faith and baptism (Jews, Samaritans). Now we see God's great love for the individual. Let's learn from the Ethiopian regarding his desire to know the scriptures, to listen and to obey God. What a day!

Dear Father –Thank you for sending servants like Philip who loved you and your word. Thank you for the risk he was willing to take to teach others and call them to follow after Jesus. May we learn humility and obedience from the Ethiopian man as he responded to the good news of Jesus. – Amen.

Monday, September 21, 2020

Crucified with Christ

The conversion of Saul, the man we know as the Apostle Paul was an amazing turning point in the life of the church. Paul could never resist returning to preach the good news in various synagogues as he did often, with mixed results; however, his primary focus became reaching the non-Jewish world with the gospel of Jesus.

Today we turn our attention to Paul's letter to the church in Rome, likely written in the mid-50's of the first century. He has never been there in person, but hopes to do so in the future. Here he describes the equal needs of Jews and Gentiles for Jesus and forgiveness. He calls for a life of faith that is led by the Holy Spirit.

In the sixth chapter he helps the church to remember an experience they all shared – their baptism into Christ.

Romans 6:1-7 - *What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin - because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

Evidently some in Rome were suggesting that the grace of God was a license for sin. Paul would have none of that thinking! He reminded them that in baptism they had been united with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection. Their old sinful nature had been crucified with Jesus and they had been raised to live a new life! He will continue urging the church to remember that there was a time they had died to their old self. Sin should no longer be their master.

I hope each of us will take some time to remember and reflect upon our baptism into Christ. I want us to remind ourselves that we have chosen to say “no” to our sinful nature and allow it to be crucified with Jesus.

In **Galatians 2:20** we read this: *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

For the apostle, this idea is really “I am being crucified with Christ.” The words here refer to action that is continuing to happen. Jesus said, “*If anyone would come after me, they must deny themselves and take up their cross daily.*” (**Lk 9:23**)

Jesus and Paul both make it clear that discipleship (following Jesus) is a daily choice we make! I hope you will decide today and tomorrow and every day to die to your sinful nature and live for Jesus. It is not easy to live by faith but I hope you will.

Heavenly Father –You have called us to die to ourselves, to our sinful nature and to follow your Son. Help us each day to make good choices and to say “yes” to a life of discipleship. We thank you for our baptism into Christ Jesus. May we relive this often on our journey. Amen.

Tuesday, September 22, 2020

Born Again

In January of 1977 America inaugurated Jimmy Carter of Plains, GA as its 39th president. Carter had previously served as Governor of Georgia and was by all accounts a very good man, regardless of what one thought of his presidential years. One thing America took note of was the President Carter spoke of being a “born again Christian.” Of course that was encouraging for many to hear. The President was often contradicted by his brother, Billy, who claimed he was lucky to be born once! Billy provided a lot of humor and I am sure some embarrassment for the President.

The idea of being “born again” is found in Jesus’ conversation with the Jewish Pharisee, Nicodemus.

John 3:1-8 - *Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.” Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”*
“How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”
Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

Please notice that Nicodemus had great respect for Jesus and his close relationship with God. In reply to his compliment, Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be “born again” in order to see the Kingdom of God. This presented great confusion for Nicodemus – how could that be? (See **John 3:4**)

Jesus’ response remained consistent, *“Unless a man is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.” (John 3:5)* Jesus said the new birth was in two parts: being born of water (baptism) and being born of the Holy Spirit. Remember, John the Baptist had already said that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit (**Mark 1:8**). From **Acts 2:38** - *Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”* We see that baptism is in two parts – we are immersed in water and we receive God’s Holy Spirit!

Paul put it this way in **1 Corinthians 12:13** - *For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.* God’s Spirit, given to us at our baptism into Jesus brings us into the body of Christ, the church. All of us enter the same way. There are two parts (water and the Holy Spirit) of describing the same event.

Heavenly Father – We thank you for the teaching of Jesus and for his reminder that our decision to follow him can best be described as “being born again.” This decision is so important, Jesus emphasized that it must happen in all our lives. We love you and praise you for the call to be born again and we celebrate the new birth – being born of water and being born of your Spirit. In Jesus name – Amen.

Wednesday, September 23, 2020

Clothed With Christ

Today we continue our discussion of Christian baptism by considering some words from two of the apostles, Paul and Peter. Writing to different churches at various times (the Galatian letter was likely one of Paul's earliest, while Peter's letters could be as much as 15 – 20 years later.) We read a very consistent message for the churches who received these letters.

Galatians 3:26-28 - *So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

The Galatian churches likely consisted of those individuals mentioned on Paul and Barnabas' first mission journey (**Acts 13, 14**). Now some Jewish Christians are trying to convince the non-Jewish Christians that they must be circumcised and obey the Law of Moses to truly be a disciple of Christ. Paul fights that teaching strongly insisting that all who come to faith in Jesus and are baptized have been united with Christ.

Colossians 2:12 - *... having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.*

Here Paul reminds the church that they have been buried and raised with Christ through baptism. This reminds us of the images used in **Romans 6** by Paul regarding being buried with Christ and raised to walk in a new life.

Many years later the Apostle Peter would write:

1 Peter 3:18-22 - *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits— to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.*

Peter will compare Christian baptism to the flood water of Noah's day. *"In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God."*

Peter reminded the church that baptism was connected to salvation through faith in the resurrection of Jesus. Everything begins and ends with Jesus! Baptism is our response in faith to what Jesus has done for all of us at the cross. We praise God for his plan.

Our Father – We thank you for your consistent message in scripture calling us to put our trust in the cross of Jesus and responding to that sacrifice by faith, repentance and baptism. We trust only in the blood Jesus shed for us, not in any of our works. Help us to learn obedience from your son. Jesus told us that if we loved him, we would do what he commands (John 14:15). We do love you. Because of the cross – Amen

Thursday, September 24, 2020

The Body of Christ is One

Good Morning,

Today we are bringing our discussion of baptism in the New Testament to a close. We have seen John the Baptist preparing people for the coming of Jesus, the Messiah by calling people to repent of their sins and be baptized in the Jordan River. Jesus, himself was immersed by John. He told a Jewish Ruling Council member that he must be born again to see the Kingdom of God (**John 3**).

Jesus would eventually call his followers to go into all the world and make disciples (**Matthew 28:16-20**) by baptizing and teaching them to obey all he had commanded. Those followers did exactly that, spreading the word in Jerusalem where thousands were baptized into Christ.

We considered the story about Saul of Tarsus and how God changed his heart and showed him how much he would suffer to share the news of Jesus. Saul (the Apostle Paul) has a special story (**Acts 9, 22, 26**) and was told to “arise and be baptized washing his sins away.” He would carry this message of Jesus around the world and many would be baptized into Christ. (See Acts 8, 18, Romans 6, Galatians 3, Colossians 2 and 1 Peter 3, etc.)

Finally, I would like us to consider words from the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthians. Remember, Paul had spent 18 months in Corinth teaching the gospel of Christ. From **Acts 18:8**, *Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and*

many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized. We learn that many Corinthians came to believe in Jesus and to be baptized. Corinth was a key city to spread the news about Jesus!

1 Corinthians 12:12-13 - *Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.*

In chapters 12, 13, 14 of this letter, Paul has to remind the church that each of them is a special part of the body of Christ. The church is made up of many parts, all of whom need each other. He says that we all came into the body of Christ through our baptism and were all given the Holy Spirit at that time.

What a special thing to remember. All of us who share baptism into Christ Jesus are brought into the church, the body of Christ. We need each other. We share a common birth – we are born again through the precious blood of Christ. Let’s remember and praise God for his amazing grace!

With love,
Larry

Heavenly Father – We celebrate our new birth into the body of Christ. We thank you for a wonderful plan you have for the world. Help us that we might be a small part of that plan. We remember Jesus and we praise you for your grace and your mercy in sending us your son. In Jesus’ name – Amen

Friday, September 25, 2020

Temptations of Jesus

Following the baptism of Jesus by John, the scriptures say:

Luke 4:1-13 - *Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.*

The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'"

The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours."

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"

The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. For it is written: "'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus answered, "It is said: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

When the devil had finished all these temptations, he left him until an opportune time.

The encounters between Jesus and the devil are filled with three great temptations presented by Satan. "If" you are the Son of God is used in an attempt to create doubt. Offering Jesus the authority over and splendor of the world was of course, an overstatement by the devil. Those belonged to God only and were not Satan's to give. His request for Jesus to worship him was quickly rejected.

The third temptation is unique. The devil himself uses scripture on Jesus to tempt him to test God with his safety. Again, Jesus rejects this notion quickly. Notice that Luke's account says in verse 13, "*When the devil had finished all these temptations, he left him until an opportune time.*" Jesus would encounter Satan again.

In a conversation with some Jewish people who were determined to kill Jesus because they have no room for his word, Jesus says this: **John 8:44** - *You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.*

Jesus calls Satan a "murderer" from the beginning, and says he is a "liar and the father of all lies."

We should be reminded that Satan still tempts all of us in very different ways. Are we aware of his schemes?

With love,
Larry

Heavenly Father – Help us to learn from Jesus to resist the temptations of the devil. May we put our hope and trust in you always and may we overcome by the power of your Word. In the name of Jesus –Amen

Saturday, September 26, 2020

Be Strong in the Lord

As we come to the end of another week, I hope you will be safe and in good health. Thank you for reading our devotional thought each day. I truly hope they will help you in your daily walk with Jesus! How are we doing with the challenge from **Mark 1:35** – “*Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed*”? I hate to bring this up to you “non-early morning” folks, but Jesus did start his day with prayer and drawing close to God. I hope we will find a way to do that as well!

I want to close our week by focusing on **Ephesians 6:10-13**.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

The Apostle Paul reminds the church to be strong in the Lord. He calls them to put on the whole armor of God so they can resist the devil's schemes. He also reminds them where their ultimate struggles lie – against the spiritual forces of evil. I hope you will take time to read all of **Ephesians 6:10-18**. It will help you to be strong in the Lord.

Please remember these words from the Apostle Peter, who himself battled Satan on numerous occasions:

1 Peter 5:6-9 - *Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

Peter calls for a spirit of humility and urges the church to cast their anxieties on Jesus. But he also urges them to be alert that Satan is out there looking to destroy.

We live by faith and NOT by fear! Let's give God our hearts, trust him with our lives and take his armor upon ourselves so we can stand firm.

With love,
Larry

Heavenly Father – We know our battle is against the spiritual forces of evil in this world. Help us to be strong in you, to resist Satan and to stand firm. We need power from your Spirit to help us as we strive to walk with Jesus.

In the name of Jesus, our Lord –Amen.