

THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE KING

Matthew 3:1-17

This chapter directs our attention to two very important things, and we shall now center our thoughts on them.

I. The Preaching of John The Baptist. Matthew 3:1-12.

John the Baptist was chosen by God to prepare the way of the Lord. John the Baptist was a man of fine physique, strong character, genuine humility, firm will, absolute loyalty, spiritual insight and unique personality.

One thing that impresses us about John the Baptist is the amount of time which he spent in training for the special job to which God was calling him. In addition to the instruction which he received in a godly home he studied the Scriptures for himself. Then he went into the wilderness, where he lived as ascetic life and underwent a discipline which fitted him for the task which he was to perform. God needed a man with a flaming message of judgment, who would be entirely obedient to His will. Therefore, He prepared him out there in the wilderness far from politically decadent Rome and spiritually dead Jerusalem.

God chose, called, equipped and commissioned John the Baptist for the important task of preparing the way for the coming of Christ. In modern parlance he was to be the advance man for Christ. His task was to get people ready to receive the Saviour when He appeared.

This rugged, unique and striking preacher and forerunner of Christ was heavily burdened on account of the prevailing wickedness and disorder of society. He preached in the wilderness, outside of the great city and away from the headquarters of the nation. With righteous indignation flaming at white heat, John denounced the sins of the people. He spoke boldly against hypocrisy in all its forms. He declared the truth of God with respect to sin and its consequences.

John's preaching attracted the multitudes, and no matter who went to hear him he did not compromise the truth, but proclaimed the Word of God without fear or favor. While he condemned sin and warned of judgment, he gave the people assurance of the forgiveness of their sins on the condition of their repentance. He challenged them to change their minds with respect to sin, to God and to self. He not only preached repentance, but he baptized the penitent as a sign of the fact that they had repented. He urged them to produce fruits which would prove that they had repented, or to show the reality of their daily lives. He warned them that there must be harmony between their profession and their conduct.

Like a true prophet, John the Baptist preached in genuine earnestness. He lived in the vast solitude of the wilderness, where he had ample opportunity to be alone with God. He dressed like a prophet, clothed with a garment of camel's hair tied around him with a girdle or leather belt. He denied himself the comforts of life, and subsisted on the locusts, which were probably dried and palatable, and wild or mountain honey, both of which were available in large quantities.

II. The Baptism Of Jesus Christ. Matthew 3:13-17.

At the very peak of the wilderness revival the flaming evangelist, John the Baptist, was baptizing in the Jordan River. Quietly and deliberately Jesus Christ made the long journey from His home in Nazareth to be baptized by John the Baptist. Very likely, though not certain, it was late in the afternoon, and after all other candidates for baptism had been baptized, when our Saviour approached John the Baptist and requested baptism at his hands. Perhaps this method of approach was to distinguish Himself from all others, for He was the sinless One Who had come to redeem and to save the lost.

When Christ asked John the Baptist to baptize Him, he shrank from administering the ordinance. He felt his personal unworthiness to baptize the Messiah. He protested saying, "I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" John the Baptist objected because of all that baptism signified to him. To him the ordinance of baptism implied repentance -- a renunciation of an old life which the baptized person condemned and of which he was ashamed. It also implied an entrance upon an entirely new life. John's baptism was unto repentance. The people were baptized confessing their sins, but baptism could not have any such significance to Christ. He did not have any sins to confess, and deeds of guilt for which to repent. He did not have any evil life to renounce. No thought even verging on sin ever originated or was harbored in His soul. He knew no sin.

To the objection of John the Baptist Christ Jesus made the following reply: "Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." How gentle those words! Permit at this time, at this period of My ministry! Permit it "now" at the threshold of My public ministry! "Thus --- in this manner --- in this picture of subjection, death, burial and resurrection -- "it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." All righteousness was what the moral law demanded. All righteousness was what the sinner needed. All righteousness was what Christ came to fulfill. To bring an everlasting righteousness was His mission to earth. But how was this righteousness to be fulfilled? It was by His death, burial and resurrection.

Christ's baptism was at a definite time and for a definite purpose. As Christ sank beneath the baptismal waters He prefigured the death which He was to die upon the cross, when all the billows of God's wrath against sin should roll over Him, and as He arose from beneath the water our Lord symbolized His resurrection from the dead. As Jesus Christ was coming out of the baptismal waters, the heavens were rent asunder and the Spirit came upon Him in a dove-like form, symbolizing peacefulness, meekness, gentleness, tenderness and love, those qualities which were to characterize the ministry of our Lord. When He was baptized Christ received the audible and visible approval of God the Father Who said, "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Thus the Father testified that His Son was the object of His love and the One in Whom He took a great delight.

In what way, then, could His baptism fulfill all righteousness? In His baptism He could show how He would fulfill it in His death. At the beginning of His public ministry, as He entered upon that pathway which must end in sacrificial death, He could show how He was going to fulfill all that righteousness which God's law demands, all that righteousness which condemned sinners need, and all that righteousness which will entitle to endless citizenship in the realms of purity and glory. When He was baptized at the beginning of His ministry, He showed in figure what He would do at the close of that ministry in fact. In His baptism was the form -- He was buried as dead. In the end there was the reality -- He was buried, being dead. In His baptism He rose from the emblematic grave. In His resurrection He rose from the dead. The waves that flowed over His head in the Jordan River pictured the waves of sorrow and blood which rolled over that same blessed head on Calvary. His baptism showed how He would work out an everlasting righteousness for all who believe by dying, by being buried, and by rising from the grave. That is the meaning of His sublime words. Therefore, Jesus Christ was baptized or submerged in Jordan to show forth His death, His burial and His resurrection. Baptism is God's chosen symbol of the most wonderful fact in all the universe. His obedient children are baptized for the same object that Christ Jesus was, namely, to picture His atoning work. To change the ordinance is to destroy its meaning. Anything which does not portray the death, burial and resurrection of Christ is not baptism. Scriptural baptism symbolizes the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. This beautiful ordinance steadfastly keeps before people the fact of the vicarious and substitutionary sacrifice of Christ.

Christ's baptism was intended to be for all times the example and pattern of those who should become members of His churches. His baptism had four characteristics:

1. He was baptized as God's child.

"This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased."

2. He was baptized by God's man.

"There was a man sent from God."

3. He was baptized in God's way.

"And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water." "And straightway coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him."

4. He was baptized for God's purpose.

"Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." "Thus" means in this manner.

If one loves Christ as he should, he will not refuse or hesitate to obey Him.

When Jesus was baptized, it was God's child being baptized, God's man doing the baptizing, God's method by which it was done, and God's purpose for which it was done.