

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 15 January 2023. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Three Baptisms

Matthew 3:7-12

On Sunday, the sixth of June, 1819, in Rangoon, Burma, a congregation of six Baptist missionaries was finishing its church service in a small *zayat* (a Burmese-style “religious building”). For six long years, Adoniram and Ann Judson had been working tirelessly to translate the Bible into Burmese, and to teach the Burmese people the Gospel; and over the years, two other missionary couples had joined them in the work. For a while now, a small number of Burmese people had been attending their services, and had been listening to the message. One of these folks was a quiet, bashful 35-year-old man named **Maung Nau**. Maung Nau really wanted to know about this Jesus who had died on a cross 1800 years ago, to pay the penalty for his sins. For weeks, he had felt deep conviction over his sin; and finally, after that Sunday service, he came to Adoniram Judson, and handed him a letter that he had written. Translating it into English, Adoniram read it aloud to his missionary colleagues. It said:

“I, Maung Nau, the constant recipient of your excellent favour, approach your feet. Whereas my lords three have come to the country of Burma, not for the purpose of trade, but to preach the religion of Jesus Christ, the Son of the eternal God, I, having heard and understood, am, with a joyful mind, filled with love.

“I believe that the Divine Son, Jesus Christ, suffered death, in the place of men, to atone for their sins. Like a heavy-laden man, I feel my sins are very many. The punishment of my sins I deserve to suffer. Since it is so, do you, Sirs, consider, that I, taking refuge in the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ, and receiving baptism, in order to become his disciple, shall dwell with yourselves, a band of brothers, in the happiness of heaven, and grant me the ordinance of baptism? It is through the grace of Christ that you, sirs, have come by ship from one country and continent to another, and that we have met together. I pray my lords three that a suitable day may be appointed, and that I may receive the ordinance of baptism.

“As it is only since I have met with you, Sirs, that I have known about the eternal God, I venture to pray that you will still unfold to me the religion of God, that my old disposition may be destroyed, and my new disposition improved.”¹

The reality of Maung Nau’s salvation was obvious to all the missionaries. Maung Nau had already counted the cost of becoming a Christian; but he had also counted the great cost of publicly following the Lord in baptism. As it turned out, his faith in Jesus held firm, even in the face of possible persecution and death. In the coming years, God used him to preserve Judson’s translation of Scripture from being destroyed, at a time when Judson was in prison, and only a hair’s breadth away from being executed, and when Judson’s wife was dying of illness. Maung Nau’s repentance was real; and his desire to grow in the Lord was real. He knew that his “old disposition” (his old nature) needed to be put to death, and that his “new disposition” (his new nature) needed to have control of his life; and as part of his Christian growth, he was resolved to own Jesus publicly. On 27 June, 1819, Maung Nau was baptised; and soon, others took courage from his testimony, placed their faith in Jesus, and were baptised.

For two thousand years now, countless people have done what Maung Nau did. It all began in the wilderness of Judaea, when John the Baptist stood up and began to preach, **“Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”** People who had always *thought* that they were righteous enough to make it into Heaven, were shocked by John’s startling message, and were smitten with conviction. Many Israelites repented of their sin, and believed on Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah. They then received baptism, to

¹ Courtney Anderson, *To the Golden Shore* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1987), pp. 223-224.

declare their faith in Jesus before others, and to become members of Christ's assembly. But guess what? John's command to repent and believe on Jesus, and then be baptised, still stands to this day. Until Jesus returns for His saints in the clouds, and this church age ends, the command will still stand. We *must* heed this command, no matter the cost. The title of this message is ***The Three Baptisms***.

Read Matthew 3:7-12.

I. The requirement for receiving baptism (vv. 7-8)

Not long after John began to preach and baptise, the religious leaders of Israel came to see his baptism. Now, make no mistake about it: these men were *not* John's friends: they were his enemies. The theologically conservative Pharisees, and the theologically liberal Sadducees, usually hated each other, and fought with each other; but they were united in their fear and hatred of John the Baptist. They were afraid that this man could "upset the apple cart" for them. They loved the power that the Romans had permitted them to have, and they didn't want anyone upsetting the *status quo* with talk of a "Messiah" who had arrived. And so, they harshly grilled John. They demanded that he tell them whether he were the Christ, or "that prophet" that Moses had foretold; and when he said that he was *neither* the Christ *nor* that prophet, they demanded that he tell him who he was, so that they could give an answer to their superiors back in Jerusalem. When John said that he was that "***voice crying in the wilderness,***" whom Isaiah had foretold, they scorned him.

Yet, even though they hated John, they also feared him. John's followers were growing in number every day; and the more followers John had, the more *their* authority would be questioned. They had to come up with a new strategy. So, what *was* that strategy? Their new strategy was, "If you can't beat him, join him!" Suddenly, they went from harshly questioning John to requesting that he baptise them! By getting onto John's religious "band wagon" (or, at least, by appearing to do so), they could regain favour with the people; and, at the same time, they could begin to corrupt John with offers of position and power, *if* he would "play ball" with them, and say the things they wanted him to say. These men were wicked and crafty!

However, John could not be bribed, flattered, coerced, or fooled. He was *not* a "***reed shaken with the wind.***" He did not bow to the manipulation of selfish, crafty men. He saw right through their hypocrisy. He pointed his bony finger at them and said, "***O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?***" He made it clear that their so-called "righteousness" was worthless to God, and that they were on their way to hell. As for baptism, he wouldn't even consider baptising these men *unless* they truly brought forth "***fruits meet for repentance.***" John wouldn't baptise *anyone* unless he could see outward evidence that this person had truly turned from his sins, and had been inwardly converted.

Now, most professing Christian religions today teach that the way to be saved is to do good works to *earn* your salvation; and those who teach this false gospel misinterpret John's words here. According to them, John was saying, "***Do good works to earn your salvation.***" My friends, this is *not* what John was teaching! John required that people bring "***fruits***" that are "***meet***" (in other words, "fitting") for the repentance that they professed to have. In other words, John needed to see outward evidence that salvation had *already* occurred in a person's heart. The *fruit* wasn't the thing that saved them: the fruit was simply the outward *evidence* that they had *already* been saved. And how *were* they saved? The same way that we still must be saved today—by **repentance of heart, and faith** in the Son of God.

Let's talk about these two requirements. First, John says that you must "***repent.***" The word "repent" means "to think differently afterward." John was instructing the people to have a *change of mind, heart, and will* concerning their sin. We must agree with God that we are condemned by our sin, and in need of His forgiveness; and we must *turn consciously* to God, from sin. Secondly, John said that people must *believe* on Jesus as the "***Lamb of God which***

taketh away the sins of the world.” John made it clear that until a man believes on the Son, God’s wrath abides upon that person. God is merciful, and is ready to save those who repent and believe; but He is also just, and is angry with the wicked every day. Every day, the wrath of an angry God is hovering over sinners, ready to crush them!

Read John 1:29, 35-37 / 3:27-36.

Read Acts 8:35-38.

In order to receive baptism, you *must* first believe on Jesus. **Acts 8:37** makes this clear. By the way, **Acts 8:37** is left out of almost all modern Bible versions. Why? Because they are based upon a corrupt Greek text. About 1,700 years ago, the followers of a heretic named Origen, in Alexandria, Egypt, were trying to erase the idea that one must personally *believe* on Jesus before receiving baptism; and thus, they purposely left out this verse. (That is why we stick to the KJV!) So, what does this mean, then? It means that if you have been baptised as an infant, your baptism is not legitimate. Even if you were baptised as an *adult*, but weren’t truly saved, your baptism is worthless! Salvation is received by repentance and faith in *Jesus alone*; and *then, after* you believe, you should be baptised. True baptism is *believers’* baptism.

As John’s ministry increased, more and more “Baptist activity” was going on. Many people were being immersed under water. Yet, was *every* person who received John’s baptism truly saved? No. Many of John’s converts never truly understood his message; and that’s why many of them ended up rejecting Jesus, and turning from Him. (Judas Iscariot was one of John’s “converts”; and he ended up betraying the Lord!) As a mere man, John couldn’t look into people’s hearts and see true faith, as God can do; he could only go by a person’s verbal profession of faith, and by the *"fruits"* that he seemed to see in that person’s life. Many were *not* truly saved; but, thank God, some *were* truly saved. For Jesus’ disciples (except for Judas), the belief and repentance *was* real; and the fruit in their lives was real, and lasting.

Now, let’s get back to the Pharisees and Sadducees. These men wanted to get onto the "Baptist band wagon"; and so, they came to John and said, “Buddy! Will you baptise us?” However, John stopped them dead in their tracks, and exposed their wicked hearts. He demanded that they repent of their sin; and the only way *he* could tell that they had repented was by their *actions*. John had to see the outward "proof" of repentance before he would administer baptism. **James 2:18** says, *"Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works."* In other words, “God can see the faith in your heart; but the only way that *others* can see your faith it is by your *changed life*. If there be no changed life, the faith is not real.”

The Bible makes is very clear that if a person be truly saved, there will be a radical *change in his life*. He is a *“new creation.”* *“Old things are passed away: behold, all things are become new.”* For a true child of God, living in sin is *not* “normal”: living *righteously* is “normal.” The authors of Scripture wrote their letters with the assumption that the Christians to whom they were writing were striving to be holy, like Christ, and that they *were* regularly overcoming sin. When a true believer *does* stumble in sin, he is smitten by conviction; and he feels compelled to go to God for cleansing straightaway, so that he can stay in close fellowship with God. A true believer also does not forget that he was once on his way to *hell*, and that hell was what he justly *deserved*. He remembers, and acknowledges, that it is only by God’s mercy that he is no longer on his way to hell. A person who *refuses* to admit that he is a sinner worthy of hell is *not* saved, even though he may claim to be. Here in **Matthew 3**, we are told that the people were baptised by John in the Jordan, *"confessing their sins."* The Greek tense of the word *"confessing"* indicates a past action that *preceded* another past action. This verse might also be translated, *"having confessed their sins."* Simply put, those whom John baptised had *already* confessed their sins to God, and had *already been saved*.

However, before baptising them, John demanded more than words: he had to see evidence of a changed life. Let's look at some of the evidences of repentance that John expected to see.

Read Luke 3:7-14.

In this passage, we are told about several groups of people who believed John's message: and John expected to see "fruits" of repentance before he would baptise any of them. For **those who loved the pleasures of this world**, he expected to see a change from selfishly hoarding their goods, to parting with their goods, and giving to those in need. For **the tax collectors**, John expected to see that they had *stopped* stealing from people, and that they had restored what they had stolen, and were now honest men. From **soldiers**, he expected to see that they had stopped taking bribes and unjustly assaulting people, and that they were content with their wages. If John were here today, he would still make the same kinds of requirements. To those **living in fornication** (sex outside the bound of marriage), he would say, "Repent of your fornication, and turn to Jesus the Christ! Then either get married, or remain single!" To those **committing adultery** he would say, "Repent of your adultery, and believe on Jesus; then end your relationship with that lover, and get right with your spouse!" To those **who love wine, beer, or drugs**, he would say, "Repent of your alcohol and drugs! Turn to the Son of God, and submit your mind to him!" To those who **hate and envy others**, he would say, "Repent of the murder in your heart, and run to Jesus for refuge!" To those in **gay and transgender** lifestyles he would say, "Repent! Abandon your wicked lifestyle, and turn your heart to the Lord Jesus Christ!" To the **liars** John would say, "Repent of your lies and deceit, turn to the Lamb of God, and tell the truth from henceforth!" To the **blasphemers** he would say, "Repent of your filthy mouth, and your cursing against God, and believe on the Messiah!" To **everyone** John would say, "Stop trying to hide your sins under a cloak of 'religion' and self-righteousness! Your good works can no more cover your sins than Adam and Eve's apron of fig leaves covered their nakedness! You must *repent!* Don't bother to ask for baptism until you have not been *saved from your sin!* Repent, and believe the Gospel!"

II. The requirements for escaping the "wrath to come" (vv. 7-10)

(Read Matthew 3:7-10 again.) Thus far, we've seen what John required in order for a person to be *baptised*. To be baptised, a person had to repent of his sin, and place his faith in Jesus. (That is still the requirement for baptism to this day. That is why we examine a person's salvation testimony very carefully before baptising him and admitting him into church membership.) However, if people will *not* repent, there is something far more important than baptism and church membership that is at stake: and that is *the fate of their souls*. Notice what John said in **verse 7**. He said, "***Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?***"

What did John mean by this? What "***wrath***" was he talking about? He was talking about the wrath that God will pour out upon a rebellious world during the coming Day of the LORD!

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13 – 5:10.

The "Day of the LORD" is a period that the Bible calls the Tribulation period. Right now, we are in the church age; and no one but the Lord knows when it will end. However, at any moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the church age could end. It will end when Jesus appears in the clouds, cries "***Come up hither,***" and calls all Christians out of this world. Those believers who have already died will be resurrected from their graves, and meet the Lord in the air; and those who are still living will instantly receive immortal, sinless bodies, and will also be caught up in the air to meet the Lord, and to go with Him to His Father's house in Heaven. Then will begin the horrible seven years of **the Tribulation** down on earth. During that time, God will allow a man called the Antichrist to rule over the whole world; and those who do not worship him, and take his mark of 666 in their right hands or in their foreheads, will be

executed. It will be a horrible time; but it will also be a time when multitudes of people will be saved. The nation of Israel—which, for the most part, has rejected Jesus as their Messiah for the last 2,000 years—will repent and believe on Jesus, in large numbers. One hundred and forty-four thousand Jewish men will preach the Gospel throughout the world; and many Jews and Gentiles will be saved through their preaching. At the end of these seven years, Jesus Christ will return to earth with all the armies of Heaven (all the saints and angels), and will destroy the Antichrist. He will then gather all the survivors of the Tribulation, and will judge the nations; and all who rejected Him, and followed the Antichrist, will be slain and cast into hell. Christ will then set up His Kingdom of righteousness; and He will rule and reign from Jerusalem for 1,000 years. All the sinless, resurrected saints of past ages will reign with Him.

This coming 1,000-year Kingdom is the Kingdom that John was talking about when he said, **“Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”**; and the seven-year Tribulation period (which will come just *before* the Kingdom age) is the **“wrath to come,”** from which John warned the people to flee. This raises a question, though: if it has been 2,000 years since John preached this message, and the Tribulation still hasn’t happened, then why did John tell the people in *his* day to **“flee from the wrath to come”**? Why would he tell them to flee from the Tribulation wrath, if it would never happen in their lifetimes?

The answer is simple: it *could* have happened in their lifetimes! The death, burial, and resurrection of Christ; the church age; the Rapture; the Tribulation; the Second Coming of Christ to earth; and the beginning of the Kingdom Age, *could* have all happened within their lifetimes—if Israel had, as a nation, received Jesus as their Messiah. God gave Israel 40 years to respond to Jesus, and to turn to Him: but they *didn’t* respond! The Kingdom *really* was **“at hand”**; but because they rejected their King, God has postponed the Kingdom—for now! The Kingdom wasn’t just an empty promise. Otherwise, God would be a liar!

Now, make no mistake about it: all the things that had been prophesied in the Old Testament Scriptures had to take place. Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection had to take place. The church age (that period between Christ’s first and second comings) had to take place. The destruction of the Temple by the Romans, the scattering of Israel, and the *return* of Israel, had to take place. The Tribulation period, the Second Coming of Christ, and the setting up of the 1,000-year Kingdom, had to take place, just as had been prophesied in the Scriptures. However, all these events *could* have been greatly shortened and compacted, and have taken place within only *one generation*, **if** Israel had repented, and turned to Jesus!

Read Matthew 11:11-14.

Did you catch what Jesus was saying about John the Baptist? He said, **“if ye will receive it”** (in other words, “If you will receive the Kingdom, by repenting and believing on Jesus”), then this man, John, will be **“Elias”** to you. What Jesus was saying was that *if* Israel would repent and believe the Gospel, then John could truly fulfil his role as the prophet Elijah. Remember, *when* did Malachi say that Elijah would appear? *Just before* **“the dreadful day of the LORD.”** The point is that the “Day of the LORD” could have been finished a long time ago—if Israel had repented! The 1,000-year Kingdom could have been finished by now, and we could have been in the glorious ages of eternity—if Israel had received the Kingdom that was being offered to them by John, and by the Lord Jesus Christ! The reason all these events are being postponed is that Jesus is waiting for Israel to repent, and receive Him as their King!

At any moment, the Rapture could happen, and the dreadful the Day of the LORD could fall upon this world; and those who have not repented and believed on Jesus will enter into that terrible time of judgment. However, as awful as the Tribulation will be, there is something far worse than the Tribulation judgments here on earth; and that is *hell*. Let's look again at what John said to the Pharisees and Sadducees. **(Read Matthew 3:9-10 again.)** Jesus' message couldn't be clearer: those who will *not* repent of their sin, and allow the Lord to produce the fruit of righteousness in their lives, will be cut down like dead, worthless trees, and will be cast into the "**fire**" of hell! Most of the people listening to John *thought* that they were O.K. with God. They had been taught that *every* Israelite will enter into the Kingdom, simply because they were the children of Abraham. But John had a "news flash": if you will not repent, you will *not* ever see the Kingdom: instead, you will see the flames of hell!

So it still is today. You must *repent of your sin and wickedness* in order to escape hell. You may think that God will accept you because you come from a "good family," or because you are "religious"; but God knows *every sin* you've ever done, said, or thought: and all will be revealed at the judgment. My friend, there is only one way to escape the wrath of the Tribulation, and the *eternal* judgment of the Lake of Fire: and that is to repent!

III. The three baptisms

(Read Matthew 3:11-12 again.) In **verse 11**, John is contrasting the kind of baptism that *he* administered to a baptism which *Jesus* would administer in the new future. John's baptism is by immersion in *water*; but the baptism that *Jesus* would soon perform would be an immersion in the *Holy Ghost*.

Now, let's examine John's baptism first. Water baptism is a first step of obedience in the Christian life. It is a picture of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. It doesn't *save* you: it simply pictures the salvation that you have *already* received by believing on Jesus Christ.

Read Mark 16:15-16.

Folks, let me be very clear: this verse does *not* teach that baptism saves us! You'll notice that in the second half of **verse 16**, John gives a qualifying statement. He says, "***he that believeth not shall be damned.***" He didn't say, "He that believeth not *and* is not baptised shall be damned": he said, "***He that believeth not shall be damned.***" Salvation is received by *faith* in Jesus alone. Yet, if you want the "full picture" of a follower of Jesus, it is in the *first* half of the verse: "***He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved.***" If you have been saved, the Lord expects you to receive baptism, to show your faith in Him publicly.

So, this is water baptism. It is an outward ordinance. It began with John; and it is still administered to this day, by saved church members. What, then, is the "**baptism in the Spirit**" that *Jesus* was supposed to do? It is a unique event, which happened to four groups of people, at four different times, in the first century. Let's look at the first time that it happened.

Read Acts 1:3-5 / 2:1-17, 22-24, 36-41.

On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon the 120 members of the Jerusalem church. His presence was manifested by the sound of rushing wind; by the appearance of flames of fire on their heads; and by their suddenly speaking in languages that they had never learned. This was God's way of publicly putting His stamp of approval and authenticity upon His institution, the church! The church had already existed for 3 years; but now, God was showing to all Israel that this church was *His!* This event happened four more times in 20 years. It happened at **Pentecost**, in A.D. 33; it happened to the **Samaritans**, in A.D. 34; it happened to the **Roman** house of Cornelius, in A.D. 41; and it happened to the **Greek believers** in Ephesus, in A.D. 54. Each time this phenomenon happened, there were Apostles, and other Jewish believers, present. This was God's way of telling the Jewish believers that He had accepted *Gentile* believers into His churches! The Jews knew, when they saw the same thing happening to the Gentiles that had happened to them at Pentecost, that God had accepted the Gentiles, too. Now, does this phenomenon happen today? No. The Spirit is no longer falling upon groups of people, and causing these kinds of phenomena. God made the point that the church is His; and there is no more need of it. Today, the moment a person is saved, the Holy Spirit quietly enters that person, and stays with him permanently; but *tongues speaking, flames of fire, and rushing wind* do not happen. For the believer, there are no longer *two* baptisms (water baptism, and Spirit baptism); there is only *one* baptism—water baptism, after you're saved. In the book of **Ephesians** (which was written *after* the last occurrence of Spirit baptism), Paul said that for believers, there is "***one Lord, one faith, one baptism.***"

Now, before we close this morning, there is a third kind of baptism that we need to talk about. It is not a baptism for *believers*: it is a baptism for *unbelievers*. Let's read **Matthew 3:11-12** one more time. (**Read Matthew 3:11-12.**) The sight of chaff being burned was very familiar to people in Bible times. After wheat was harvested, the farmers took the wheat to a threshingfloor. A threshingfloor was an area on the top of a hill, with a stone pavement. The stalks of wheat would be strewn out on this stone floor: then, the farmer would have his oxen trample the grain, in order to break the bond between the grain and the chaff. Then, the farmer took a winnowing fork, and tossed the wheat and chaff up into the air. The wind would blow away the largest pieces of chaff, while the grains (being heavier) fell to the ground. The grain was then put through a sieve, and shaken violently, until the grain was separated from all the last pieces of chaff. The remaining pieces of chaff were then gathered and burned.

In the Bible, God often compares believers to grains of wheat. True believers can be violently shaken and "sifted" by the enemy through temptations and trials; but they are still God's "grain." They are still saved, and profitable to God; and God will not allow them to be destroyed. In the end, they will be gathered into God's granary (in the coming 1,000-year Kingdom). Chaff, on the other hand, is a picture of the lost. In **Psalms 1**, King David said that the ungodly are "***like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore,***" David says, "***the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment,***" but will "***perish***" eternally. Just as chaff is worthless and unprofitable to men, so those who reject Christ are unprofitable to God. If they will not repent and turn to God, they will one day be "blown away" in judgment; and like chaff, they will be burned with "***fire unquenchable.***" My friend, don't let this happen to you. If you have not been saved, please repent and believe on Jesus today! He will save you!

Conclusion: As we close this morning, I would address Christians once more. First, if you know Christ, but have not been baptised, what are you waiting for? It is extremely important that Christians follow *every* command that Jesus has given! Secondly, I would ask, "How is your fruit for the Lord?" God

doesn't want you to bring forth a *little* fruit: He wants you to bring forth *much* fruit! He died to destroy the works of the flesh; and you *can* overcome these evil works, if you will submit yourself wholly to God every day. The Lord wants you to overcome lust in the heart. He wants you to overcome anger (both inner, seething anger, and outward, explosive anger). He wants you to overcome envy, jealousy, covetousness, lying, pride, fearfulness, and lack of faith in Him. Let Him have His way with you today!