

BEHOLD THE LAMB

Rev. Lawrence Baldrige

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Mark 1:9-11; John 1:29

Baptism is a beautiful rite of the church. The rite itself was first used by the Jews as they baptized by immersion the Gentile Proselytes who desired to worship the God of Israel. Later the ritual washings by the Pharisees and the Essenes became a symbol of cleansing also, which certainly was the idea behind proselyte baptism. Then, along came a man named John the Baptist who practiced baptism like the Jews practiced toward the Gentile proselytes. But he required even the Jews to be baptized! And he preached that their lives reflect righteousness and repentance before they were baptized. He preached about a Kingdom and said that nobody could enter that kingdom without those requirements of righteousness and repentance, and that if they could not meet those requirements, they could not be baptized. As the Interpreter's Bible tells us, this baptism was a symbol that repentance, a change of heart and mind, had already taken place.

Mark tells us that this strange prophet, while doing his God appointed task, was approached by one named Jesus, a Galilean, who requested that John baptize him. John immediately recognized that this was the One that He had been preaching about, the one who would come after him who was preferred before him, the one whose shoe buckles he was unworthy to stoop down and unloose. John tried to dissuade Jesus from baptism. John even said to Him, "You should be baptizing me, and not I baptizing you." But Jesus would have none of that. In deep reverence, John gave up that struggle and baptized Jesus. John's words, when he first saw Jesus, are the words from which this sermon is taken—Behold the Lamb!

John had good reason to suggest that Jesus not be baptized, for Jesus was righteous and without sin, and John knew that. He saw it in all that Jesus appeared to be. Moreover God had told John that this sinless Son, the Messiah and Savior, would be revealed by the Spirit; and John saw the Spirit of God rest upon Jesus even before this baptism, and knew that He was the Promised One. Why, then, would a sinless man want to be baptized by a good but sinful man, and that as a symbol that his sins were forgiven. Indeed, He had no need of forgiveness? So Jesus told him why, "To fulfill all righteousness." In a word, Jesus was saying, "I'm doing all that my Father wants me to do, and He wants me to do this." Jesus would always do what the Father said. In fact, before this He had said to the Pharisees, "I always do what My Father bids Me do." Baptism by John the "baptizer" was God's will for Him, and, as an obedient Son, He did His Father's will. Since the age of 12, when He told His earthly parents that He had to be about His Father's business, He always listened to His Father's Voice.

But this baptism was also His initiation into ministry. Now 30 years of age, the age when a Rabbi began his ministry, Jesus was starting His own work, the work that John the Baptist had begun, and He would enter this ministry by following God's Voice, and by making it public. Barclay, the New Testament scholar writes: "He must have

waited for a sign. For Him the emergence of John was that sign. This, He saw, was the moment when He had to launch out upon His task.”

Indeed, this was His foray into His public ministry. As such, it was also a public affirmation by the Father Himself that this was His choice.

But in this story of Jesus’ baptism we have 3 different kinds of signs that Jesus was truly the Only Begotten Son of God.

I. THE FIRST SIGN WAS THAT THE HEAVENS WERE OPENED.

A. In both the Old Testament and the New Testament the heavens, in most cases, were opened so that mankind might see a vision of the Divine world. The great longing of man, the curiosity that drives the mystic, the philosophic quest, is to see the unseen, to hear divine things, to gain a vision of the Eternal, to experience the very presence of God. Paul speaks of being caught up into the 3rd heaven and of seeing and hearing things too holy, to unutterable to repeat. John the Revelator has the same experiences. But so did Isaiah, and Ezekiel, and Daniel see the Heavens Opened. I long to see that, too. If we follow Jesus, one day, like the martyr Stephen, we may cry out too, “I see the heavens opened, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.”

I often think of how great it would be to meet Jesus as Paul met Him on the Damascus Road, as Peter met Him risen from the dead, as Thomas met Him in the Upper Room, as Moses met Him in the burning bush. My finite mind cannot fathom a vision of the Infinite. But what a challenge it is just to think about such a reality as that. But, while we travel in this world, though we see not the Infinite, we shall see Him in that world which is to come. Still, still, with all our hearts we long to see Heaven opened, to look upon the faces of the blessed saints gone on, and to see the face of Jesus smiling down upon us in this dark world. A thousand days of sunshine would not be equal to one second of such a vision.

B. But, on this occasion, God did not open heaven for men to see into the Divine Mysteries, or to catch a glimpse of Jesus, or to see their loved ones in glory, but rather to let the inhabitants of heaven see the Messiah entering into His glorious ministry.

The Heavens were Opened. The words in the Greek are best expressed ‘rent’ or ‘torn apart’. There is great force expressed in the words we read. It was as if the hand of the Almighty ripped the heavens open so that the Divine World could see the Divine Word in the most Divine Act of all—a Sinless Man dedicating Himself to be a Sacrificial Lamb to save people from their sins. This statement parallels the ripping apart of the ‘veil of the temple.’ God is rending the veil of the heavens to show all heavens inhabitants what His only Begotten Son is doing. God is answering Isaiah’s prayer in 64:1—“Oh that Thou wouldst rend the heavens, that thou wouldst come down...”

Perhaps the Heavenly Father might have said to them, “Behold the Lamb! Behold the Lamb!”

II. THE SECOND SIGN FROM HEAVEN WAS THE ANOINTING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. The 2nd part of Isaiah’s prayer is being answered as well... “That thou wouldst come down...”

I love the great contrast between the forceful nature of the tearing away of the heavens and the gentle and quiet entrance of the Holy Spirit upon the brow of Jesus to officially and publicly anoint Him for His ministry.

There are those who say that the Spirit of God empowered Jesus for His ministry when He was baptized. This is not so. Jesus was the Eternal Word of God from the beginning. He pre-existed as God the Son. “The Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Since He was God from the beginning, He needed no other power than His own. Since “all things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made” it is somewhat ludicrous, and certainly false, to say that the Spirit empowered Him. The Spirit simply anointed Him. This was a public anointing, and had great meaning.

A. John tells us of that meaning: Jn. 1:31 “**And I knew Him not:** but that He should be made manifest to Israel...” This public anointing was for Israel. He was, first of all, their promised Messiah. This anointing of the Spirit that came upon Jesus in such a gentle, dove-like-way, was God’s message to Israel—Behold your King! Samuel anointed David to be king, and the Spirit of the Lord came upon him from that day forward.” The Father Himself anointed His Son, and proof of that was the descending Holy Spirit crowning the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. But He possessed even then the birthright and the throne and the power He already had possessed. His was the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory forever.

B. Further, this sign of the Holy Spirit was for John the “Baptizer” also. Vs. 33. “**And I knew Him not:** but He that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.” Vs. 34. “And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.” Just as the other Jews, John needed this sign to know that Jesus is God’s Son. This anointing settled the matter for John that Jesus was the Messiah. God used the forum of Heaven to show that Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah, and God used the rugged Jordan River Valley as a forum to show Israel that the Messiah was now come.

C. Further, John the Baptist tells us that this one upon whom the Spirit descended and remained was “He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.” The Spirit came upon Jesus so that Jesus could baptize believers with the Holy Ghost. Before the coming of the Holy Spirit, men could not be born again. In fact this marks the beginning of a New Covenant found in Ezekiel. This tells us what Jesus spoke about when He conversed with Nicodemus. “You must be born again.” Literally, you must be born from above. Before this men went to heaven on the basis of the Old Covenant; now all mankind, including the children of Israel, must get to heaven through the New Covenant. That must have been quite unsettling to John’s hearers! Even the act of baptism itself symbolized, as Paul tells us, a dying to sin, a burial, and a rising again to ‘new life.’ The next day, vs. 35, John said it again, “Behold the Lamb!”

But while the Holy Spirit did not empower Jesus, by the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit, Jesus empowers us. What could we do without the Holy Spirit? We could not even pray, we could not preach, we could not worship our God and our Father, and we could never know Jesus, for the Bible tells us that we cannot know the Father or the Son except the Holy Spirit reveals that to us.

III. THE RENDING OF THE HEAVENS, THE DESCENT OF THE SPIRIT, AND THE FINAL SIGN, THE FATHER’S VOICE.

If anything touches the heart, it is the Fathers’ or Mothers’ voice. I often think of my parents’ voices, consoling and correcting me, and even when I didn’t know it, always

doing so in Love. Even though their voices no longer sing on earth, I still hear them singing, hear them reading the Bible and praising God. But with purer voices still they do the same in heaven, as we are assured by the saints we read about in Revelation.

A. Before we speak about the Voice from Heaven, let us look back at what Jesus said to John the Baptist when John tried to persuade Him not to be baptized. We find that in Matthew's Gospel: 3:14, 15. "But John forbad Him, saying, 'I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?'" "And Jesus answering said unto him, 'Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered Him.'" It was only after Jesus had fulfilled that righteousness that the Heavens were opened, that the Spirit descended, or that the voice of the Father spoke about His Son. Jesus had to fulfill all righteousness before God would fulfill the entire plan of salvation.

Isn't that true of us as well? Jesus will not baptize us with the Spirit until we have fulfilled the righteousness of God in believing in Him and following Him. God doesn't have the same test for us that he had for Jesus. Before we could be saved Jesus had to fulfill all righteousness. But we must fulfill the righteousness of God in the things we know we should do. If we are believers we will never have the great blessings of God and not do His known will. If we have not been baptized we have not fulfilled the righteousness we know that God demands of us. If we live an ungodly life in any way, we have not fulfilled the righteousness of God. But I think especially in the matter of a public profession of faith and a public baptism, we must do these things if we truly intend to follow the will of God. How can we say, 'Not my will but thy will be done', when we willfully disobey the direct commands of our Father? I sometimes disobeyed my earthly Father; but I didn't do so openly. I must obey my Heavenly Father. If you have any question about what I am saying, I just point you to Jesus and say to you, "Behold the Lamb!"

B. And then there came from Heaven a Voice, the Father's Voice, and it said, "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." This can also be translated, "Thou art my Son, my beloved, in whom I am well pleased." God was simply affirming the absolute obedience of Jesus to all His will, which would consummate finally upon the Cross where the bleeding and dying Son cried out, "It is finished!" "Into thy hand I commend my spirit." God shows His delight in this great affirmation. I am a father, and I am proud of my son. When he does wrong, I still love him; but when he does right, I am delighted in him; especially if what he does is something exceedingly difficult to do. So the great heavenly Father, through tears and heartache is saying, "Son, I know how hard it's going to be, I know you have to suffer for others, but I know you will succeed. You are the 'apple of my eye' and I love you so much. You must suffer much to bring mankind back to yourself. You are my Beloved. You have followed all my will for you."

The Jewish tradition referred to this Voice as bath qol, a kind of an echo that came from the very depth of heaven, a voice of consolation, but at times, a voice of judgment. Such a voice was not heard by most. Perhaps to the people standing by it sounded more like an echo. But to Jesus it was very plain. Mark says, v. 11, "And there came a voice from heaven, saying, 'Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'"

Now whether we hear a voice like the voice that came to Jesus, or whether we hear nothing at all, I tell you this, when we do the right thing, the good thing, the hard

thing, the painful thing, God surely says to us, “I am delighted that you did my will.” For God takes delight in all His Sons of righteousness, even to His adopted sons.

And we get our righteousness from the Righteous Son of God, who became sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. There is one way for us to go, there is one path for us to follow, there is one and only one right way, for He is the Way and the Truth and the Life. “Behold the Lamb!”