

## 2. Acclaimed by Heaven

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now, last week we began a little series on Luke chapter 3 and 4, which I called Preparing the Way of the Lord, looking at the way in which this gospel lingers over the preparation of Jesus for his public ministry.

Last week we saw how John the Baptist had come identifying him, saying, this is the one whom the ancient prophets spoke about, and now he's actually here.

And today we're particularly going to concentrate on Luke chapter 3 verses 21 and 22, but we're going to read from verse 15.

As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, John answered them all, saying, I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the straff of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.

[ 1 : 19 ] So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people. But Herod, the Tetrarch, who had been reproved by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison.

Now, when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came from heaven, You are my beloved Son.

With you I am well pleased. Amen. That is the word of God. One thing that human beings, all of us, are very prone to do is to try to set up contrasts between things and people who are not to be contrasted.

One of the things in churches we are very fond of seeing is that some churches are all spirit. There is a great deal of life, a great deal of busyness, a great deal of bustle, but really it is all froth and bubble.

On the other hand, there are churches that are all word. Teaching is very sound. The Bible is read and opened and talked about, but it is all very dull and stodgy.

[ 2 : 56 ] Now, I am sure you have heard this contrast made. But let us think about it for a minute. It is an absolutely appalling contrast.

There are churches which are all froth and bubble. Are we to believe that it is the living Holy Spirit of God and the overemphasis on him that causes that?

And there are, frankly, churches which are very dull, very stodgy, where the preaching is very sound and very worthy, but also very, very boring. Are we really going to say that it is the living word of the living God that causes that?

Never, ever separate spirit and word. That's what this, and this passage, particularly verses 21 and 22, refuse to allow us to do that.

The living spirit working through the living word. The living word coming to us in the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is not here simply identified by John the Baptist.

[ 4 : 05 ] He is acclaimed from heaven. Heaven opens. It's not just John says he's here. Heaven opens and says he's here. A couple of things by way of introduction.

Look at verse 19. Herod the Tetrarch had been reproved by John for Herodias, his brother's wife, and he locked up John in prison.

So we're faced with the apparent failure of the Baptist ministry. We read last week, the crowds poured to him, the crowds listened to him, many people's lives were transformed, and then there's this abrupt halt to his ministry.

Now, Herod the Tetrarch was married to this woman Herodias. Both of them still had spouses living. That's the point. And John had reproved him, and so Herod moves to silence John. Now, it's interesting. This is a flash forward because when Jesus is baptized, John is still at liberty. But you see what Luke is doing. Luke is saying that this kind of ministry produces great opposition from the establishment it condemns.

[ 5 : 22 ] Now, back in chapter, well, back at the beginning of the chapter, Herod is one of the establishment who's mentioned. Remember, we saw how the word of God bypasses all these great figures, comes to John in the desert, and now it appears as the establishment of one again.

They're getting rid of this awkward, truculent, angular figure and silencing him. So we have the apparent failure of the Baptist ministry.

And this has been a feature of church history. Very often ministries, which have been flourishing and seem to be doing well, for some reason, they're simply cut off. Sometimes the person involved is taken away.

Sometimes circumstances arise which prevent it. So, the apparent failure of the Baptist ministry. But that's immediately followed by these verses we're going to look at with the baptism of Jesus. And notice, when all the people were baptized, reminder that John's ministry, which now seems at an end, had actually been a very successful ministry.

[ 6 : 32 ] Huge crowds had come out. But more importantly, Jesus is being baptized as well. Now, he's baptized because he wants to identify with us.

He's a true human. He's identifying with us. But surely, more important still, he is actually underwriting John's ministry.

So, if Luke is saying, look, Herod may have put him in prison, but here is the one, the coming one, and he is identifying with John and endorsing his ministry.

It may have been stopped by Herod, but Jesus himself is endorsing this. Now, I said it last week, that Luke, and I said it earlier today, Luke lingers on the details of Jesus' preparation.

But in verses 21 and 22, he almost speeds up.

[ 7 : 32 ] The baptism of Jesus is reduced to its essentials. Some of the other Gospels actually tell us a bit more about the events surrounding it. Here, the focus is on the event itself and on the fact that the whole Trinity is involved.

The whole plan of salvation, the whole purpose of Jesus' coming is endorsed by the other persons of the Godhead, the Spirit and the Father.

And there are two particular emphases. First of all, there is the Spirit from heaven, and secondly, there is the Word from heaven. As I said a moment or two ago, these two are inseparable, the Spirit and the Word.

So let's look first of all at the Spirit from heaven, which I'll call the visible evidence. Heaven is opened on this event which is without parallel.

Now, some of the prophets had seen heaven opened. Ezekiel looked up into heaven. Isaiah saw heaven opened. The difference is these prophets, when heaven was opened, it was a call.

[ 8 : 43 ] They were being called to their ministry. Jesus is not being called to his ministry here. This is a confirmation, an endorsement, an acclaiming of his ministry from heaven.

He does not become the Son of God on the banks of Jordan. The Spirit descending is not making him Son of God. The Spirit descending is showing that he is Son of God, the Chosen One. Heaven reveals who he is. And that's why Luke says, the Spirit descended in bodily form. This is not an imaginative experience.

It's not some kind of mystical vision. Now, only Jesus himself takes flesh and becomes one of us. But here, the Spirit is shown in a visible form to show that this is a real event that's actually happening.

almost certainly this reflects Genesis 1, where the Holy Spirit brooded over the dark chaos waters at creation's dawning.

[ 9 : 55 ] Here, the new creation is dawning and the Spirit comes down again. Some have argued it also possibly is the picture is taken from the dove that Noah sent out after the flood, and that may well be the case, but certainly the Spirit here at the new creation as he was at the beginning of the first creation.

You see, the important thing is Jesus is not just being baptized. He is the baptizer of verse 16. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

So you see, once again, John's words are being endorsed. John says he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. What happens is the Holy Spirit in bodily visible form comes down from heaven. Who said the Baptist ministry had failed? The Baptist ministry has not failed. The Baptist ministry is being fulfilled. So the ministry of the Lord and of the Spirit are to be intertwined.

Chapter 4, we're going to Jesus full of the Holy Spirit, led by the Spirit into the wilderness, and so on. The ministry of Jesus and the ministry of the Spirit are intertwined.

[11:11] And how this applies to us is that in Luke 2nd volume, in chapter 1 and 2 of that volume and beyond, it is the Spirit who enables people to carry on the mission.

Jesus said to the disciples, stay in Jerusalem until the Spirit comes. Interesting, no one in the Gospels is said to be filled with the Spirit because the Spirit in all his fullness indwells the man Jesus Christ in all his fullness.

The Spirit is totally working through Jesus himself. And of course that continues in the Acts of the Apostles, the risen Lord, the ascended Lord sends the Spirit.

So there is no separate ministry of the Spirit that the Church can have, which is to be divorced from Jesus' ministry, his life, his death, his cross, his resurrection and ascension.

So the first sign from heaven is a visible sign, the Holy Spirit comes down. Now the second sign from heaven is the voice from heaven, if you like, the verbal evidence.

[12:32] the Holy Spirit descended, we are told, and a voice came from heaven. Simultaneously, the Spirit comes and the voice comes.

Now, we must understand clearly what's happening here. In chapters one and two, there have already been messengers who spoke from heaven. Gabriel had come from heaven to Mary and told her the plan of salvation.

As the shepherds watched their flocks, the angel of the Lord appeared and said, to you is born the Savior, who is Christ the Lord. But this is the voice of God the Father himself.

There's no intermediary here. He speaks directly, just as in chapter 9, when Jesus is transfigured, he is going to speak again. But this voice from heaven is very, very interesting.

You'd expect a voice from heaven to speak of its own bat and its own words. This voice is speaking with an Old Testament accent. This voice is quoting the Bible, quoting Psalm 2 and Isaiah 41 and 42.

[13:43] Psalm 2 about the son who is to be set up as God's king in Jerusalem and Isaiah 41 and 42, the beloved one who is going to come in the power of the spirit.

You see, you see what's happening here, everything is being authenticated. Jesus authenticates John's ministry. Jesus is saying, look, John is not a failure, and then the spirit comes down to authenticate Jesus' ministry, and the voice from heaven not only authenticates Jesus, but it authenticates the Bible.

It authenticates the words of the Old Testament. Veteran preacher Alec Motier was once asked, what would Jesus have thought of the Old Testament?

And Motier said, well, first of all, they would ask you, why do you call it that strange name, the Old Testament? And they said, oh, do you mean the scriptures? And he said, I don't know why you call it the Old Testament.

I know this is not going to happen, I'm crying for the moon, it'd be a great thing if we dropped the terms Old and New Testament, simply called them the scriptures. Anyway, as I say, this is not going to happen, but it'd be great if it did.

[15:10] The voice from heaven is essentially saying, these books are my voice. So if somebody comes along and says, I've got a message from God, we're in the last days, now I've got a message from God.

You say, good for you. So do we. Here it is. This is the message from God. This is the voice from heaven. The words of the apostles and the prophets. And it also places Jesus at the center of the story.

The voice is not just quoting the scriptures, it's saying that's what the scriptures are about.

Remember, Jesus is going to do this himself at the end of the gospel on the road to Emmaus, beginning with Moses and all the prophets.

He revealed to them in all the scriptures the things about himself. That is what the Bible is about.

And if you try to understand the Bible without that, we can understand a lot about its background, a lot about ancient languages, the ancient world, and so on.

But it will simply remain a dead book. that is why spirit and word go together. The living word, the author, is the living spirit.

[ 16 : 25 ] And that's why we need the living spirit today to help us to interpret it. But you'll notice as well, it's authenticating in another way John's ministry.

Because John came, verse four, as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, the voice of one crying in the wilderness. Who is the one crying in the wilderness?

The Baptist himself. Where do we read about that? We read about it in the prophet Isaiah. So John was true in what he said.

His identification was right. This is no imposter. This is no fake. This is the Messiah, the Son of God, the living God. And John himself is a true prophet.

And you can see how important, that all is. That's why Luke lingers and he's still a lot more to say before Jesus enters on his public ministry.

[ 17 : 25 ] And what he has to say centers around the revelation of the living God in the living word through the living spirit. So as we finish, just two things to conclude.

First of all, Luke is saying the gospel is not something that has not been prepared for before. In other words, if you want to understand the gospel, you've got to read the whole book, not just the annex at the end.

You've got to, because it's all about the gospel, the way of salvation. And the second thing he's saying, this is particularly coming back to what I said about the apparent failure of the Baptist ministry.

If we're involved in that message, if that is the message we take to the world, whether we meet with apparent failure or apparent success in the long run is not important.

What is important is that we prepare the way of the Lord, both in our own hearts and in the hearts of others. Amen. Let's pray.

[ 18 : 37 ] Lord God, help us to realize how amazing, how life-changing, how earth-shattering the gospel is. The gospel is the story from eternity to eternity, centering on Jesus Christ the Lord.

Help us in our day to carry that message, not to be ashamed of it, and whether we meet failure or success, to rejoice that we are preparing the way of the Lord.

And we pray that in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen.