

Sunday, March 4, 2007 Notes:

Order of events:

1. Opening prayer.
2. Praise God with song.
3. Praise God with corporate prayer.
4. Praise God with study of His Word.
5. Close with blessing and reminder of the Gospel.

Read Story of Billy Graham.

A remarkable religious phenomenon broke out in the United States in the year 1948. It started in a tent near the Hollywood area of Los Angeles, under the preaching of a young evangelist by the name of Billy Graham. The crowds were a little sparse in that tent at first, but as the preaching went on they began to grow. Finally certain rather prominent Hollywood celebrities came to the meetings and were converted. At first, as often happens with gatherings of that sort, the press totally ignored them. But when some of the well-known names of Hollywood became involved, the media began to take an interest in what was happening. Eventually reporters were sent to investigate and to interview this rather strange young preacher, who dressed in pistachio-colored suits, wore flaming red ties, spoke with a pronounced Southern accent, and yet had incredible appeal to the masses. It was evident that God was doing something there. That was the beginning of Billy Graham's career. As news of those meetings spread across the country, other cities invited him to come and preach. He went on to Boston, where all of New England seemed to turn out to hear him. Thus began the great Crusades that swept across America in the latter part of the '40's and '50's under Billy Graham's ministry.

As it was with Billy the Baptist in 1948, so it was with John the Baptist in the late '20's of the first century. He, too, was a young man, in his early '30's, six months older than Jesus. He, too, dressed rather strangely, even for that day. He did not wear green suits; he wore animal skins, and ate a strange diet of grasshoppers and wild honey. This young man had a very powerful message, which seemed to have great attraction to people. At first they came out by dozens, then by scores. And finally hundreds and thousands forsook the cities of Judah and Galilee to hear this remarkable preacher out in desert places. Finally the response was so tremendous. And this man became so popular, that even the religious establishment of Jerusalem had to take note. They sent a delegation to investigate this remarkable preacher. [1]

Read John 1:19-34 – Describe the flow of events. The Sanhedrin meets John the gadfly.

Discuss the chain of events in the passage from the Pharisees (possibly of the Sanhedrin) sending their inquisition delegation to John's telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. John told who he was not, who he was, his purpose or job, and Who was the "main thing."

What things in the passage really jump out to you? What questions are raised? What images are evoked? What seems odd? What is amazing?

Some things that stand out to me (we can read "the story," but we can also read "the whole story."):

1) The Pharisees sent a delegation; they didn't come themselves. This signifies or implies they didn't consider John genuine. The stir had become so great, they had to give it a cursory look.

2) They, the Jews, were expectant: they were expecting someone to come, but they didn't seem to quite know who: Messiah, Elijah, the Prophet. "From the very beginning of the Old Testament there is a whispering hope that grows stronger and stronger all through the record that Someone is coming. In the promise to Adam and Eve as they are driven out of the Garden of Eden there is the hope that there is coming One who would bruise the serpent's head. That hope increases through the whole of the prophetic record as an ever-growing promise. But by the end of the Old Testament, the book of Malachi, he still has not come. The Old Testament is a book of unfulfilled prophecies. Now John announces that there is one standing among them who is the fulfillment of those prophetic predictions." [1] And we have that same expectation today.

3) John was crystal clear about who he was not, who he was, and why he was here. He told the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Verse 20, "And he confessed, and did not deny."

4) John without provocation or leading declares he is not Messiah; it must have been heavily rumored as such.

5) Why did they think he was Elijah? Mal 4:5 states, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes." Expectation. Elijah was rugged, fearless, and bold. John's countenance must have been like Elijah's. Don't mess with Elijah. 2 Kings 2:23-25. John said, "No," emphatically. Does this contradict with Matt 17:12 and Mark 9:13? Luke 1:14-17 straightens it all out. Yes he was Elijah in spirit and power! No reincarnation here! Some say the 2 witnesses in Revelation 11 are Enoch and Elijah too.

6) Who was "the Prophet"? Another popular expectation taken from Deut 18:15. One thing this says, these folks knew their scriptures! Jesus said they search the scriptures looking for eternal life, but failed to see they all point to Jesus. Some thought Jeremiah was in this mix as well. (Matt 16:14). And John the Baptist knew his scriptures as well, especially Isaiah's writings.

7) What does John mean that he is preparing the way of the Lord? Isaiah 40:3,4 say it clearly. The valleys will be lifted up (depressed/oppressed lifted up, encouraged), the hills will be made low (arrogant and proud humbled), crooked shall be made straight, rough and rude shall be made smooth. That's the way a highway is made. John came to prepare the highway for God to be received. "Repent and be baptized." Repent means to change your thinking. God has enabled me to see myself the way He sees me. John formed a "purified group" ready to receive the message of salvation. Baptism was a common way to express a demarcation in one's life.

8) Why was John baptizing? Matt 3:5-16, Mark 1:4, and ultimately John 1:30 explain clearly that John was baptizing as a sign of someone's repentance, to "fulfill all righteousness," and because this was the vehicle in which he would identify Messiah.

9) Why was Jesus baptized? This is the \$64,000 question! probably asked to every seminarian come down the pike. One professor had accumulated a list of over 70 reasons. Let's list a few:

- John 1:31. It was the way God introduced John to Messiah: the coaching sign to John from God.
- Baptism signifies an event has taken place. The event was the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry: a passing of the baton from John to Jesus. The place of Jesus' baptism was Bethany or Bethabara, which means "place of passage." Tradition has it that this is where the Israelites, with their Joshua, crossed the Jordan and entered into the promised land.
- It symbolized Jesus' future death and resurrection.
- But from Jesus himself, it was to "fulfill all righteousness." (Matt 3:15). To show the people they were doing the "right" thing. Righteousness is right being, right doing, and putting right: "right doing." Why did He wash feet? Why did he do all He did? To show us "right doing." Righteousness!

- Philippians 2:7. By His baptism, Jesus completely identified Himself with man's sin and failure (though He Himself needed no repentance or cleansing from sin), becoming our substitute. [4] Our Lord voluntarily submitted himself to the baptism of St. John, intended for sinners, in order to "fulfill all righteousness." Jesus' gesture is a manifestation of his self-emptying. The Spirit who had hovered over the waters of the first creation descended then on the Christ as a prelude of the new creation, and the Father revealed Jesus as his "beloved Son." [CCC 1224]
- Psalm 85:10-11 says it beautifully: "{10} Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other. {11} Faithfulness springs up from the ground, and righteousness looks down from the sky."

10) What kind of answer is verse 26 and 27? John seems to be saying, "fella's it's just water I'm immersing people in here. Let me tell you there is a great one standing amongst you... watching right now." Also, John says he was not worthy to untie the strap of Jesus' sandal. Now a disciple could do almost anything for his teacher, but was forbidden to take his shoes off for him; that was a servant's job. John stated emphatically that compared to Jesus, he was even lower than a servant!

11) John the Apostle likes to bring in the calendar and the map. The geography we've already discussed. This story happens after Jesus' baptism; therefore, he must be back from the 40 days in the wilderness, ~ 6 weeks. So it seems there were a few days between Jesus returning from his trials until he begins his earthly ministry.

12) What is meant by "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"? "Once again, if you read through the Old Testament, you will find it is a revelation of unexplained sacrifices. Abel, the son of Adam, offered a lamb to God and God smiled upon that sacrifice. Later Abraham made offerings unto God. Then the children of Israel were taught at the foot of Mount Sinai to bring certain animals to slay and to offer the blood and meat of those animals unto God. Many are offended by the fact that the Old Testament is replete with animal sacrifices, of actual blood being spilled. Every morning and every evening there were animals slain in the temple in Jerusalem. On the great feast days of Israel thousands of animals were sacrificed. A stream of blood runs all through the Old Testament. But nowhere are these sacrifices ever explained. In Leviticus we read, "the life of the flesh is in the blood" {Lev 17:11}, and it is clear there would be no remission of sins without the shedding of blood. But nowhere is it explained why God demands blood. Every sacrifice, however, was a testimony that Someone was coming who would supply that explanation. Now, at last, there is an answer to the cry of Isaac, as Abraham his father was taking him upon the mountain to offer him, "Father, where is the lamb?" and Abraham replied, "God will provide a lamb." Centuries later, as John sees Jesus coming toward him, knowing who he was, having baptized him six weeks earlier, he says to the crowd, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." Here is the one who will fulfill all the promise of the sacrifices of the Old Testament." [1] Isaiah 53:1-12, some of the most beautiful words of scripture, remind us of the Lamb of sacrifice for us. And Rev. 7:10 where we are reminded, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

13) What is baptism with the Holy Spirit? *Baptizo* means to immerse. In John 7:38-39, all believers partake of God the Holy Spirit now, when we believe. And He is given as a seal of our ownership: Eph 4:13, 30. We are immersed in God the Holy Spirit. Water changes you on the outside; God changes you on the inside. Also, the baptism of the Holy Spirit happened with power at Pentecost. It is not some separate, special event that imbues believers with additional gifts. 1 Cor. 12:13 and Acts 10:47 help clarify this. (Read Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16, John 1:33, Acts 1:5 and Acts 11:16 – where the scriptures directly speak about baptism in the Holy Spirit).

14) What is Johns' (both) point in verse 34? "That is a claim to deity. Every Hebrew would understand that if you say of someone, 'He is the son of something,' you are claiming that he is characterized by that very thing. If you say that he is the son of peace, he is characterized by peace; if he is the son of encouragement, that is the kind of a

person he is. And if Jesus is the Son of God, then he is God himself. That is what John claims. That is what John declared: there is One standing among you whom, perhaps you know not, but he is the fulfiller of all the promises of old, all the predictions of the Old Testament. He is the answer to all the unexplained sacrifices; he is the satisfier of the unfulfilled longings of men, because he is the Son of God. That is the good news for us today.” [1] This is the Son of God. Mission accomplished. Thank you John.

References:

1. Stedman, Ray C., *Hello Darkness*, 1983
2. Halley, Henry H., *Pocket Bible Handbook*, 1951
3. Guideposts, *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 1986
4. Zondervan, *The NIV Study Bible*, 1985
5. <http://www.geocities.com/ian4christ41/baptism.html> (Baptism in the Holy Spirit)

Some Answers to the questions:

1. John's baptism was with water and a baptism of repentance. Jesus baptized with the Holy Spirit. "Baptism is a sacrament, wherein the washing with water, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, doth signify and seal our in-grafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagement to be the Lord's." Baptism with water of John used as a way to identify with something: a sign of sincerity and earnestness.

When Jesus came to John to be baptized, John asked the same question. Why should he, a sinful man, baptize the Messiah? He tried to prevent Jesus from being baptized saying, "I need to be baptized by You and You are coming to me?" (Matthew 3:14). The baptisms that John performed symbolized repentance, and he saw this as inappropriate for the One he knew to be the spotless Lamb of God. Jesus replied that it should be done because "it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). Christ was here identifying Himself with sinners. He will ultimately bear their sins; His perfect righteousness will be imputed to them (2 Corinthians 5:21). Therefore, this act of baptism was a necessary part of the righteousness He secured for sinners. His was a perfect righteousness in that He fulfilled all the requirements of the Law which we, for whose sin He would exchange His righteousness, are not capable of fulfilling. He is our perfect substitute.

This baptism was a very public one and was recorded for all generations to know about and understand, and it is important for several reasons. First, it pictures His death and resurrection. Second, it symbolizes the believer's identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. Third, it marks His first public identification with those whose sins He would bear. Fourth, the event was a public affirmation of His Messiahship by the testimony that came directly from heaven (Matthew 3:17).

Water baptism is used as a way to identify. In Jesus' day, when a Gentile would convert to Judaism, he would have to be publicly baptized to identify him as a convert. Obviously, Jesus was not converting to anything. Jesus' baptism was an identification of Jesus with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Jesus was baptized to publicly announce Himself as God's Son, and to pronounce the beginning of His ministry with the Holy Spirit's power. Jesus did not "need" the Holy Spirit. However, to set an example for us, Jesus emptied Himself (Philippians 2:7) and relied upon the Holy Spirit's power. Jesus' baptism and reliance upon the Holy Spirit is an example that we are to follow in our own lives.

Baptism was a very common ceremony among the Jews, who never received a proselyte into the full enjoyment of a Jew's privileges until he was both baptized and circumcised. But such baptisms were never performed except by an ordinance of the Sanhedrin, or in the presence of three magistrates; besides, they never baptized Jews, nor even the children of proselytes, for they were considered as born under the covenant and had no need of the introductory rite of baptism. Now, as John had, in this respect, altered the common custom, admitting to his baptism Jews in general, the Sanhedrin took it for granted that no man had authority to make such changes unless especially commissioned from on high; and that only the prophet, or Elijah or the Messiah himself could have authority to act as John did.