

John's Baptism – Repentance And Confession



Foundations (Day 118)
by Derek Prince

Mark 1:3-5 provides a summary of John's message and ministry with its accompanying form of baptism.

> "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight. John came baptising in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptised by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins."

In the providence of God, John's message and ministry served two special purposes:

1. They prepared the hearts of the people of Israel for the advent and revelation of their long-awaited Messiah, Jesus Christ.
2. They provided a link between the dispensation of the law and the prophets, which was closed by John's ministry, and the dispensation of the gospel, which was initiated about three years later as a result of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In fulfilling both these purposes of God, John's ministry was of necessity brief and temporary. It did not constitute in itself a dispensation but merely a period of transition.

In his message and ministry, John made two main demands upon the people:

1. Repentance
2. Public confession of sins

Those who were willing to meet these two conditions were baptised by John in the river Jordan as a public testimony that they had repented of their past sins and were committing themselves henceforward to lead better lives.

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> "John came baptising in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." (Mark 1:4)

Obviously it does not mean that those who were baptised by John only entered into the experience of repentance and forgiveness after they had been baptised. On the contrary, when many of the Pharisees and Sadducees came to John to be baptised, John refused to accept them and demanded that they produce evidence of a real change in their lives before he would baptise them.

> "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, 'Brood of vipers! Who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance'." (Matt. 3:7-8)

In other words John demanded of them: "Prove first by your actions that there has been a real change in your lives before you ask me to baptise you." Plainly, therefore, the phrase "baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" should not be taken as indicating that these two inward experiences of repentance and forgiveness only followed after the outward act of being baptised. The outward act of being baptised served as a visible confirmation that those being baptised had already passed through the experiences of repentance and forgiveness. Thus the act of baptism served as an outward seal, giving assurance of an inward transformation which had already taken place.

These experiences were similar in character to the ministry of John – they were essentially transitional. Those whom John baptised did not receive abiding, inward peace and victory over sin, made possible only through the full gospel message of Jesus Christ; but their hearts were prepared to receive and respond to the gospel message when it should be proclaimed.

Devotional

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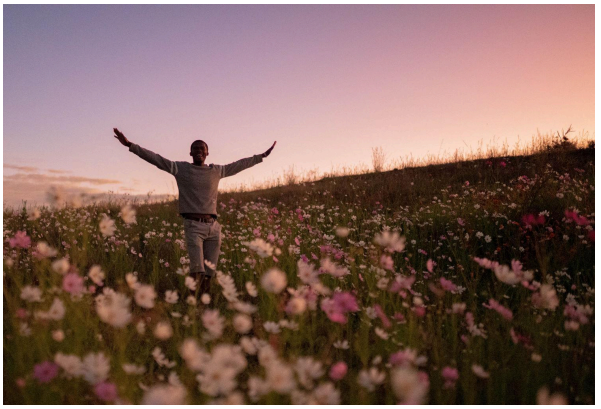

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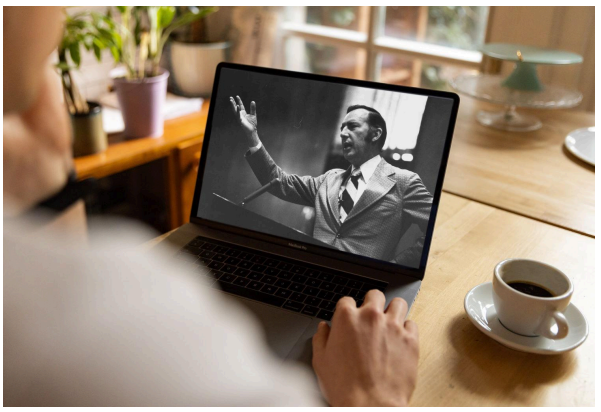

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