

LUKE 3. 21-22.

The Lord Jesus Christ appears to have come after, or rather at the end, of the baptism of many - not while the people were being baptized, but when they had been baptized. What was the reason? Baptism is not a goal, but a beginner. Ought they not to have remained and thus been ready to be led further? Apparently many of them had left John, not only with physical leaving, but failing to realize what baptism set forth. Hence, though John saw the wondrous view of Christ, few others were present, if any other. HE was to be manifested to Israel, but we are not told that crowds of Israel saw Him baptized. Somewhat interestingly in this connection we notice how the most remarkable baptism - that of the Lord Jesus which has been the most remarkable witness - was not particularly a public event at first. This has an important bearing. The great point for children of God is to honour their Lord's

will. Scripture does NOT now lay great stress on the baptisER as one appointed for some special 'office', nor the PLACE of the baptism, nor on the number who witness the baptism, but upon the one who is baptized being in a right condition, and on the baptism being in accord with the mind of God.

The Lord Jesus was baptized to set forth obedience, and was praying. The tense is changed. Baptism, an act; praying, a continuance. The words "Being baptized" in English would look like a similar tense, but it is rather "Having been baptized and keeping on praying". "The heavens were opened", and the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, descended - this was a fact. The WAY in which the Spirit of God came is remarkable. The coming in bodily form as a dove would remind us of the sacrificial aspect of the dove, a symbol of purity; would indicate, furthermore, the gentleness of the Lord Jesus, and still further would provide a contrast with God's gift from heaven to Elijah through the ravens. You will recollect that the Lord sent through the ravens to Elijah in the wilderness. The Spirit of God came as a dove upon Christ, Who was then "driven into the wilderness", where there was no food. The contrast is very remarkable. Again, there is another contrast, - Upon the disciples the Holy Spirit appeared in the form of a flame. Nothing to burn up in Christ, much to burn up in them. Yet again, baptism in water was with a view to baptism in the Spirit. This was pictured. But Christ in His baptism also pictured His going under THE WATERS OF WRATH, and therefore as His going under the waters of wrath was the stepping stone to His sending of the Holy Spirit, as the end of the gospels and the beginning of Acts would show, here we have a beautiful picture of this. He was baptized under typical water. The Spirit of God descended to show that when He went under wrath, i.e. under the waters of judgment, His work would be complete, and the Spirit of God would descend upon those who rose to newness of life in Him, and who would thus become faithful servants.

There is another parallel with this passage in Matt. 17. We have on the mount of transfiguration the voice from heaven, even as here the words from heaven. The Lord Jesus went up into a high mountain and was there transfigured; Moses and Elijah were talking to Him, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and, behold a voice out of the cloud which said, "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well-pleased". Observe that in Luke's gospel we read

that He was baptized, and prayed, and in the same gospel (Luke 9) we are told concerning the transfiguration "He went up into a mountain to PRAY, and AS HE PRAYED the fashion of His countenance was altered" - thus the words "from heaven" are in both places associated with PRAYER. Nor is this strange. When the Lord Jesus was praying in John 12, there came a voice from heaven, saying, "I have glorified and will glorify again". Thus we have a special stress on prayer. "I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter" is thus illustrated, and the type of the descent of the Holy Spirit is before us. But further linking with the transfiguration, do we not see the twofold testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ? His rising up from baptism reminds of, "Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee". The transfiguration pictures the coming day of the Lord. "Thou art My beloved Son". "This is My beloved Son, hear ye Him". In that future day of the Lord, it will be, "Every soul which will not hear that prophet will be cut off from among His people". "Hear ye Him" will be the mark of the coming day.

Thus the two events were not only events in history, but were pictorial of the two dispensations. The present dispensation was associated with the Lord Jesus as the well-approved One in Whom the Father was well-pleased. The power of the Holy Spirit over a wilderness-life, the future dispensation will have the glory of God displayed in the kingdom-triumph of Christ. That the transfiguration pictures the kingdom is clear from Hebrews 2, "We see Jesus Who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour, THAT HE by the grace of God might taste death" - crowned before death. The crowning, therefore, was on the mount of transfiguration, pictorial of His coming crowning. His coming royal glory in this earth. In like manner, the baptism and the descent of the Holy Spirit were pictorial of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and His work on the day of Pentecost. Hence we have the wonderful stress "Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well-pleased".

Isaiah 42 affords another parallel, "The Lord is WELL-PLEASED for His righteousness' sake". God the Father is well pleased with the finished work of His beloved Son. The Spirit of God came down as the proof of that; and the present dispensation, in its blessedness of the new covenant, and the future dispensation is its further blessed application of the new covenant, are

alike built upon the fact "My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased". The well-pleasing work of the Lord Jesus is the ground of our acceptance. The well-pleasing work of the Lord Jesus is the basis of every blessing, now and then.

These words also give us a practical encouragement, Just as the typical sacrifices were pictorial of the work of Christ and suggestive of the devotion of the worshipper and what the worshipper wished to become - for when he offered a bullock he said, "I wish to become a faithful servant"; when he offered a sheep he said, "I wish to become pure", - so here, this pictures not only Christ's finished work, but what His people should be. Made sons of God in His well-beloved Son, we are to realize that the mark of a son of God, a child of God, is - "In whom I am well-pleased". If we walk in the Spirit we shall be those in whom the Father is WELL-PLEASSED. The privilege of life after baptism is not to look back with satisfaction to the one act, but to realize that the believer's life AFTER baptism is to be seeking to please the Father. I do not mean that baptism SECURES this. The believer is not ready to be baptized TILL he wishes to be well-pleasing. Only as he rests upon the finished work of the Lord Jesus can he rightly be baptized, and only as he wishes to please God can he rightly be baptized. Baptism does not secure the blessing, but the Lord Jesus Christ was typically baptized BEFORE HE engaged in certain parts of His life-work, as if to suggest that baptism indicates we are willing to please the Lord in everything, to go where He wishes, to do what He wishes, to suffer what He wishes, to be what He wishes - in other words, baptism indicates in type what the believing soul experiences in regeneration, the crucifixion of the flesh, the burial of the flesh, the setting aside of the flesh, and the desire to live with a life well-pleasing unto the Father.

In the Lord Jesus Christ there was nothing that was grievous. John therefore, was surprised when He came to be baptized - "I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me"? The Lord's answer is definite, "Thus it becometh us" - not to do what the others did, they were confessing their sins, "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness". Christ's object was the opposite in some respects from that of others who came to be baptized, They confessed their sins, He pictured the fulfilling of all righteousness.

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