Mark 1:10-11 As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

I don’t know if you remember, but not long ago we had a very similar text before us only it was from the Gospel of John. At that time I speculated about whether or not John and Jesus knew each other and had spent some time together as kids. Yet I made it clear that what we speculated about didn’t matter because the only thing that really counts is what God reveals to us!

Now that is always a key point to remember when speaking of the Christian faith, “What does God reveal to us?” When you have that grasp, then it does make faith and believing in our Lord and Savior so much easier. I say that because if you take even the slightest divergence from the truth of the Bible, if you decide that anything, no matter how big or small is not true, well then, you have put into total doubt the Bible as any kind of spiritual guide. Yep, I believe you either believe the entire Bible to be God’s Word and absolutely true in everything or you and I are just wasting our time with all of this God stuff, because if our God was not capable of clearly and precisely revealing himself to us, then in the entire world there is no revelation of God! Pretty simple isn’t it. Since I do not have to doubt anything that Scripture says, I have no doubt that what Scripture says is absolutely true. My faith rests entirely on God and His power to reveal, fulfill and instill in souls eternal faith and all of this through His Word.

Which means that details of the Word are important. Take one of the details that I think we often overlook. Look at what John proclaims as he is pointing to the Christ that he knows is soon to be revealed. Our text said, **“And this was his message: ‘After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”** The last time we spoke of this ministry of John we pointed out John’s total humility, his confession of his unworthiness before the coming Christ, to the point of saying he was not even worthy to untie his sandals. So note that John is speaking of the power of the Christ and in that context of the power of Christ he says, **“I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”**

Why does John say that? As those who profess a knowledge of the Greek language we clearly teach that the base meaning of the word baptism is “to apply water.” It is not a word that tells you how to apply the water: you know: whether by immersion, sprinkling, dipping, pouring or wiping. And yet here is John saying clearly, “I baptize with water.” The Greek really doesn’t make much sense, because literally John is saying, “I apply water with water!” Why is John being so redundant? Is it because he is confused or because he is making a very specific point?

I think he is making a specific point. John is telling us that his baptism is nothing more than mere symbolism, the same symbolism found in the washing that went on in the Temple of the Jews as they brought their sacrifices. It was a washing that made you contemplate your sins. It was a washing where you were brought to contemplate the Christ and what He would do, but make no mistake, it was not the same baptism that Jesus would bring! John is telling us his baptism is just that, a water baptism but Jesus’ baptism would be special and would bring the Holy Spirit. John’s was symbolic and Jesus’ baptism would be a means of grace, a means by which God brings his Holy Spirit to call, gather and keep us in the one true faith.

That’s the reason that in the Book of Acts we find John’s disciples re-baptized with Jesus’ baptism (Acts 19:3-6). Jesus, because he showed himself to be the Christ, to be the one who was more powerful than John, caused the Holy Spirit to be a part of his applying of water. How that is all written and what we understand by it tells us so much about the importance of baptism. It is no longer just “symbolic” under Jesus. It is a bringer of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, one of the ways that God reveals he will work in us! God reveals that He will send his Holy Spirit upon us through the applying of water!

So why was Jesus baptized then? Because of the symbolism and what it all meant for us. Our theme will be: **THE MESSAGE OF JESUS’ BAPTISM.**

Yep, there is John the Baptist out doing his thing. He is preaching a message of the Savior to come, a Savior that John seems to know is coming very, very soon. John knows this because he is the forerunner of the Christ. That had been made clear to him by his parents as they no doubt told him many times the circumstances of his birth. So John is now in the wilderness conducting a ministry of calling people to repentance. He is definitely teaching the law. He is clearly pointing out sin and the foolishness of rejecting the Christ to come. He is preparing people for the revelation of the One who is to come after him who was more powerful than he was. What is interesting to note is that John has at the heart and core of his ministry the issue of baptism.

Why baptism? Baptism is literally a washing, wiping, sprinkling, pouring of water upon something to symbolize cleanliness and purity. I have no doubt that John’s baptism is a direct result of those things that took place at the temple of God, a temple John would have been trained at and a temple that John would have clearly grasped was really all about the Savior to be. For instance, every priest, before he entered the temple on the day of his service took a bath in the Temple baths provided just for that. And then as those same priests were going about their duties, every time they were going past the Bronze laver of the temple they stopped to wash their hands and feet. In other words as a priest you started with a bath and then washed your hands and feet numerous times throughout the day!

Do you understand the symbolism? The washing was done because of sin. Those priests as they went about their duties were to bath and wash to constantly remind them that sin was all around. They were to contemplate sin, they were to wash to represent repentance and confession of sin. Finally, as a priest in service to the people, representing God before the people, they washed to show they were cleansed from sin and now able to help and serve the people. The whole issues of baptizing or washing was about sin and its ability to disqualify you for service to the Lord, unless you were washed!

And now here is Jesus being baptized! He did this because his whole life was about confronting and overcoming sin. Jesus thought about, faced, overcame and would eventually serve as the atoning sacrifice for sin. In other words, this baptism of Jesus symbolized his readiness, his ability and his eagerness to be the priest for the people of God. The last priest. The One great priest who by one baptism, his own, would bring about the defeat of sin and finally break its power over mankind. Here is the message of Jesus being baptized: fulfilling the requirement of being symbolically washed and cleansed to serve as priest for the people of God. No wonder when Jesus came to John, Matthew records this conversation: **“But John tried to deter him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’ Jesus replied, ‘Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.’”** With those words Jesus is telling us this baptism is the fulfillment of the Law that allowed a priest to serve!

Still there is more to be understood. Do you remember the way John was told he would be able to identify the Christ? John himself said, **“I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.”** Here was a way to clearly identify who the Christ was so that there could be no imposters. The Father and the Holy Spirit would identify and reveal the Savior!

You do realize that every gospel account of the baptism of Jesus includes and, clearly, highlights the Holy Spirit upon Jesus! It is true, that the Gospel of John does it through the words of John the Baptist, but every single one points out this awesome occasion. Here, following his baptism, as Jesus is coming up from the river Jordan, the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove comes upon him. Not just flies by or hovers around but it is clear that this dove lands on Jesus and stays there for a while. The message is clear. Here is the Christ, the Savior. Here is the One people have been waiting for, the One who has the Holy Spirit, the One who will give the Holy Spirit! Here is God’s Messiah, who through the Holy Spirit will bring faith and forgiveness to the people of God.

What we should not miss is the clear testimony of John the Baptist and what he now knew. He says, **“I have seen and I testify that is this the Son of God.”** And following those words of the Baptist the very next lines say this: **“The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God.’”** Those words tell us that John knew Jesus was the Christ, the one who would be the atoning sacrifice for sin. His words identify Jesus as the true Passover Lamb who would die and in that death, the threat of eternal damnation would be defeated for all. And might I mention that every sacrifice made at the temple was to be ceremonially washed or baptized beforehand. It is clear that John got the message of Jesus. The question is: “Do we?”

And still one more thing to point to in this baptism of Jesus. That voice from heaven! Here is what I want you to grasp. John had a very successful ministry and we are told people from the entire nation of Israel came out to see him. In other words, John was always surrounded by crowds of people and those who were his disciples. All of those people saw what happened with Jesus. All of those people saw that dove come down and land on Jesus. Better yet, all of those people were witnesses of the other great thing that happened. Our text records it this way: **“As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’”**

Please note the text says the heavens were torn open. While we wrestle with exactly what that means I believe most artists who picture this moment do get it right when they show a strong beam of light surrounding Jesus. In the Old Testament we hear on a regular basis about “The Glory of the Lord” and how that “Glory” of God descended on Mt. Sinai and the Tabernacle. I believe we have the very same thing going on here. And just as in the past that “Glory of the Lord” signified God’s presence and God’s approval of events so this event does the same. Except there is a voice. Here is God the Father giving his approval to Jesus! Jesus is the Christ! Jesus is the one who will save God’s people, all who believe, from sin, death and the Devil.

But again let me share with you John the Baptist’s very own testimony. I think it says it all. In John 3:27-36 we find these words. They were spoken right after some of the Baptist’s disciples complained that Jesus was now drawing more people than John. **“A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, ‘I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.’ The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less. The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God wrath remains on him.”**

There it is. The purpose of Jesus! And how did John know? Because of the events of the baptism of Jesus and the fulfillment of all righteousness. Because God in this event has shown the Savior. Because the Savior brings and gives the truth and wonder of God. Because the Savior speaks for God and has all things in His hands. Because the Savior through his atoning sacrifice brings eternal life to those who believe. There is what Jesus is about. About eternal life. About the truth of God. About the Savior, your Savior, my Savior, the Savior of the entire world! May you hear and believe Jesus the Son of God and your Savior. Amen.