

Buried With Him

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When you think about revival, what comes to your mind? Getting together with friends at church? Singing great music, and listening to the preaching of the Bible? Even coming forward to an altar call?

You know, when I think of revival, I can't help but think of one man in particular, who of all times was definitely the greatest of revival preachers! Though he lived far away from the cities, he drew crowds from all walks of life. From the great religious leaders, the wealthy, to the working class, and even slaves—all were affected by his messages. Even though what he said didn't always make him popular. He wasn't affiliated with any of the Christian denominations of our day. He proclaimed the Advent of Christ, so in that since he was one of the first Adventists. Our Southern Baptist friends, of course, like to claim him as a charter member. His name: none other than John the Baptist.

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matthew 3:1-2)

As Isaiah said:

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord'"

Picture John, standing by the Jordan river:

"Now John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins." (Matthew 3:4-6)

A fearless revival preacher he was, too. When the Pharisees and Sadducees came out to hear he preach, he denounced their hypocrisy

"Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance." (Matthew 3:7-8)

Yes, John was indeed a fearless preacher—and his very appearance and way of life gave a witness to the truth which he preached. He was sent to herald the coming deliverer.

"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." (Matthew 3:11)

Imagine yourself, standing in the crowd of people, listening, straining to catch the words of this mighty man of God. You see the people filing down into the river, and one by one, John dips them under the water. But as He baptizes one man, a humble Galilean, his manner suddenly changes. Jesus, as yet unknown to the world, rises from the water, and as He prays, a glorious light flashes down from heaven. The Holy Spirit comes down upon Jesus, in the form of a dove. The sky above opens up, and the voice of God pronounces, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:17)

John has no doubt in his mind! In tone of solemn awe, John cries out to the surrounding throng, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

Behold! The Lamb!

The voice of John the Baptist, ringing out across the desolate hills of Palestine, hearkens back to the earliest days of human history. Everyone knows—exactly—what John is saying! For since ancient times, the Jews and all the followers of the One True God had worshiped Him by bringing a lamb. The lamb of sacrifice, whose shed blood represented the True sacrifice, the promised Seed of the woman, who would bring deliverance to men and women who have come under the power of Satan. This Jesus, says John, is the Christ—the deliverer—the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

Last Wednesday, we talked about how Lucifer chose to rebel against God. We saw how a third of the angels, and then Adam and Eve and all the human race have followed in the same course—of doing what we want to do, instead of doing what God has made us to do.

I also gave you an introduction to this beautiful object lesson—this 3D model that God gave to the Israelites—of the plan of redemption.

Picture yourself as an Israelite father. You've been amazed at what is taking place around you—you've seen the thunder and smoke on Mount Sinai, and you've heard the Ten Commandments, spoken by the voice of God. You know that, as it stands now, you've got a pretty long tab on your account, so to speak. The other day, when you lied to the shopkeeper and stole a pair of sandals. And the bad words you said, when you got angry at your uncle Reuben. Just to name a few. But even one sin—even a wrong thought—would be enough to need a sacrifice.

And so, you take a lamb, and you make your way to the center of camp, where the tabernacle has been pitched.

As you approach the tabernacle, you see the curtain fence surrounding the courtyard. It would be easy just to duck under the fence—but no, you must go around to the door, on the east end of the courtyard.

Jesus says in John 10:9, “I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved.”

Have you ever heard anyone say, “What does it matter what I believe? We're all going to the same place anyhow!” But is this what Jesus taught? Is one way just as good as another? Or does he not say specifically “I am the door”?

Jesus is the only way to salvation, friends. In John 14:6 Jesus says ““I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” Not through works, or something we can accomplish. Not through birth, or wealth, or eloquence, or fame, or pride, or humility or anything else that we can do—but only through Jesus can we have any hope.

As you enter through the gate into the courtyard, you approach the large bronze altar, where the sacrifices are offered every day. All different types of sacrifices are brought to the temple—from cattle, to

goats and sheep, to birds. Even offerings of flour and grain were brought to the temple—each according to the occasion, and each one governed by specific rules that were designed by God to direct the worshiper's mind to the coming Messiah.

Next to the altar, you place your hands on the head of the lamb, and confess your sin. This is a symbol of how Jesus carried the guilt of your sin in His body as He died on the cross. A priest, clothed in pure white linen robes, stands by your side, but you must take the knife and kill the lamb with your own hands.

The sacrifice is separated. Parts are washed in water, and the blood is sprinkled around the altar. In many cases, the blood is taken inside the sanctuary as well.

It's important to notice that the animals were always slain in the courtyard. The courtyard around the sanctuary is a symbol of this earth. Jesus came to this earth and died as a sacrifice.

The animal was always killed on the north side of the altar. “He shall kill it on the north side of the altar.” (Leviticus 1:11) Jesus died on mount Calvary. Where? On the north side of Jerusalem!

Isn't it fascinating to see how every detail of the sanctuary was a prophecy of Jesus? I wish we had time to go through every verse in Leviticus—to just unpack it and see how much detail of Jesus life we can discover! I used to think that Leviticus was one of the most dry and boring books in the Bible—but it's fascinating when you really study it.

The sanctuary itself is a symbol of heaven—where God dwells. The Bible tells us that God records the deeds, whether good or evil, of those who profess to serve him. “So a book of remembrance was written before Him For those who fear the LORD And who meditate on His name” (Malachi 3:16) A detailed book is being written—everything you think and say and do. You may think that nobody sees; that nobody knows; but God knows. Whether it's good or whether it's bad. Just as Jesus bore our sin in His body, so the blood of His atonement is taken into the court of God, and there, if we confess and ask for his forgiveness, He blots out the record and makes it clean with His blood.

Speaking of being clean, that brings us to the next piece of furniture in the courtyard: the laver. The laver

was a large round basin full of water, that the priests used to wash and purify themselves, before they ministered inside the sanctuary.

The Bible says that this laver of brass was made out of the looking glasses of the women of the congregation. Tell me, what is a mirror for? To look at yourself? These women freely gave up their mirrors, that they had brought from Egypt, and Moses melted them down and turned them into a beautiful piece of furniture for the sanctuary. And how fitting that it should be used to hold water—to purify and cleanse—and to reflect the beauty of the sanctuary. Moses took an offering of something totally profane and selfish, and turned it into something useful for God.

You know, when we here the gospel, so often we are tempted to think that it's all about what I can get—what God is going to give me. But I want you to pause and think for just a moment. What does God want you to give? The gospel isn't just about wiping clean a set of books—it's about changing you and me. And in order for that to happen, we have to be willing to give everything. After all, God made us—He redeemed us! Can we really say that anything we have belongs to us? What about your time? What about your money?

Animal sacrifices weren't the only gifts brought to the temple. God required that a tithe—that is, one tenth of the increase—be brought to the temple. This one-tenth, God says, belongs to Him.

*“Will a man rob God?
Yet you have robbed Me!*

But you say,

*‘In what way have we robbed You?’
In tithes and offerings. (Malachi 3:8)*

*Bring all the tithes into the storehouse,
That there may be food in My house,*

And try Me now in this,”

Says the LORD of hosts,

*“If I will not open for you the windows of heaven
And pour out for you such blessing*

That there will not be room enough to receive it.

Since ancient times, God's faithful followers have returned one tenth as a tithe, in token of the fact that God owns everything in the world, and that we are only His stewards of the goods He has intrusted to us. In the time of the Israelites, the tithe was used to support the priests and levites in their service in

connection with the temple. In addition, the Israelites would bring free-will offerings of all kinds, and they were very generous, as we can see from the gift of the mirrors, that were formed into the beautiful laver.

Water purifies on the outside, and gives life on the inside. During their secret midnight interview, Jesus made a shocking statement to Nicodemus. He said, “you must be born again.” Born again? What could this mean? A second time He said, “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”

Born again. Made into something completely new. This was the message of John the Baptist. “Repent, and be baptized.”

Being put under the water is a symbol of death. “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

The Christian life is something so totally new, and different, from anything else, that the only way Jesus could describe it, is to be born again. And when you are born again, it's not you who is living anymore, but Jesus who lives through you. Paul writes: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”

This is what it means to receive the Holy Spirit. When Jesus was baptized, there were three distinct Ones who were present: Jesus, who was baptized, God the Father, who spoke from Heaven, and the Holy Spirit, who came down upon Jesus in the form of a dove.

Just before He ascended to heaven, Jesus commissioned His disciples to “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Some people are troubled by the fact that all three: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are mentioned together. But this is what the Bible says.

Christians and Jews have always believed in one God. Deuteronomy 6:4, known as the Shema, states plainly: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!” But it does not do any injustice to the

text, to understand that the “One” God, whom we serve, is truly three separate persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three are so closely united in thought, in spirit, and in purpose, that they are truly one God.

Perhaps it is a little like a husband and wife. Since Kristina and I have been married, we have nearly everything in common. She has taken my name—our home, and cars, and even bank account have both our names on them. We talk to each other, and share everything with each other. No one would mistake one of us for the other, but after less than five years of our marriage, I just feel like part of me is missing if she isn't around!

This, of course, is a poor comparison, but I think you get the idea. When God created the world, he said “Let us make man in our image.” The pronouns are clearly plural.

And this God—yes all three in one—is calling you. Calling you to make a commitment. Jesus died for you. Would you die for Him? Is there anything you wouldn't give up, in order to follow Him? In fact, Jesus says that you *must* die. You *must* die to self, and to sin, and be born again. Be born of water, and of the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit, if you let Him, Jesus can make your life something totally new—something that reflects His glory through you. And as a symbol of this new birth experience, Jesus taught us, by example, to partake of the rite of baptism.

“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38)

Friends, He's given everything—for you. He didn't have to, but He chose to, out of His heart of love. And now He's calling you to make a radical commitment. Something like you've never done before. To lay yourself down, like young Isaac, or like the lamb—to be a sacrifice to God. It may not be a physical death, but the struggle is just as hard. God might ask you to give up a job, or family, or material possessions. He might ask you to step out in faith, like the Israelites, journeying into the wilderness in the face of certain disaster. But He promises to go with you by His Spirit—to empower you to any call in service for Him.

Friend, are you willing to take the challenge? It

will certainly be the most radical thing you've ever done. But friends, it's worth it!

I want to challenge you tonight! Every one of you should have received a paper when you came in. At the bottom this paper is a tear-off section, with some questions. You may not feel ready quite yet—that's OK. But if you would like to make this commitment, and take the step of baptism, to dedicate your life to God in a real and public way, then I want you to put a mark in the first box. “I want to be baptized.”

Many of you have already taken this step—if so, praise God! But perhaps, for some of you, that was a long time ago, and since then you have fallen away. You've turned your back on God, but now, you want to make that commitment again. If this is you, I want you to check the second box, “I want to be re-baptized.” Or perhaps you've been baptized before, but not in the way the Bible describes baptism—or perhaps you didn't understand what it meant, the first time you were baptized, and you'd like the opportunity to make the re-commitment in a real and personal way. If this is you, then mark the second box, “I want to be re-baptized.”

Maybe you're still making your decision. It's a big decision—it's one that affects your whole life, now and for eternity. There's still time to make the decision, but God is calling now. I'd like you to write your name on the cards, and put down a telephone number and address where someone can contact you. As we exit after prayer, we will have a basket at the back to put the cards in.

If you're still not sure you're ready for this decision, but you'd like to study more, mark the third box on the card. And if you will commit to pray for all the decisions that are being made here tonight, and for these dear brothers and sisters who are making these commitments, I want you to mark the last box on the card.

Friends—brothers and sisters—this is a wonderful, precious commitment that is being made. It's not the end of the journey. It's only the beginning. And let me warn you ahead of time—once you make this commitment, the devil is going to put up a fight. It may seem like all hell breaks loose over your head, literally—but Remember, Jesus has gone before. He's given everything for you. What can you give for him?