

BAPTISM

A SERMON

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“And Jesus, when he was baptized went up straightway out of the water; and, lo! The heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit descending like a dove, and lighting upon him.” Matthew 3:16

IF John were baptizing a few miles above the northern head of the Dead Sea, then the Savior came not much, if any, less, I cannot speak with accuracy, because I know not from which part of Galilee he came, but he could not have come much, if any, less than fifty miles to be baptized of John in Jordan. Now, this is a very different feeling in the Savior from what we see in some Christians; they would run fifty, and perhaps twice fifty, miles to get away from that ordinance that the Savior came fifty miles to attend to. And this thought suggests something else: that while we, as sinners, were afar off, the Savior did not think it too far to come after us. he didn't say in the high councils of heaven, Father, they are so far off, sin has formed such a mighty gulf between God and them, the journey will be so terrible, the work so tremendous, that I cannot undertake to accomplish the ingathering of sinners so far off. Nothing of the kind. So far from this being the case, he rejoiced as a strong man to run a race, knowing that he should obtain the prize, that he should save much people alive. And, if the things of God, salvation, and the things that accompany salvation, are not worth going far for, if need be; if those things are not worth seeking, suffering for, and being cared for, then what things are? All things we can desire cannot be equal to godliness. So the Savior came and was baptized of John in Jordan; and our text very beautifully describes the circumstances of this great matter, that when he “went up straightway out of the water, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him.”

We have two things to attend to this morning. We have not practically, certainly, to attend to the ordinance of baptism this morning, but that is the first thing we have to notice. First, *the ordinance of believer's baptism*; secondly, *the opening of the heavens*.

First, *the ordinance of believer's baptism*. In order to get clearly at this, let us in the first place look at what “believer's baptism” is intended to represent. It is intended to represent two things: the first thing which this ordinance of believer's baptism is intended to represent is, that of the

death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is one of the forms in which his incomprehensible and indescribable sufferings are presented to us: "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished." If you look at the margin of your Bibles, those that have marginal readings, where the Savior says, "How am I straitened," the margin reads it, "How am I pained." Both these readings are very expressive. When he said "How am I straitened" of course it means that infinitely solemn and responsible position in which the Savior stood as the Surety for poor, perishing sinners. And then the other reading, "How am I pained until it be accomplished", there are two thoughts in that, first, the pains of death that he had to undergo; secondly, his uneasiness, we may say his restlessness, until it was accomplished; for he never for one moment lost sight of the great end for which he came into this world. And we find the Lord speaking in prediction upon this restlessness until the great end was accomplished: "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace;" nor did the Savior cease to tell out the wonders of eternity, even to the very last: "And for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burns." Now, next to the ark and Jonah, both of which are figures of the Savior's immersion or baptism, the 42nd Psalm is, perhaps, of all the Old Testament Scriptures most expressive upon this. That Psalm belongs to Christ altogether: "As the hart pants after the water-brooks, so pants my soul after you, O God." Jesus Christ, in the primary, blessed, and most substantial sense, is there described, and answers to what is there said. Then, in that same Psalm, the Savior said, "My soul is cast down," or, as the New Testament says, "exceeding sorrowful" "therefore will I remember you from the land of Jordan" ah! why from Jordan? Because when he comes there, and when he comes out of the water before his death, notice, here is the Holy Spirit showing his approbation of Christ; here are the heavens opened to show approbation of Christ; here is the voice of God the Father to show approbation of Christ. "Therefore, will I remember you from the land of Jordan and of the Hermonites" that is, from the north of Canaan, where he was transfigured. So, here prediction foreshows those three manifestations of God to Christ while he was here below. It was connected with the mountains of the Hermonites that the transfiguration took place, and there the voice came, "This is my beloved Son; hear you him." And "from the hill Mizar," or little hill, referring to his position three days before his death. This is just to show us that Christ, as man, looked back to these circumstances, and, as man, took courage therefrom. Then comes in, in that 42nd Psalm, a description of this solemn baptism, and what he went into, as expressive of that to which we must have eternally come, if he himself had not gone into those deep waters and brought us out; and those who understand something about it, can join, by faith in Christ, with the Psalmist, when he said, "He sent from above; he took me; he drew me out of many waters." Now, in that 42nd Psalm, there is a description of the Savior's baptism. "Deep calls unto deep," our deep, unfathomable sins, for the very human heart is unfathomable in its deceitfulness, being deceitful above all things, desperately wicked and the deeps of our sins called to the deeps of God's wrath, and these two tremendous deeps met upon the Savior: "deep calls unto deep at the noise of your waterspouts: all your waves and your billows are me over me." But then he met this terrible ocean, rolled it back, and has made a way for the ransomed to pass over. When Jesus Christ rose from the dead, he virtually brought all the people up with him, that is to say, legally so; he having put an end to sin, he having dried up that terrible Euphrates; and having dried up that mighty ocean, he himself is thus become the way by which we come out of great tribulation, even infinite and eternal tribulation. It is Jesus that has thus delivered us from the wrath to come. And so I say, when he rose from the dead all the people virtually rose: "Your dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, you that dwell in dust, for your dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall

cast out the dead.” This is one thing, then, that baptism is intended to represent, this wonderful immersion of the Savior. There is not perhaps in the whole range of the English language one word that is altogether adequate to express what the original word *bapizo* means, because it means not only immersion, but it means emersion. The English word “immersion” is certainly the best word, perhaps, that we have: but more of this presently. This is one thing, then, intended to be represented by baptism. What shall we say then, to such a Savior as this? What shall we say to the Lord’s mercy in bringing us to see that he alone could stem the torrent, that he alone could stem the floods of fury, that he alone could work out this eternal deliverance from the wrath to come?

The second thing intended to be represented by baptism is the soul’s transit from death to life. The soul is regenerated by the Spirit of God, and is said to be baptized; as the apostle says, “We are all baptized into one body.” While the soul by nature is immersed in death, darkness, bondage, and everything that is against God, immersed in the fall of man, the work of the Holy Spirit is to cause the soul to emerge out of this its state by nature, and then it becomes immersed into the life of God, the light of God, the love of God, the Spirit of God. Ah, say you, you must not say immersed in the Spirit of God. Well, I had a great mind to bring a little New Testament with me, a translation recently given by a body of learned men across the Atlantic; but I can quote the words without having the Testament here. In this 3rd of Matthew they render the words like this: “I indeed immerse you in water, but there comes one alter me mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to loosen; he shall immerse you in the Holy Spirit and fire.” Why deny that you are immersed in the Spirit? John says, “Immediately I was in the Spirit!” And when I get to glory, nothing short of immersion into the eternal Spirit of God in all his vitality, purity, and perfection; nothing short of the soul’s immersion into the perfection of Christ, nothing short of the soul’s immersion into the love of God, nothing short of the soul’s immersion into eternal glory; for I shall not want heaven in me merely, I shall want heaven round about me; not only in my soul, but I shall want the opening heavens round about me to shine as well; while I have heaven in me, I want to be in heaven. Here, then, baptism is intended to represent first the immersion, and then the emersion of the Savior, and then the soul is immersed into oneness with Christ, by which it becomes dead to sin, to the law, to the curse, to Egypt, dead to the old dragon, to Pharaoh and all his powers; and when it is thus immersed, it emerges up into life; and there stands the man one with the Spirit of God, one with the Christ of God, one with the truth of God, one with his immutability.

Now let us look at baptism as an ordinance. As to sprinkling, why, there is not common sense in it. I know very well some of our non-Baptist friends say, It doesn’t matter whether there is a little water or much water. Now I speak in a most sincere, humble, friendly way, of course, because I love our non-Baptist friends as well as our Baptist friends; still, at the same time, I feel my conscience must go out of the world clear. Now you say it does not matter whether there is much water or little water. Well, carry out your argument. You would not like to say it does not matter whether you have much of the Holy Spirit or little, whether you are brought into much light or little light, whether you are brought into much love or little love; or whether you are brought into the glory of God a little, and sprinkled with a few rays of light, or, on the other hand, to be as the Israelites were, they were immersed in the cloud and in the sea; you would not like to say this. Then why do you treat the ordinance of baptism as you would not treat the great essentials of the gospel, seeing the one is intended to represent the other. You say it does not matter whether there is little water or much water. Ah, you would not like to say, it does not matter whether Christ went merely to the brink of the Jordan, merely to the borders of the sea, or whether he dried up the

depths of the sea, and made a way for the ransomed to pass over. You would not like to say, it does not matter whether he suffered much or suffered little; whether he went down very deep, as the 69th Psalm testifies, where there is no standing, or whether he did not. You would not like to say this. And, on the other hand, you would not like to say, It does not matter whether the Lord blesses me with much water of life or with little; it does not matter whether he so blesses me with the water of life that it shall spring up to everlasting life, or whether he does not; it does not much matter, either will do. So, then, when you come to essential things you would shudder at the thought of so trifling with the tremendous sanctions of the blessed God. And if our eyes are opened, and our feelings right, we shall reverence everything that belongs to him that has loved us with such a love, saved us at such a cost, brought us up from such degradation, to make us inherit a throne of eternal glory.

Now what was John's baptism? It was no more John's baptism than it was or is mine. John did not contrive baptism; John was not the author of baptism; John was not the owner. The matter stands like this, as John himself tells us: "He," Christ Jesus, "sent me to baptize." And I will presently show you, pretty clearly, that John's baptism and our baptism are one and the same. "He sent me to baptize." It was not John's own contrivance. And as soon as ever the dear Savior had, by his servant John, commenced the New Testament dispensation, Christ himself comes, he himself is baptized, and thus gives a Christian character to the practice of it. Oh, some of you lovers of his name, how can you resist his command, how can you stay away from his holy ordinance, how can you make light of it? No sooner had the Savior, by his servant John, I say, commenced the New Testament dispensation, then Christ himself came forward, and would reckon himself, what shall I say? although the Head of the Church, yet would reckon himself disobedient if he did not conform to this ordinance. For when John, with that humility and modesty very proper to him, refused to baptize the Savior, feeling it was an honor too great for John to have, what did the Savior say? "Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becomes us," notice that, me and my brethren; I am one of the brethren among you, though the Head of the Church; "thus it becomes us to fulfil all righteousness." By and by, a little time after, the time draws near when the Lord's Supper is to be instituted, they eat the Passover, and as soon as ever the Passover is eaten, Judas goes out, and then the Savior and his disciples change the tables, and the Savior says, "Arise, let us go hence." Hitherto it has been the literal vine; now it is to be the spiritual vine; hitherto it has been the blood of beasts on Jewish altars slain, but now it is to be my blood in the New Testament; hitherto it has been a temporal covenant, but now it is to be an eternal covenant; hitherto it has been the lower, the providential table of national distinction; but now it is to be the table of immortality, now it is to be that bread that endures to everlasting life. "Arise, let us go hence." So, when Judas was gone, "Take this, this is my blood that is shed for you, and this is my body, broken for you." And thus, the Savior fulfilled all righteousness. As soon as ever, by his servant, he had established baptism, he himself came and was baptized, and as soon as the Passover was over, he himself instituted the Supper, and partook thereof. Now what was John's baptism? On what ground did John baptize people? Simply on the ground that they believed in Jesus Christ, knew their need of Christ. Hence you read that they came confessing their sins. Now if they came confessing their sins in the true sense of the word, it was because the Lord had showed these people their sins, and these same people were believers in Jesus Christ. So that John baptized on the ground of faith and repentance. Perhaps I had better stop here and just remind you that there is no efficacy in the water, not even in immersion, much less in sprinkling, that will regenerate the soul. You see the Lord has so ordered it that the man is to be a Christian before he is baptized. Do not you see this? The work is

done, and therefore if the Puseyite priest comes to me, and says. "Well, have you been," what he calls "baptized?" I should say, "No, sir, not in your sense of the word." "Then you are not regenerated." "I beg your pardon, air; I take the description of the apostle 'not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost.'" Ah, say some, I think John's baptism stood by itself, How was it the Savior was baptized by him then? How was it the Savior kept it in practice? How was it the Savior gave the command to the apostles, and how was it they obeyed it? Some of our non-Baptist brethren will go to the 19th of Acts, where the apostle met with some, and said, "Have you received the Holy Ghost since you believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what, then, were you baptized. And they said, Unto John's baptism." There, say some of our non-Baptist friends, do not you see that John did not know anything of the Holy Ghost. Ah, friends, do not talk, I was going to say, such nonsense; I must not use that word, either. Now what did these men say? did they say John baptized them? No, they did not say that; they said they were baptized "unto John's baptism;" just showing that some carnal men, man-made ministers, that knew nothing whatever of divine things, had taken up John's baptism, and converted people to it, and persuaded them to be baptized; but that such persons knew nothing about the Holy Ghost, nor about Christ. Then the apostle takes it up, and describes what John's baptism was. "John truly baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus." Ah, say some, that is all very well, but John did not know anything about the Holy Ghost. Just read the 3rd of Matthew, and you will see that John knew the Holy Ghost. Ah, say you, after he proceeded to Jordan. No, before that; for when the Pharisees came, and John refused to baptize them, he then turned round to the other class of men, that he had baptized, and said, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance; but he that comes after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear; he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire." And yet John knew nothing of the Holy Ghost. Ah, friends, those men you read of in the 19th of Acts, were baptized unto John's baptism, but they were not baptized by John; for if they had been, they would have heard that there was a Holy Ghost. So, then John's baptism is Christ's baptism, and that baptism was continued. Again, is it not a rather remarkable sort of thing, if it did not matter whether there was little water or much, whether it was sprinkling or immersion, that throughout the gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and the epistles, there is not a solitary instance of the wafer being brought to the candidate? Why, the old woman of Samaria's pitcher would have baptized ten thousand if it consisted of sprinkling; I could have dipped my finger in the pitcher, and have baptized ten thousand. And yet you have not a single instance in all the New Testament, of water being brought. Surely, friends, if it consisted of what some of our independent ministers say, independent enough of God's ordinance and God's command, the water might be fetched. But in all cases, they came to the water. And why should they go into the river Jordan? That is not a very shallow river, I can tell you. They went *into* the river. What in the world should they go *into* the river for, if it were mere sprinkling or pouring? And John baptized in Aenon because there was much water there." Ah, say some, that might mean "many waters." I do not care, that would make it much worse; for if there was much water in one river, and you could alter the rendering, and make it many waters, that would make it many rivers; and the further you go the more you will get into the water; and a good thing too.

Now I have a word to say as to strict communion. The New Testament presents no other way to the table. I will ask this assembly, do you think that the Lord Jesus Christ sent his apostles, one

part of them with one order of ordinances for the New Testament dispensation, and the other part of them with another order? Can you believe such a thing? Is there the least hint of such a thing? Do you not see in the close of this book that he said, "Go and teach all nations," the teaching comes first, and then the baptizing in the name of the Holy Three. So, then, he gave this ordinance; and the apostle said, "There is one Lord, one faith, and one baptism." Now there are three baptisms, but there is only one of each kind; there is only one ordinance of baptism, only one baptism by the Holy Ghost, and one of Christ. Would it not be strange that he should give one kind of command to the one, and another to the other? But he did not. Now what shall we say to the following words? We are Gentiles, and our prototypes, if I may so call them, at Caesarea, were brought to know the Lord, and they made an inquiry what was to be done, and the apostle Peter, by the infallible inspiration of the Spirit of God, commanded them to be baptized. It is wrong for me to appeal, perhaps, to our non-Baptist friends, but I do it because I love you. I must say to you, as believers in Jesus Christ, that commandment is as much to you to be baptized as it was to the Christians of Caesarea. You are a believer, you are indebted to what Christ has done, your soul is immersed into the light, and life, and liberty of the everlasting gospel; and there is a divine command for you to be baptized. Perhaps some of you will ask, Do you mean to say that we who are not Baptists are disobedient to that command? I leave your own consciences to that matter. And I will tell you something else; You would not so deal with any other command of the Lord. We were reading this morning that we are commanded to love one another. Would you, as a Christian, say that that does not belong to you, that you have nothing to do with brotherly love, that you have nothing to do with unity with the saints? You would not say that. Then if we would not trifle with one command, why should we trifle with another? "He commanded them to be baptized." And there never was and never will be more than one way to the table. Christ's baptism, I mean his baptism as we have described in the 42nd Psalm, is the only way to heaven above, to the table above; and baptism, or immersion, is the only way to the table below. "He commanded them." What is our answer? Peter, we don't regard your command, we think nothing of your command, we set aside your command. Then again, we have another Scripture. You say, We are baptized by the Holy Ghost. That is the very reason why you should obey the Lord's commandment; at least Peter makes it a reason he said, "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" So, then John baptized believers, and only believers; and here we have at Christ's baptism at Jordan the presence of the Holy and Eternal Three.

Then again, how is it, can you account for it, that we are so very anxious for one ordinance, and yet think so little of the other? Ah, it is said, you Baptists keep the dear children of God away from the table. No, they keep themselves away. It may seem bad, but it would be a great deal worse the other way. I can stand before God with a clear conscience in keeping you back. I cannot stand before God with a clear conscience if I cast his commandment out, if I break willfully his order of things, if I put that out of place which he has put into place. He has given the command, and his word is quite enough for me. While I have been honored to be in public for more than forty years, I have never been suffered to move from his sovereign commands, and trust I never, never shall. There is one Scripture which I often wonder our non-Baptist friends do not drop under, "If you love me" how many times have not some of you said, "Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you;" what comes next? "keep my commandments." No, I will not. But then you see he does not suffer his patience to wear out, or his love to wear out; he meets our non-Baptist friends at the table, and smiles upon them there; not because they have obeyed him, though, but in spite of their

having disobeyed him; for I do not make the Lord's presence so conditional as that; still at the same time I like the Lord's own way.

“If you believe with all your heart, you may.” “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and if the Ethiopian had not so believed, he would not have been baptized. And then again, how is it we are got a little out of order? We talk so much about the Lord's Supper, and I love that ordinance; it is the command I look at, not the water, but the Lord's command; it is not the bread and the wine, but the Lord's command I look at. I think we are got a little out of order, for you find the Epistles speak very much more of baptism than they do of the Lord's Supper. How is that? Why, one would have thought the apostle might have written the Epistle to the Galatians without bringing in baptism, but he could not; in the 3rd chapter he says, “You are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” And then again, “buried with him in baptism.” Now would you like to say, “buried with him in sprinkling?” You are not so foolish in temporal things; you are sharp enough there. If I were to come to your shop, and try to delude you as much upon natural things as you delude yourself sometimes upon spiritual things, you would pretty soon be too sharp for me, very soon indeed The Lord give us wisdom.

So then we have the New Testament dispensation commenced with the baptism of John; we have the Savior coming to him to be baptized; we have at that baptism the presence of the Eternal Three; the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit descending like a dove, and the Father saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Then we have the Lord giving the command; then we have the Acts of the Apostles, where they went and did just as they were commanded to do; they never thought of deviating therefrom. Oh, believe me that keeping the ordinances of God is a matter of greater importance than may at first sight appear. If the professed Christian Church had abode simply by the three ordinances; Preaching, for you may call that an ordinance; Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, would Popery and Puseyism ever have existed? Certainly not. Remember that the mission to the apostles was a world-wide mission; and that therefore, being a world-wide mission, the ordinances are very, very simple. So then, I am still, you see, a Baptist; and as we hope soon to baptize, I trust your eyes will be opened that are not yet opened, to see it. Whatever good men you have heard that were not Baptists, you know you are to follow good men only as far as you can see that they follow the Lord. No man reveres the memory of Huntington more than I do; but because he went wrong in that respect I am not going to do so. No man reveres the memory of that great late preacher at Camberwell more than I do, a great and good man he was, and I like to see those who were his hearers keep up their sentiments towards him; it does you great honor; still I must abide in the Lord's own way, for that is the only safe way. We must take the word of the Lord to be our guide. What did the Bereans do? They did not say, Paul, stop till James comes, stop till Thomas comes, stop till Philip comes, and some of the rest of the apostles; and then we will get their opinion; no they went to work in the wisest way they could “they searched the Scriptures, to see whether those things were so.” Go you, my hearers, my non-Baptist friends, and do the same; search the Scriptures; and if God be with you in the search, you will find it impossible to escape that order of things which he has established. I daresay some of our friends that are not Baptists kindly pity me; but I am standing in this dilemma, it is no dilemma to me, I must either keep you back from the table, or else I must cast out the Lord's command, and sanction your casting out his ordinance; I must either join with you to cast out baptism, or else I must keep you back. Which had I better do? I know which I must do. Well but, say you, some do admit mixed

communion. I am not their judge; God is their judge; I judge no man; I have to do with my conscience, and to speak the truth in love to others. I must say, when I look at the great work which baptism represents, when I look at the great and wonderful work of the Holy Spirit in bringing our souls out of the state we are in by nature, and immersing us in God's eternal glory; and look at the many times the broad seal of the heaven has attended that public ordinance, for it is a public ordinance, it is not a private ordinance; it has no right to be administered to a sick person, or when a man is dying; the Lord's Supper has no more right to be administered to any one in private than the ordinance of Baptism. It is intended for the church in its public capacity. There is nothing in baptism but water; it isn't that that I look at; it is the Lord's command, and being his command, it is to be observed after the same order that he commands. In olden times some of the people thought, David, we have to go a very long way; I hope you won't be so rigid now as you are sometimes. I know you are dreadfully rigid; you are such a one for your covenant God that when the Lord says a word, off you are, and overturn the world pretty well. Now, David, don't be quite so rigid; this ark is rather heavy, and it is a long way to carry it; let us have a nice new cart, drag it along on a free-will cart, and see if that will do. Well, David says, I won't be so rigid; we will have a cart; poor things, it is very bad to have to carry it; and it is very bad to have to go under the water and come up again; it is very bad to have to change your clothes; it is very bad to take all this trouble; and so we will get the ark along in a more fashionable sort of way; for if it is carried on the shoulders of the priests everybody will call us fools, and we shall think we are fools. We will carry it in another way. So, they did carry it in another way and God stepped in in another way, smote Uzzah, that he died. Hence said David, "It was because we bought not the Lord after the due order." The Lord therefore keep us in due order, that we may be under the gratulation given by the apostle, "I praise you, brethren, that you keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you."

Secondly, I notice *the opening of the heavens*, "The heavens were opened unto him." I will take a threefold view of this. Jesus, and Jesus alone, could pass off the thunder clouds of heaven, could, open the everlasting gates; nothing but his blood and righteousness could do this. The heavens were opened to him, and if they are opened to him, they will not be shut against us. Hence, he said, "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you." I am admitted there, and if I am let in you will not be shut out. "I go to prepare a place for you, and I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, there you may be also." Water baptism is essential to gospel church order, but bless God, no ordinance is essential to eternal salvation; that is another thing altogether; but we will not slight the one because we have the other.