

Luke 3:15~17

Beloved, we are living in perilous times... And I don't want you to think I'm simply referring to the state of the economy, I'm more so talking about the reign of unrighteousness in our land. We're living in dark times, referring to the reign of darkness over the land. Sin abounds, people do what they want, murmur and complain about things, when we have far more than any nation on earth. The condition of our day is much like that of John's day here, the religious system was corrupt, iniquity abounded, men were lovers of themselves more than lovers of God... men love pleasures more than God... We stand in need of revival, we need a fresh move of God across our land, beginning with the church. We need more men like the man we been studying about these last few weeks, the man known in scripture as *John the Baptist*...

John was a "*preacher of righteousness*..." His message was a "*call for repentance*..." calling for the people to turn from their wicked ways, to repent from their rebellion against God in their hearts, to live righteous lives, living in a way that is pleasing to God... We learn from this section, that John was a bold man, one who didn't mince words. John preached it straight and true. He put his finger right on the sins some of the people were involved in, he confronted the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and Sadducees. He told them in essence, he knew what they were, and unless they were coming in genuine repentance, they need not come. Simply put, John told it like it was... And we learn in 18~20, that it ended up costing him his freedom, King Herod locked him up for his preaching...

As John was preaching and baptizing in the wilderness, many of the people began wondering whether or not he was the Christ... The very fact that they even entertained the thought that he was the Christ, gives us some insight to the power and impact of John's preaching and ministry. I mean, it's apparent that they saw something in John that was worthy of him being considered to be the Christ. But it is a consideration that John quickly makes clear is not the case. John emphatically denies that he is the Christ, and he declares that he is nothing more than a *lowly servant* of Christ.

(Vs 16b)... *but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes **I am not worthy to unloose**...*

John makes it clear he is not the Christ, and emphasizes that he is not worthy to be compared with the Christ. John declares that he is not even worthy to *untie the sandals* of the Christ, an expression of extreme *humility*... In those days, the wealthy and prestigious, rulers, and such, had servants that upon entering their residence, would take off their sandals, and wash their feet. Of all his servants, this one would be considered the lowest one on the totem pole. Here John makes it clear to those who wandered if he were the Christ, that not only is he not the Christ, but he is not even worthy to hold the humble position of untying his sandals...

Here in this passage, John uses two analogies to express the superiority of Christ... In verse 16, he uses the analogy of "*Baptism*," and in verse 17, he uses the analogy of "*Threshing Wheat*." To help us fully understand the two, it's important to keep in mind that both analogies are in the context of *cleansing*... The "*Baptism of the Holy Ghost and fire*" refers to the cleansing of the hearts of those who had come in repentance. While in verse 17, the "*Threshing of Wheat*" speaks to cleansing in the sense of separation, by separating the "*unrepentant*" from the "*repentant*." Separating the evil from the good... *kind of cleansing*.

(Vs 16) We'll begin with the first one... "*Baptism*."

¹⁶John answered, ***I indeed baptize you with water***; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: ***he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire***:

It's no wonder he uses the analogy of baptism... There's a very high likelihood, that as he is speaking here, that he is standing in the water, baptizing those coming in repentance. Add to that the fact that John was so closely identified with baptism, he was known as "*John the Baptist*," or more accurately, "*John the Baptizer*." Given that he was so closely linked with baptism, and the fact that some were thinking that he might be the Christ, John contrast "*his baptism*" with "*Christ baptism*" to clearly differentiate the difference between the two.

I indeed baptize you with water;he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire:

As I said earlier, it's important to keep in mind here that the context is that of "*cleansing*." Baptism is naturally associated with cleansing...in that of the *washing away of sins*. Now we know that the act itself has no such ability, for it is obvious, water can't remove sin in the heart. But rather, as you know, it's more symbolic of the result of repentance. Notice in verse 3, that John was preaching the "*baptism of repentance*" for the remission of sins... The call for "*repentance*" is a call to turn from anything in our lives that is not right, turning from anything that does not honor God, thus no longer having anything to do with it. Given that, repentance is the cleansing of the heart...

Here, John's compares his baptism of "*water*" with the baptism that Christ will employ, "*the Holy Ghost and fire*," with the point being, *the superiority* of Christ baptism...

"I indeed baptize you with water...but there's one mightier than I that is coming...and his baptism will not be with water...but rather, He will baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire!"

His will be a far, far greater than mine...the work that He will do is far superior than the work that I do. The contrast between his baptism with water and Christ baptism with the Holy Ghost and with fire, is a contrast between that of the outward washing and cleansing by water, verses the inward washing and cleansing by the "*Spirit*."

John's baptism was external... The cleansing aspect of John's baptism was that of simply preparing the people to receive Christ. He was calling people to "*Turn from Sin*" (Repentance), preparing a dwelling place in their hearts for Christ.

In the O.T, God promised that in the latter days, He would pour out His spirit on them. Here, John is declaring that his baptism with water was merely symbolic of being washed by God's spirit. This is what John is referring to when he declares that Christ will immerse us in the Holy Ghost and in Fire. The Holy Ghost is a reference to the Spirit of God, the third person of the Trinity. Throughout scripture, the presence of the Holy Spirit of God is associated with fire. There's the encounter Moses had with God on the mountain, with the burning bush. The children of Israel were lead by night by a pillar of fire. When the Lord came down on Mount Sinai to give the commandments, he descended upon it in fire...and a thick smoke covered the mountain. The book of Hebrews states..."*Our God is a consuming fire*..." It refers to the fact that the radiance of the glory of god is so intense, that it is like a fire.

Here, given that the context is "*cleansing*," and the fact that John associates Christ's baptism with "*fire*," suggest that the cleansing that Christ would bring about, would be similar to that of the purification of metals. The fire of God's spirit will act much like a refiners fire, in purifying silver and gold. Where metals are heated to boiling point, resulting in the impurities to come to the surface, upon which the silversmith would take a ladle and scoop away the impurities. Here John declares that when the Christ comes, the spirit will convict of sin, and bring to surface the impurities and iniquity in the heart...

This all coincides with how Malachi described the work of the Christ during his visit to His people...

(Malachi 3) ¹*Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in:*

behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts. ²But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appears? **for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: (Both speak of cleansing)**

Now, notice how Malachi describes the work of the Lord upon his visit... ³And **he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver:** and **he shall purify the sons of Levi,** and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness. ⁴Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the LORD, as in the days of old, and as in former years.

Malachi makes it clear, that upon His visit to His people, one of the things He will do, will be that of "cleaning up" the corruption of the priesthood, (*the sons of Levi.*) Malachi uses the analogy of a refiner of metals to express how the Lord will purify His people. He's going to "purify" them, *clean them up*, removing the impurities of their heart, just as a silversmith cleanses metal.

(Luke 3:16) John says, ¹⁶...**I indeed baptize you with water;** but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: **he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire:**

Notice... **I indeed baptize you with water ...he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire...**

John is speaking to those who have come to him in repentance, those being baptized by him. This is important to understand, because in verse 17, even though the subject matter is still that of cleansing, the context of the cleansing has changed. He moves from the washing of the inner man, the purifying of their heart...to the cleansing of wicked from among the righteous.

(Vs 17) ¹⁷Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable.

Here, John is alluding to the fact that the Lord will "cleanse the nation of unrighteousness"...

In 16, he used the analogy of a refiners fire to illustrate the cleansing of the hearts of those who came in repentance. Here he uses the analogy of threshing wheat as an illustration how he will separate, true inner righteousness from the false external righteousness of the Pharisee's. The "so-called" righteousness of the Pharisee's was superficial and external only. Something Christ would expose and condemn during his visit. John uses the process of threshing wheat to describe this work that Christ will do...

The Threshing of Wheat... The threshing of wheat involved the spreading of the harvested grain over what was called a threshing floor, a large flat surface, usually a flat rock. Then oxen were employed to walk through the grain pulling a drag, weighted with stones to separate the kernel from the stalk and chaff. Once the grain was pretty dense, the owner would use a pitchfork type of instrument to throw the wheat into the air, the chaff would be carried away by the wind, while the heavier kernel would fall to the ground. Over time, the wheat would be cleansed of the chaff. The wheat would then be gathered into the garner, while the chaff would be raked up and burnt.

Here John declares that the work of Christ would resemble much of a thresher separating the wheat from the chaff, separating the good from the bad. In this analogy, the harvest of grain is a reference to the nation Israel as a whole. In the words of Paul, *they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.* Meaning, that even though the entire nation was in subjection to the Law of God and followed the God of Abraham, that didn't mean that the whole nation was right with God. As a matter of fact, it was only a very small remnant that truly walked by faith. The greater part of the nation possessed rebellious hearts. One of the things that Jesus would do during his visit to Israel, would be to separate true believers from the false. Which was somewhat difficult simply by looking on the nation, given that the whole nation lived under the Law and was accountable and responsible to keep it, and as a result, the entire nation had "form of godliness," an outward appearance of being righteous as a result of simply adhering to the Law. But that

didn't mean that everyone who did was right with God. During the time of John the Baptist, much of the religious system was corrupt, and stood in need of cleansing.

Thus here in this analogy, the harvest of grain refers to the entire nation itself. The threshing of the grain represented the separation of the good from the evil. The kernel of wheat represented true righteous, referring to those had come in repentance, those who turned from sin to follow Christ, while the chaff represented the self-righteous of the Pharisees.

Chaff is such a fitting metaphor for the Pharisees, because the chaff is the thin, covering on the outside of the wheat. And here it refers to the superficial, outward righteousness of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Their righteousness was not righteousness at all...it was external, outward only. Underneath that superficial layer, were dark, depraved rebellious heart. Here John tells us, that during His visit, Christ would strip away that thin outward layer, exposing the superficial righteousness of the Pharisees.

The gathering of the wheat into the garner and the burning of the chaff is a picture of salvation and judgment... The gathering of the wheat into the garner refers to those who come in genuine repentance, those who bear fruits of repentance, manifesting a change of heart. All who do so will be saved; Christ will gather them unto himself.

But the chaff is a picture of judgment... Superficial, external righteous acts of men will not stand in the Day of Judgment. God's judgment will be based on the hearts of men... Like the chaff of wheat, all superficial obedience will be stripped away and burnt!

Listen... The message here is clear, the gospel of Christ is a serious matter, something every man, every woman better lay to heart. It is a call for men and women to REPENT, and come to Christ, submitting themselves to Him as Lord. Playing church, dabbling in religion won't help you... God gave up His son, allowed Him to be beaten and mistreated, ultimately murdered by the hands of sinners, in hopes that such a love would win your heart. To all who hear, and repent...and turn to follow Christ, they will be saved from the wrath, which is to come. But all who reject His Son, whether it be those out here who have no association with religion, or whether it be someone who does identify with religion, God will judge...