

Part 2 - John the Baptist's Baptisms

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Preacher: Craig Dowling

- [0 : 0 0] So extol the Lord at all times. His praise will glory in the Lord. Let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the Lord with me. Let it exult in the Lord, and he answered me.
- ! He has delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant. Their faces are never covered with shame. This poor man called, and the Lord heard him.
- He saved him out of all his struggles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them. Taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.
- So let's taste and see the goodness of the Lord. Let's just pray together. Thank you, Lord, that you are always good to those who trust in you. Circumstances can change.
- They can be good or not so good. But in everything, your faithfulness is our security in the good and in the bad times. Lord, we thank you that there is nothing that is beyond you, nothing that is too difficult for you.
- [1 : 0 1] And we thank you that you are always there with us. And Lord, we do thank you for the way you've been leading the church over the past couple of years. We thank you for having John with us for a while, and we do thank you for bringing Craig and Georgie and Noah and Bethany to join us.
- Thank you for the blessing that they've been to us so far, and pray that you continue to bless them as they settle into a new home, a new church, and a new ministry for Craig. And pray for him as he gets to know the people in the church.
- Just bless him in that. And we pray for the children, that they may continue to enjoy school and make good friends while they're there. And we continue to ask for Craig, that you would give him the strength and the wisdom and the patience he will need in his new role as our pastor.
- Help him to stay close to you day by day and to know your presence and your guidance. And we do thank you again for him. And we pray for our outreach as a church into the community around us.
- We pray for Kids Matter, for Munchkins, for the Fun Day, for the Holiday Club, and for many other ways in which we can have contact with people. Lord, we do pray that we see people finding Christ.
- [2 : 1 8] We do pray that you'd help us to be faithful in our witness for you. Pray for the evangelism course that Craig will shortly be starting on Wednesday evenings. And just pray that you'd use that to help us, to prepare us just to be better in our witness for you.
- And we pray for those who serve you in the UK and overseas. Especially we pray for Simon and for Pam as they travel. We pray for them as they're in the USA now.
- Bless their time there. And then as they go to Australia and finally to Papua New Guinea, we do pray that you would be with them in all their travels, that you keep them safe. And Lord, that you would use them in their new ministry.
- But before that starts, just give them a good time together with their family. And we pray for the upcoming church AGM. We pray that you would bless and lead in that.

Pray for us as members that we receive to do your will and to glorify your name here in this place. We thank you for the way you've provided for the church over many years.

[3 : 27] And Lord, we pray for your continued provision as we take our more financial commitments. Just pray that you provide all that's needed there. And we do pray for youth workers.

We seek to expand the youth work here. We pray that we will see many more young people, one for Christ, and learning to follow Jesus. Lord, we commit that need to you again.

And we just pray for your leading in that. We thank you for the people from the Dove Centre. We do pray for them again. Just bring them before you. We pray for the staff and for the clients.

Pray that we might be able to show them the love of Christ. And that many of them would find the Saviour if they don't already know him. Pray for those who've recently been bereaved.

Remember Mike and Sheila as they mourn the loss of Mike's mum. We pray for Bobby Tate's family and friends. And Lord, I know there are many others in the congregation this morning who've lost people recently or perhaps not so recently, but continue to mourn.

[4 : 34] Lord, we thank you that you're close to the brokenhearted. And we pray that you bless those who mourn at this time. And Lord, we pray for our own non-believing family and friends.

Lord, all of us have people that we know and love that do not yet know Jesus as their Saviour. And we continue to pray that you would work through us and through other people and through other means just to bring our loved ones to know you where you would work in their hearts and their minds.

And Lord, as we look beyond these walls, we continue to pray for our country. We pray for our government in Scotland. For the Prime Minister and the government in England.

And Lord, we do pray that you would direct their path, whether or not they know you and acknowledge you as Lord. You are the one who is Lord of all.

You're Lord of this country, whether people know it or not. And Lord, we do pray about some of the legislation that's going through at the moment. We pray for this assisted dying bill.

[5 : 43] Lord, that that might not be passed into law. For you are the author of life and you alone number our days. And Lord, we recognise that.

And just pray that this country would recognise that too. And Lord, we look beyond our own country and we pray for the wars that continue in different places.

We pray for the war in Ukraine and do pray for a just and peaceful resolution to that situation. Lord, we commit it once more to you and pray for an end to the loss of life that's going on there.

And we pray for lasting peace for Israel and for the Palestinian people. Lord, we know there's still death and destruction being rained down there. And we do pray for an end to that.

And we pray that these nations would turn to Christ or that we would come to know Jesus as Lord, Jesus as the Messiah, for he is the only one who can bring lasting peace.

[6 : 46] And Lord, we thank you that there's a truce being announced between India and Pakistan. Just pray that that would continue. And again, we pray for those nations, whether they're Muslims or Hindus or whatever, Lord, that these people would hear the gospel for we know there's many millions there who haven't even heard the name of Jesus.

And we do pray, Lord, that those who bring the gospel to these lands would know your blessing and your enabling. And Lord, we pray for Craig as he brings to us your word this morning.

Lord, again, we commit him to you and just pray that you would anoint the words that he says, that you would use the message to touch each of our hearts and to bring your truths home to each one of us.

Lord, we commit all these things to you now. Thank you that you're here. And we do pray for your answer. In Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to stand and sing again.

And our song this time is Make Way, Make Way. And then Craig will come and bring the message. Chapter 3.

[7 : 59] Last week we launched into the books of Luke by looking at his first two chapters, chapter 1 and 2. And this week we'll move into chapter 3.

I'm going to read a portion, starting at verse 7. which you'll see starts talking about John, John the Baptist.

So it says, John said to the crowds, coming out to be baptized by him, you brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?

Produce fruit in keeping with repentance and do not begin to say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father. For I tell you that out of these stones, God can raise up children for Abraham.

The axe has been laid to the root of the trees and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

[9 : 08] What should we do then? The crowd asked. John answered, anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none. And anyone who has food should do the same.

Even tax collectors came to be baptized. Teacher, they asked, what should we do? Don't collect any more than you are required to, he told them. Then some soldiers asked him, and what should we do?

He replied, don't exhort money and don't accuse people falsely. Be content with your pay. The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah.

John answered them all, I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am worthy to untie.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn.

[10 : 12] He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. And with many other words, John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news. But when John rebuked Herod because of his marriage to Herod, his brother's wife and all the other evil things he had done, Herod added this to them, he locked John up in prison.

When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in the bodily form of a dove and a voice came from heaven, you are my son whom I love.

With you I am well pleased. Earlier this year at a conference, Jonathan Lamb, the Kessie Convention leader, said, the age of the strong man is upon us.

You know, we have individual world leaders making a very bold, very strong, very forceful approach to how they believe politics, the military, the economy, the world itself should be run.

It's resulted in lots of unease felt across the rest of the world. All the other world leaders are worried, concerned, fretting.

[11 : 55] Though, it's not necessarily a new attitude, is it? In reality, it's as old as time itself.

Early history from both biblical and non-biblical sources make clear that from the earliest recordings we read about the uprising of Egypt, often referred to, though some may differ, often referred to as the world's first superpower, and those strong individual pharaohs who ruled it, right through to Babylon, per se, and, of course, Rome, its emperors and beyond.

The world has always swayed in and out of its strongman ears. And so, as we work through Jesus' biography offered by Dr. Luke, it is, of course, no surprise to encounter those very same minded leaders, leaders such as Herod, who has come up in our Bible reading this morning.

We started in verse 7, but he's there in verse 1, and again in verse 20, we heard how he put John in prison. Now, the important thing to first note here is Herod wasn't actually that powerful.

Rome had divided the region into four territories, each with its own local ruler. Herod ruled over his own little quarter, and everything he did was still subject to a higher power.

[13 : 48] Interestingly, when we later read that he offers up to half of his kingdom to Herod as his daughter, well, truth is, he had no kingdom to give away, but he wanted to look strong.

He had an image to maintain, and he was prideful. And if there is one thing he certainly did not like, it was having his faults, his failures, his sins pointed out in public.

and this, of course, is where John the Baptist comes in. And given all the history of powerful people and their work that we've already mentioned, given all the history of the way the world's powerful people treat the world, what a breath of fresh air it really is when we finally read about John the Baptist.

because, of course, John was also a strong man. John attracted thousands upon thousands to follow him into a hollow desert just to listen to his words.

And the ones he attracted had no boundaries. Commodors, tax collectors, soldiers, and as we're told in Scripture, even Herod himself.

[15 : 25] I suppose if John wanted, he could have called and commanded a military or political movement. However, John's use of his strength was the big difference here.

Because it wasn't follow me and marching, shout with me and demanding, push with me and forcing, shout with me and declaring. It wasn't my ways, my rules, my opinions, my strategies, my strength.

He had the strength to do that. He had the followers to do that. He had them at his fingertips. But it wasn't any of that. Instead, it was Jesus.

God, Holy Spirit, God's righteous ways, Jesus' loving heart, God's desire for justice, honesty, and mercy.

Jesus' heart for loving, caring, and helping. It was a strength that was fully and completely saturated in God.

[16 : 36] It was a strength that was accredited to God and it was all given up to point people to the Lord Jesus Christ.

I suppose John gave up and lost all his strength to instead gain approval with Christ.

Christ. He gave up his celebrity status to instead have a more bountiful, more prosperous, and an even greater, and an even closer relationship with Father God.

I mean, it's definitely in line with what Jesus did and taught. It's definitely in line with what we are still called to do today.

Jonathan Remy has recently shot to fame all over the world for his portrayal of Jesus in The Chosen, with his latest release now going into cinemas worldwide.

[17 : 45] And he's getting invited to appear in all these big chat shows because of it. But the invites to the chat shows are going up and down because TV hosts are not sure how to handle him.

And I was listening to a news report about this and interestingly the one main struggle that the TV hosts are having is that he refuses to be glorified on their chat shows.

He keeps giving the credit back to God and the TV doesn't like that. With one of his latest ones being The View, some big show in the US I guess, the host continuously pushed him to talk about the fun, the excitement of fans adoring him and following him down the streets.

He wouldn't. He wouldn't. And the host didn't like it. I suppose it's a bit of a modern day reflection of just one of John the Baptist's characteristics.

And whereas many of us were not about to face that same battle, unless one of you have applied to Britain's Got Talent or something that you're going to tell us about. But truth is, we do all have and face our own little personal ones, don't we?

[19 : 06] Our little ones in our lives. In work, in school, in church, the business world, the leisure world, and a number of other scenarios where we struggle and wrestle, where we are prideful, we strive to be powerful, to be the strong one, and to maintain an image that we feel we rightly deserve.

But here, in the third chapter of this wonderful account of Jesus' life, we read about God's final prophet who was strong and mighty in word and in deed, who had the command of thousands at his fingertips, choosing to use it all, all his strength, to instead clear the way for Jesus' explosive ministry to begin.

And so the big lesson here is very self explanatory. You and I need to do the same. so have we?

Have I? Have you? Do we? Do I? Do you? Well, will you?

Of course, will I? I know the challenge for you and I to take home today. But to make succeeding this challenge as easy as possible, all you really need to do is take a leaf out of John the Baptist's book, for he is a prime example.

[20 : 56] So, quick recap, the world is full of its strong man leaders, always has been, always will. John was certainly a strong man, a strong leader, but he gave up his attractive power to instead make it all about Jesus.

Now, if that is indeed the case, if that is indeed a fair summary of John, you know, he gave up his image to make it all about Jesus, took no pride, took no glorification, if that is indeed true, which we all agree it is, then we need to answer a very, very, very big question.

Why on earth did tens of thousands from all walks of life follow him into a desert and listen to his every word? If that really is true, he took no pride, no glorification, gave it all up for Jesus, why would all these people follow him into a desert to hang on to his every word?

why did the other tough, strong people of his day, i.e. Roman soldiers, ask for his advice? Why did hardened crooks and tax collectors ask for help, to be honest?

And why did Herod, the tough local ruler, come out and listen to him? If he didn't have some big, powerful, militarized, what was going on, I mean like it's not even as if they had some big pomp, splendor to look at, a bit of a ragamuffin dressing in camel's hair, eating locusts, living as a traveller, living off the land, and I'm told his style and choices even 2000 years ago would have been considered rare and weird.

[22 : 52] Perhaps he purposely did it to make a scene, I don't know. But here's a scenario worth considering as we answer this question. You may have heard this one before.

He lived a lifestyle and conducted himself in such a manner that perhaps would have made him completely unhirable to any church today.

No vacancy committee would touch him. Would you Gerald? Not sure what that means for us. He would be a public relations disaster.

He made few friends and lots of enemies. He spoke very, very bluntly. He told people exactly what he thought. No one for his brood of vipers talk.

He raised tensions, made governors angry, put a wedge between him and the community. no, I'm not sure he would get hired today.

[23 : 58] Yet, yet, if he were here today, he would grow a church of thousands in a week. He would grow 52 churches a year of thousands.

He made thousands of converts, Mark tells us in his biography. all the people from Judea and Jerusalem were going out to him. They confessed their sins and were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

All the people of Judea and Jerusalem. Given what we have previously just said, my question remains, why on earth do we explain this?

just what exactly was it about him? What did he have? What just did he have?

I think John had a holiness, a devotion, a faithfulness, a joy, a grace, an honesty, an attitude, a personality, a love, that all resulted in a very, very, very real peace.

[25 : 19] Not a peace in the way the world thinks of peace, but a peace that the world wants. A peace the people were searching endlessly for.

A peace that presented a picture that said, it doesn't matter what the world thinks of me, or what they will take from me, or what they will do to me. It doesn't matter what shape or situation I'm in, because deep in my heart and deep in my soul, I live knowing I am connected to the very creator of all of creation.

And if I'm connected to him, then what possibly can go wrong? Life may fall apart, yes, I may die out, yes, but my soul, my soul is at one with the God of heaven.

And so I have a confidence. This peace produces a confidence where you no longer fear man or man's ways. You don't care how man summarises you up, because you're so at peace with your creator that all that matters is him.

And so let the people attack, shout, threaten, mock. let them. It will never take your peace, because you're so confident in God.

[26 : 40] Jesus himself said, John 14, peace I leave you with, my peace I give you, but I do not give as the world gives. I do not give as the world gives.

This peace of his can't be found in the world. It's heavenly. It's from above. It can only be acquired by connecting to the creator of heaven.

And there it was, out in the wilderness, deep in the desert, in the middle of nowhere, in a scraggy dressed preacher, running around, shouting, you brood of vipers.

You see, that description doesn't sound very peaceful, does it? That's the exact point. As Jesus said, real peace doesn't look like what the world thinks it should.

So for however wacky John looked, he was confident God had his back. And knowing that, give him undisturbable peace. And there answers our question.

[27 : 50] That's why these crowds and crowds went out to him. Because everyone wanted his peace. Everyone wanted his confidence. Soldiers, how can I have that peace, John?

Tax collectors, all sorts of others, and yes, even Herod. Let's go and listen to John because he's got something I don't. He has a peace and a confidence that I don't have.

so John was fully connected to God and he was fully in love with God and he was fully devoted to God.

And because he was fully in love with God and because he was fully obedient to God, he made his entire life and ways all fully focused on the Lord Jesus.

He gave it all up, all his dreams, all his aims, all his ambitions to fulfill and do God's instead. And that's why he lived the way he lived.

[28 : 56] And that's why he was at peace. Why don't we all here at Westerhill Baptist Church now rally together in support of one another to be a little bit more like John the Baptist.

Because if we were all to live a little bit more like John, modelling his attitude, his devotion to Jesus, his personality, his ways and approach to God, then our lives, our families, our community, our very church here would be and will be and is in a much greater place for it.

But maybe you find yourself asking and thinking, yes, we need to. John was brilliant. He did this and he did that. But it was the first century and so on and so on.

The first what? It's a good question to ask. How do we really approach today this in 2025? How do we be faithful to John's evangelistic zeal but in a 21st century sent in?

Well, let's next ask, what just was the ultimate aim of John's work? What was the one thing he was trying to get people to? It was people saved.

[30 : 20] It was people in the kingdom, people with God. That was the one sole ultimate outcome and aim of all his work. So with that in mind, maybe a little advice from the Apostle Paul would help.

because a little later in the New Testament in the Thessalonian church, they asked Paul a similar question. And Paul, via the same Holy Spirit that inspired John, said, do all you can to lead a peaceful life.

Take care of your own business. Do your own work. As we have already told you, if you do, then people who are not believers will respect you. All right?

So the summary here is, these people had done and taught what John encouraged them to do. Whether directly from John or not, they were doing his teachings. They had personally chosen to give up their old lives for the Jesus way.

They had given up their statuses to instead gain approval of Christ. And they have now come together as a church and to grow and now help others. And so they're now asking, so what do we do now?

[31 : 29] And Paul says, live in peace, take care of your own business, do your work, then people who are not believers will respect you. Two thousand years later, the answer, the response, the outcome is the same.

So yep, for us here at Westerhills in 2025, this is certainly something that we can indeed do likewise. This is taking John's message and all the New Testament into the 21st century.

It is certainly great for our own personal relationships with Jesus, but also for the kingdom. Because notice the last line of Paul's words there.

Believers will be enticed. And what happens? Non-believers will be enticed, sorry. And what happens after being enticed? They then ask. And as Holy Spirit later tells us through Peter, at that point, be prepared to share.

And what happens after sharing? People get saved, people become disciples, the kingdom grows, people from all nations and all cultures get baptized, i.e. we fulfill the Great Commission, i.e. we do what John said it to do and we achieve John's ultimate aim of people in the kingdom getting saved, getting baptized.

[32 : 52] Simple. Simple. that's how we do. Which of course comes out here after Luke has detailed all the ways of John the Baptist.

He then detailed for us the last job of John the Baptist was to baptize Jesus. In verses 21 to 22, Jesus was baptized too.

And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in the bodily form like a dove. And the voice came from heaven. You are my son whom I love.

With you I am well pleased. And so if there is one more important lesson we need to finish on this morning, surely it must be Jesus' baptism.

John gave everything up to gain approval of Christ. Now here he is being used by God to baptize Jesus. We have just made a massive deal about the new radical way that John the Baptist modeled.

[33 : 57] And as we journeyed through John the Baptist model, we pointed out it was all grounded in those words giving up to gain approval of Christ. And as we rang this off, the extremely important point not to miss is John's practical exercise to show you're willing to give up you and your ways to instead gain that approval of Christ.

And John's practical exercise, baptism. Yes, it is faith and faith alone that seals you as in. But how do we show that?

How do we practically tell everyone? Well, as with everything else in life and in faith, we do the only thing we know we can trust. We look to the Lord Jesus, and copy him.

What did he do to show he was practically in? Verse 21 again, he got John to physically floor him to the seabed in an act of dying down and physically raise him back up in an act of new, fresh life, saying I'm in.

And therefore, as Christians here, 2,000 years later, it is only appropriate and right that we honour Christ's example and join with him in showing practically that we have indeed died to our old ways.

[35 : 26] And again, showing practically that we have indeed risen and started his new fresh ways through full immersion, just like he did.

baptized. I was telling the vacancy committee that coming from the Church of Ireland, I was sprinkle baptized. And God was good. God led me into the service of his church.

And when I was studying with the Church of England, getting ready, I couldn't shake this burning that if I was truly to go forward in the service of my king, then I had to truly copy my king.

If I was going to truly preach the king's message, I had to do and live out his message. Fortunately, I was always in good partnership with FIC and New Frontier Churches.

So there I was as an Anglican minister in Eltham Green Community Church in London with Pastor John Watson, getting baptized by a merchant, that I may fully copy my king.

[36 : 31] That I may fully copy my king. So, three introductory chapters on Jesus' birth, his upbringing and finer details, by all very firmly making clear he's God.

He is God's Son, Father God said so, from the heavens above. And remember last week, Luke, the Greek physician, always king to have everything crisp and clear, goes on to point out, and if you really, really need a little more proof or evidence, I've recorded his ancestry line for you, right back to Father God himself.

This is God's Son. And Luke is sort of saying, so as we go into the rest of the book, remember these three chapters because they show and prove he is God.

God. And for us here today, at the end of Luke's three introductory chapters, take this message. The king has arrived.

The king has grown. The king has developed. The king is ready until the king shows it by physically being put down and physically rising back up to hear Father God say, you're my Son and I am pleased.

[37 : 52] And again, don't miss the life and faith challenge. Like John, let's give up our ways to instead gain approval with Christ. And most of all, like Jesus, let's show it.

Let's copy the king. Amen. Let's pray. Father, we thank you.

Thank you for the example that you left. the example of how to live, of how to be, of how to connect with God, of how to start, of how to grow, of how to nurture.

Help us go forward and do likewise in every way just as you did, Jesus. And as we now, Lord, take these words into the week ahead.

Help us live them, do them, talk about them. And in these next moments we're going to settle our hearts as we approach the communion table.

[38 : 58] Give us wisdom, Lord, give us guidance, conviction where needed, Lord, joy where needed, Lord, peace where needed, confidence where needed. Let us be close to you now, be comforted by you now.

In your name, Lord, amen. In a moment we will sing and then approach communion. And if you have given your life to Jesus, then please do join us.

If you are yet to decide to claim Jesus as your king, do feel free to let it pass by, but do come and chat later. Ask us about our faith if you would like to.

Let's stand if you can and we'll sing all I once held dear. Thank you. All I once held dear built my life upon All this world dreams and wars to all All I once thought I had come said What is Spent and worthless now compared to me.