

Last week we considered the heart of the message of the Bible. God has intervened in the affairs of men, and sent his Son to redeem man from his lost estate. Redemption comes by believing in the Son, not by any pious acts on our part. The alternative is not active judgment of man, but merely leaving him in the condition in which he has been living to date. Jesus did not come to condemn the world, but to save it. Whoever does not look to Jesus for his salvation remains in his condition of condemnation.

We reviewed the episode in the wilderness wanderings of Israel where they were attacked by snakes, and found healing by looking on a bronze serpent that Moses prepared for their redemption. The question arose how this differed from worship of an idol. It turns out that the Israelites did indeed make an idol of the serpent later in the life of the nation. Hezekiah destroyed the bronze serpent early in his reign as king of Israel (Judah).

**2Kings 18:1-5** *In the third year of Hoshea son of Elah, king of Israel, Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, king of Judah, began to reign. He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abi the daughter of Zechariah. And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that David his father had done.*

*He removed the high places and broke the pillars and cut down the Asherah. And he broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it (it was called Nehushtan).*

*He trusted in the LORD the God of Israel, so that there was none like him among all the kings of Judah after him, nor among those who were before him.*

This week we will get our last glimpse of John the Baptist. Jealousies arose between John's disciples and Jesus' disciples. John's disciples probably considered Jesus to be one of them, baptized by John and a disciple of John. They may have considered him to be a usurper.

However, John quickly squelches any basis for competition by setting them straight concerning his God-given role. He caps it with the picture of the bridegroom's best man.

Chrysostom suggests that if John had stopped baptizing when Jesus began, his disciples might have grown very hostile toward the newcomer. One reason John was killed may have been to allow an orderly transfer of allegiance of John's disciples to Jesus.

**John 3:22-24** *After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized (for John had not yet been put in prison).*

This section tells us that Nicodemus encountered Jesus early in his ministry, because after the encounter Jesus was baptizing at the same time as John the Baptist. In fact, the other gospels begin Jesus ministry after John was imprisoned, so this is a picture into what

Jesus was doing early in his public ministry. Nicodemus was a believer by the time the synoptics began to record Jesus' teaching ministry.

This is the only reference to Jesus baptizing, but it is certainly reasonable in light of **3:5-7**. It is not found in the synoptic gospels. It may be different from John's baptism, because John's baptism was one of repentance, and Jesus' may have included repentance, but also included initiation into his new kingdom.

In **4:2**, John further explains what he meant by Jesus baptizing. He says it was really Jesus disciples that did the baptizing. However, no matter who carried out the physical process, Jesus was the true baptizer. It is still so today. Although we were baptized by our pastors or other evangelists, the truth of our baptism is that it is made efficacious by Christ and by the Holy Spirit.

**John 3:25-30** *Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him." John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.' The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease."*

John was no rival to Christ, but the forerunner, the one crying in the wilderness: 'Make straight the way of the Lord.' Jesus called John 'the greatest of the prophets'. Augustine suggested that it was John's great humility that made him the greatest.

*So what is the meaning of such greatness, sent before the great One? It is a testimonial to extraordinary humility. After all, he was so great that people could think he was the Christ. John could have taken advantage of the people's mistake, and he would not have had to work hard to persuade them he was the Christ, because those who heard and saw him had already thought this without his saying it. There was no need for him to sow the seed of the error; all he would have to do would be to confirm it.*

**Matt. 11:11** *Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*

The friend of the bridegroom played a significant role in the Jewish wedding. He would stand outside the bridal tent and wait to hear the 'voice of the bridegroom' as he would shout in triumph that he had been united to his virginal bride. The bridegroom's friend rejoices in this as he selflessly announces the consummation to the wedding guests.

**Bultmann:** "The old epoch of the of the world has run its course, the eschatological age is beginning."

**: 31-36** *He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all. He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony. Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.*

John sums up his teaching from the beginning of the gospel to this point with this paragraph.

*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. Why? Because he has done the work of God, seeing that this is the work of God that you should believe in the one whom he has sent. But whoever does not believe in the Son will not have life, but the wrath of God 'remains on him', not 'will come upon him', but 'remains on him'. He is abandoned, not healed. Augustine*

*He says that the believer shall have everlasting life, but the word has a different significance for the unbeliever. For he does not say that the unbeliever shall not have life since he too shall be raised by the common law of the resurrection. But he says that he shall not see life, that is, he shall not even so much as glimpse the life of the saints, he shall not touch their blessedness, and he shall not taste of their life spent in bliss. For that is indeed life. But to exist in punishment is far bitterer than any death, holding the soul in the body only for the sensation of suffering. Cyril of Alexandria*

**John 4:1-3** *Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), he left Judea and departed again for Galilee.*

There must have been a concern on Jesus part that the Pharisees (of Jerusalem) were getting upset about him. Although Jesus had left Jerusalem, he remained in the Judean countryside, and word of his teaching and of his following reached the leaders in Jerusalem.

Some suggest that this happened around the time of the imprisonment of John the Baptist. They thought they had finally gotten rid of John and his message of repentance, and now Jesus was becoming more popular than John.

Jesus prudently left their vicinity and returned to Galilee, a bit further from their reach. Augustine says that Jesus wanted to provide himself as an example for believers in time to come, that it was no sin for a servant of God to seek refuge from the fury of persecutors.