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THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

– JAN. 19. – Luke 3:15-22. –

Golden Text – "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." – John 1:29.

SEVERAL points in this familiar narrative are worthy of special notice, – (1) The deep and wide influence of John's preaching. The prepared instruments of the Lord are powerful in his hand. The whole nation was aroused, the multitudes were baptized with the baptism of repentance (Mark 1:4,5), and the expectation of the immediate advent of the Messiah was everywhere manifest.

(2) The humility and sincerity of John, which was not changed in the least by the popular favor, is seen in his denial of the suggestion that he might be the Messiah. Had he made the claim, how readily would the people have accepted it! But this prepared vessel of the Lord was so established in righteousness as to be superior to any such temptation.

(3) In disclaiming this honor for himself John compared his own work and the work of the coming Messiah and showed them the difference. Referring to himself he claimed great inferiority. And his own work he described as only a preparatory work, – "I indeed baptize you with water, but...he shall baptize you with the holy spirit and with fire." It is very manifest that all of the multitudes who were baptized with water were not baptized with the holy spirit. The baptism of the holy spirit came at Pentecost after the Lord was glorified, but only upon a small minority of the Jewish nation. The baptism of fire came later – in the end of the Jewish harvest (A.D. 70) when Jerusalem was destroyed and their national existence terminated in the midst of a great time of trouble. Verse 17 is in reference to the great separating work of the Jewish [R1917 : page 11] harvest and the gathering of the worthy

remnant into the garner of the Gospel age, and the fiery judgments upon the unworthy chaff.

(4) In the baptism of Jesus we see that the ordinance received a new significance. His baptism was not unto repentance; for he had no sins to repent of. "He was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." (Heb. 7:26.) With the accustomed view of baptism, John declined to baptize Jesus in whom there was no sin, nevertheless, though he could not understand why he should desire it, John complied with his request – "Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." – Matt. 3:15.

The righteousness of God's law which could by no means clear the guilty (Exod. 34:7) without a satisfaction of the claims of justice by the sacrifice of a life for a life (Exod. 21:23; Lev. 24:17-21; Deut. 19:21), he was about to fulfil by the sacrifice of himself. He was about to give his flesh for the life of the world – giving his life for the life [R1917 : page 12] of Adam, in whom we were all condemned, that as all posterity were included in the condemnation, so they might likewise have a share in the redemption. And all who desire to follow in the footsteps of Christ must likewise present their bodies living sacrifices, holy and acceptable through Christ. Thus it becometh *us* [the Christ, Head and body], to fulfil all righteousness.

With the baptism of Christ, then, the ordinance received the new signification of entire consecration to God as living sacrifices, even unto death. And in this new view of the matter some of the Jewish converts were baptized again. See the baptism of John and the baptism of Christ and his body, the Church, contrasted in Acts 19:3-5. See also TOWER for June 15, '93.
