

The Baptism of Christ & the New Creation of God

Introduction

The Text

“¹⁸ So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people. ¹⁹ But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by him for Herodias, his brother’s wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, ²⁰ added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison.

²¹ Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, ²² and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” (Luke 3:18–22)

“Who Can Put Me Back Together?!”

- A. Let me read you something written by a secular, non-Christian therapist that I think gives us profound window into the human heart: “Very often...patients make it clear they are opposed to learning much more about the personal life of the therapist. Those who desire magic, mystery, and authority are loath to look beneath the trappings of the therapist. They are much comforted by the thought that there is a wise and omniscient figure to help them. More than one of my patients have invoked the metaphor of the Wizard of Oz to describe their preference for the happy belief that the therapist knows the way home—a clear, sure path out of pain. By no means do they want to look behind the curtain and see a lost and confused faux-wizard. One patient...described the Oz dilemma in [a] poem [where he writes of his desire to] “replace the drape, [and] refuse to see the man behind the voice, [and] forever follow that magic road, that leads me to a place no place like home” (99-100).
1. Do you hear this?! This therapist is relaying how many of his counselees actually try to avoid getting to know him personally. But why?
 - a. They’re afraid they might find that the one they’ve hoped would be able to put them back together is just another broken person himself! “If he’s exposed as a fraud, as just another broken part of creation, what happens to my hope for redemption and re-creation? How can someone old and broken make me new and whole?”
- B. This captures something of our own hearts does it not? Indeed, I would press further and say that the fundamental cry of humanity since the first moments after the fall is: “Who can put me back together?! Who can remake me! Who can make me altogether new?!”
1. We know we are broken people in a broken place. We know we need help but we don’t know where to look.
- C. So we look everywhere! And Satan is quick to distract us with a thousand answers—answers veiled with promise but void of potency. They look good but they let you down!

1. But, for a while, these answers captivate us. And like these counselees, we're reluctant to look behind the veil of our idols: "Don't tell me this therapist, this relationship, this career change, this degree, this bottle isn't the answer. I don't want to go behind the veil. Just let me hope."
 - a. It feels nice to hope even if it's a blind hope.
- D. But these answers never deliver. And we would despair of ever finding the answer, were it not for God, who in His grace, at last, directs us to His answer. And O how He is jealous for us to see it this morning—to see Him, the Son, Jesus the Christ!
 1. In our text, John the Baptist is abruptly removed from the scene and Jesus is thrust into the foreground where He will remain for the rest of this gospel. God is saying: "Don't miss my answer!"

One Angle: Jesus as the Pioneer of God's New Creation

- A. I'm going to focus this morning really on the two verses (vv. 21-22) that describe for us the baptism of Jesus.
 1. I have chosen an angle from which to come at these verses that perhaps isn't immediately evident to us, but it is the most fundamental, most basic.
- B. I believe that Luke has an especially pressing desire for us to see Jesus in this text as both the New Creation of God and the New Creator God Himself.
 1. According to His humanity, He is the New Creation—the perfect man; according to His divinity, He is the New Creator—the perfecter of men.
 - a. To put an image on it, we could say that He is the Pioneer of God's New Creation. He stakes His flag, as it were, into the ground of this fallen world and presses forward to redeem and re-create it.
- C. Putting it simply: God's answer to the human (and cosmic) dilemma is...JESUS! The fundamental cry of humanity finds its answer in the person and work of Christ!

The Nature of Biblical Revelation

- A. At this point, I am sure many of you are asking, "You are seeing all of this in the text we just read? How?!" In order for me to make my case here, we must first understand a few things regarding the nature of God's revelation to us in the Bible.
 1. Holistic—Consider here God as the ultimate and final Author of the Scriptures. When God picks up His pen to write, as it were, He does it with a view both to what's come before and to what's coming after.

- a. The Scriptures are not fragmentary notes, as if God were just jotting down a few ideas here and there as they come to Him. No! He is telling a story, a story planned from all eternity. When He writes, He writes with a view to the whole. As such, it all connects and forms a unity. In this sense, the Bible is holistic.
- 2. Organic—We must also understand that this revelation has been conditioned historically. Meaning, it is given in time and space and actually progresses and unfolds as time moves forward.
 - a. Some liken this to the organic process of a seed being planted and slowly growing into an impressive and healthy apple tree. As such, the former parts correspond to the latter, though with significant development and maturation.
- B. To put all this together, then, as we approach Scripture we must be aware that there is an unfolding, gathering, and rolling dynamic to it as it progresses.
 - 1. What comes before sheds interpretive light on what comes after (unfolding) and what comes after wraps back around and sheds interpretive light on what comes before (gathering). And as this rolls forward we are given wider and wider vistas into God’s heart and mind in Scripture.
 - a. It’s like a rolling wave of interpretive light, rising and cresting until it crashes, as we shall find on the shores of the person and work of Jesus Christ: “The Scriptures...bear witness about me” (Joh 5:39)!

(1) Identifying & Tracing the Elements

- A. I say all of this because, if we are to see Luke presenting Jesus here as the Pioneer of God’s New Creation, we must see our text in light of what’s come before.
 - 1. In particular, there are certain elements found in this episode that are also largely present at other key creation and re-creation episodes in the history of redemption. The rising wave of these connections will help us interpret our text aright.

Identifying the Elements

- A. What are the elements? Let’s return to the scene in vv. 21-22 and I’ll point out a few of the key elements in the order of their appearance:
 - 1. Waters (v. 21)—John the Baptist is calling people to “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (v. 3), in preparation for the coming Messiah. He is baptizing people in the Jordan river, which seems to have involved immersion into its waters—a going down beneath them and a coming up from them—as an expression of personal repentance before God, symbolizing a cleansing of sin.

- a. Amazingly, mysteriously, Jesus is in the line with sinners, waiting to be baptized in this water by John: “when Jesus also had been baptized” (v. 21).
2. Holy Spirit (v. 22a)—And when He is baptized, upon coming up, the heavens are thrown open, and “the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove” (v. 22a).
3. Heavenly Voice (v. 22b)—Following in the wake of the descending Spirit is the heavenly voice of God the Father: “a voice came from heaven” (v. 22b).
4. Sonship (v. 22c)—This voice first makes known that this Jesus is the divine and most loved Son: “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (v. 22c).

Tracing the Elements

- A. Having identified this episode and these elements, now let me show you from the OT why I’m saying I think all of this is charged with creational and re-creational energy.

(1) The Creation (Gen 1-2)

- A. We begin where the cosmos began, with Gen 1:1—“In the beginning...” Here, intriguingly, is where we see the most striking parallels to Jesus’ baptism.
 1. Waters—Clearly waters feature prominently as the whole creation account opens with all eyes upon them! “The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (1:2).
 - a. The first creation at this point is under the deep and its waters and it emerges as God makes separation for it through the waters.
 2. Holy Spirit—Moreover, “the Spirit (רוּחַ) of God was hovering (רָחַף) over the face of the waters” (1:2), involved in some mysterious way in this first creative activity.
 3. Heavenly Voice—The heavenly voice is present in the divine commands that pierce through the darkness and direct the creative drama from then on: “Let there be...” (i.e. 1:3).
 4. Sonship—All of this activity seems to be mounting towards a climax: the creation of Adam in the image and likeness of God (1:26-27).
 - a. This is sonship language, as we see elsewhere in Scripture (cf. 5:1-3), which is why Luke calls Adam “the son of God” in Luk 3:38.
- B. But, of course, we know where the story goes from here. The initial creation unravels in a single chapter because of man’s fall into sin. With this, both man and his environment fall under the curse of God, and man is exiled from the Garden of God’s presence.

1. But not without a promise! Amazingly, in the midst of the curses comes the first Gospel promise—the promise of an offspring from the woman who would one day overcome the curse and, therefore, usher in God’s new creation (Gen 3:15).

C. Thus, already at the outset of the first creation, there is need for and promise of a second.

(2) The Flood (Genesis 6-9)

- A. Moving forward, we gather that humanity is looking for this promised offspring. This expectation reaches a high point with the birth of Noah (“rest”). For as his father declared: “Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed, this one shall bring us relief...” (Gen 5:29).

And with Noah, God does appear to be starting again, with land, animal, and man. The flood is both a de-creation and a re-creation story.

1. Waters—Because the whole earth was “corrupt in God’s sight” (6:11), He, in effect, un-separates the waters and land, letting the deep have its way once more (7:11).
2. Heavenly Voice—But His heavenly voice calls out to Noah (6:13-21), warning him, saving him and his family and two of every animal in an ark.
3. Holy Spirit—Perhaps symbolically represented here in the dove of Gen 8. After the rain (40 days) stops and the waters start to recede, a dove is sent out from the ark to determine whether dry land has emerged once again.
 - a. There could certainly be a connection here to the Spirit hovering over the waters in 1:2. For the word “hover” (רָחַף) in Hebrew is used only one other place in the Torah, describing God as an Eagle that “flutters over its young” (Deut 32:11).
 - b. Noah knows God’s wrath has abated and the dry land of God’s new creation has emerged when the dove does “not return to him anymore” (8:12).
4. Sonship—We get a sense that God is re-creating man and re-instituting his function as son within the cosmos. For He gives to Noah the commission that was initially given to Adam: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (9:1). Noah is a new Adam, a new son of God.

- B. And yet we see plainly that this is not the re-creation we are longing for. Noah is not the promised offspring of Gen 3:15. For even after the flood, God concedes, “the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (8:21). The heart of the problem (quite literally) has not yet been dealt with.

(3) The Exodus & Entrance (Exodus 14-15 & Joshua 3-4)

- A. And so the redemptive program rolls on, with humanity still crying out for an answer. Noah was not the seed, but from Noah later comes Abraham. And here the lens is focused a little bit tighter: “In your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Gen 22:18).

This offspring who would overturn the fall and pioneer a new creation is here tethered to Abraham. And from Abraham we know comes the people of Israel. And it looks like maybe they are to be the ones for the task. For God picks up the creational/re-creational motif strongly in their exodus from Egypt and entrance into the Promised Land.

1. Heavenly Voice—God initiates this re-creational activity with the sounding of His heavenly voice from within a burning bush to Moses ([Exod 3:4](#)).
 2. Sonship—And what does YHWH tell Moses that he is to say to Pharaoh? “Israel is my firstborn son...Let my son go that he may serve me” ([Exod 4:22-23](#)).
 3. Waters—This culminates in His separating of the waters of the Red Sea that his people might walk through the depths ([Isa 63:13](#)) on dry ground ([Exo 14:21-22](#)).
 4. Holy Spirit—Separates waters by a strong “wind” (רוח) ([Exod 14:21](#)), which in other places is referred to as His breath: “At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up” ([Ex 15:8](#)).
- B. And, we know that after leading Israel through the wilderness for 40 years, a similar event occurs at the river Jordan, when God cut its waters off from flowing and the people, led by Joshua, walk through on dry ground, entering the Promised Land ([Josh 4:23](#)).
- C. But Israel is not the answer. Their whole history is riddled with rebellion ultimately ending in exile, finding themselves, all these years later, in the same place as Adam.
1. And they’re crying out with the words of [Isaiah](#): “Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down” ([64:1](#))!

(2) Jesus as the Pioneer of God’s New Creation

Revisiting the Elements

- A. Now we are positioned to see this event in [Luk 3:21-22](#) as we should. Now the cresting wave of interpretive light is starting to throw its foam on our text. For what do we see when our Savior is baptized by John in the Jordan? “The heavens are opened...and God comes down!” And all of these elements are now seen to be charged with new-creational significance!
1. Waters—The waters take us back to the cosmic waters of [Gen 1](#) and those re-creational waters of the flood, exodus, and entrance (Jordan!). Jesus is seen as going under these waters and emerging as the new creation of God.
 2. Holy Spirit—the Holy Spirit descends and rests on Him in the form of a dove. We, therefore, have here both the picture of the Spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters as God’s first creation emerges, and that of the dove which Noah sends out from the ark that comes to rest upon the new creation.

- a. It's as if the dove of Noah, which we are told never returns to him, is meant to be seen still flying through the pages of the OT, coming finally to rest here on the person of Jesus Christ, God's climactic new creation.
 - 3. Heavenly Voice—the heavenly voice peels through the heavens, indicating the significance of all that's taking place.
 - 4. Sonship—He is revealed by the Father to be the Son connecting Him back to Israel and Noah, but especially to the first Adam, showing Him to be now standing in his place as second and last Adam, as the headwaters of a new humanity.
- B. We gather from all of this that: Christ is the new creation of God; He is the second and last Adam (1 Cor 15:45); He is the promised offspring of the woman (Gen 3:15); He is our ark through the flood waters of God's judgment (1 Pet 3:21); He is the offspring of Abraham through whom the nations are blessed (Gal 3:16); He is new Israel (Matt 2:15); He is our dry ground through the Red Sea (1 Cor 10:1-2); He is a prophet greater than Moses (Deut 18:15); He is the new Joshua, who went down into the Jordan and leads His people up and into the true promised land...He is the Pioneer of the new creation of God!
- C. And if we have any doubt that this is what Luke is after, all we have to do is keep reading (vv. 23-38). For he takes us immediately from here into Jesus' genealogy where he traces Jesus the Son of God all the way back through Abraham (where Matthew stops) to "Adam, the Son of God" (v. 38).
- 1. As all went wrong with the first son of God, so now all who will be made right with the second!

But Why Is He Here?!

- A. We must stop and ask something of our text at this point: Why is He here? Why is Jesus standing in line to be baptized with a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins—a baptism that signified one was fleeing from the wrath to come?
 - 1. "He stands in solidarity with them now, because He is to stand in substitution for them soon...At the last He will do more than stand with them He will be made sin for them."
 - a. He stands with the sinner, He goes under with the sinner, because He will die for the sinner, the righteous for the unrighteous.

Re-Creation through De-Creation

- A. Since the fall, God's re-creation has always come through de-creation. Before He can make things new He has to deal with the brokenness and corruption of the old.

1. Noah was saved, but through the judgment waters of the deep that destroyed the rest of humanity and creation. Israel was saved, but through the judgment waters of the Red Sea that left countless Egyptians dead in its belly.
 - a. The waters here have both re-creative and de-creative function—they clean and make new but they also kill and destroy; they are mercy but also judgment. Indeed this mercy, cleansing, and re-creating can be said to come through judgment, death, and de-creation!
- B. Therefore, before Jesus can be the Pioneer of God’s new creation, He must be the Lamb of God’s sacrifice. Or perhaps, better put: because He is the Pioneer of God’s new creation, He must be the Lamb of God’s sacrifice.
 1. He takes the waters; we get the new world!

Conclusion

Look to God’s Answer!

- A. I want to end where we began. Is anyone in this room broken? Is anyone desperate for answers: “Who can put me back together?”
 1. Every answer under the sun is veiled with promise but void of potency. It looks so good but it will let you down on payday. It promises everything but delivers nothing.
- B. God’s answer moves in precisely the opposite direction. On the outside Jesus looks like nothing—just a man going under the water with a bunch of sinners; just a man dying on a cross next to a bunch of sinners.
 1. God’s answer is veiled with weakness and foolishness. Nobody sees the promise in this. But if God would be pleased to take us behind the veil this morning we would see in Christ the wisdom and power of God.
 - a. It looks like nothing, but in Christ, God is delivering everything!
- C. So where are you looking this morning? The finger of almighty God on every page of Scripture is pointing to the Son! He and He alone is making all things new! “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself” (2 Cor 5:17–18a).