

The Words of Jesus #2

by: Ronald L. Dart

Nothing is more central to the Christian faith than Baptism. Whether it be by immersion or pouring or sprinkling if you will. Baptism is the initiation right to the Christian church. If you have not been baptized by someone, somehow, someway, you have not met the entry level requirement. Baptism is a Christian thing, and yet baptism did not originate with Christianity. It had been practiced for at least 150 perhaps 200 years before Jesus appeared on the scene and even in the New Testament itself, baptism does not appear with Jesus but rather it comes from John the Baptist who himself baptized Jesus. Now there is a puzzling exchange that takes place between these two men and it is only in recent years that we have come to understand what that exchange is all about. One of the reasons we understand it is because of some things that we have learned of all places, from the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The exchange is in Matthew 3 verse 13. Then comes Jesus from Galilee down to Jordan to be baptized by John, but John stopped him and said, "I have need to be baptized of you and you are coming to me." And Jesus answering said to him, "Permit it to be this way now, for thus it becomes you and me to fulfill all righteousness." Then John allowed him. Baptism was already an old custom. How old? No one really knows. The Qumran community had been in the area where John was baptizing for generations and John's baptism resembled theirs in some important respects. Now we make a mistake if we project the doctrine of Christian baptism back onto John's baptism or if we apply somehow the criteria required for John's baptism to Christian baptism. There was an importance difference between them.

Christian baptism in the New Testament typology washes away sins. Arise, be baptized they would say, and wash away your sins. We are cleansed of our sins by baptism. The baptism, the act of baptism purifies. But the baptism of the Qumran community required that a person become clean and free from sin before he could be baptized. In other words, you had to do all of that work, you had to straighten your life out, fast, pray, bring forth all kinds of results and live a clean life and when you achieved a certain level of purity, then and only then could you be baptized into the Qumran community as it were. Now John's baptism was similar. I would not say necessarily it was the same and I would not even say that it was even derived from the Qumran community but it was similar in that he required those coming to his baptism to clean up their lives first. He would say to people who came down to be baptized, Well you hypocrite, you go straighten up your life before you come down here to be baptized. You bring forth fruits, meet for repentance. So in John's case it was not enough that they had repented or claimed to have repented. They

actually had to show in their lives the results of that repentance. They had to straighten themselves out. Then and only then could they be baptized. Now it is hard to say if John knew anything about Christian baptism when Jesus came to him, but listen to what he said. Then came Jesus from Galilee to Jordan to John to be baptized by him and John stopped him saying “I have need to be baptized by you and you are coming to me?” John knew who Jesus was. He knew his reputation. He did not apparently know Jesus yet as the Messiah but he knew that Jesus was a righteous man. He knew that Jesus life was clean and by anyone’s standards of what you had to measure up to in order to be baptized, Jesus was already there. John was a prophet and he realized that he needed the baptism of Jesus for himself. He looked ahead and knew that Jesus’ baptism, which as far as we know he had baptized no one yet, was a different thing all together.

It was the baptism that actually washed away all sin. And Jesus coming to John’s baptism was a moment of truth for John because John knew that he needed something that Jesus had and not the other way around. Now, listen to the words of Jesus in response to John, who said, Look I need to be baptized by you and you are coming to me. And Jesus said, “Permit it to be so now for thus it becomes you and me to fulfill all righteousness.

Jesus was fully qualified for the baptism of John because he was sinless. He was righteous. He was qualified for the baptism of Qumran for that matter. His baptism was to finish off or fill up to the full the righteousness of Jesus and that is what he meant by it becomes us to fulfill all righteousness, let’s top this off. When he did the baptism, Jesus when he was baptized went straight way up out of the water and low the heavens were open to him and he saw the spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon him and low a voice from heaven saying this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. There was someone in heaven who was not Jesus who observed this act of baptism and spoke of Jesus as his son. It was of course the father of Jesus. In this series of programs, we are talking about the words of Jesus. I will have more on that when I come back after this message.

Then after his baptism, Jesus was led by the holy spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil and when he had fasted for 40 days and 40 nights he was afterward hungry as well he might be. And when the tempter came to him he said, “If you be the son of God command that these stones be made bread and we can eat. You and I can both share this. He answered and said, “It is written, man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.” Now it was such a simple statement, a short statement by Jesus but it is one that says so very much.

First when Jesus was challenged, he did not reason or argue with the devil, which is a mistake at all times. He did not appeal to tradition. He did not argue from oral tradition or oral doctrine or oral law. He appealed to the written word of God. Notice, he said, “It is written.” It is what you and I call, the Old Testament. Also, he did not suggest that man should live by the most recent words of God. He did not say that man should live by the new covenant words of God. He did not make a distinction between old covenant and new covenant words of God. Nor did he say that since he was a Jew, he should live by every

word of God. No, he said it is written, "Man shall live by every word of God." So that God's words from the beginning, from the creation, all the way down until now are those words by which man should live and God does not change. He is the Father of lights in whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. He is the same; yesterday, today and forever. And so, Jesus said that the Bible, which is the record of the written word of God, well that is what we are supposed to live by. But you would be surprised how many Christian people have not even read every word of God. And if you have not read it, how on earth could you possibly live by it?

Now in the Jewish faith, there are two laws. There is the written law and there is the oral law. In emphasizing, "It is written." Jesus makes the point that it is the written word that is authoritative. And in this, and the argument that went on among the Sadducees and the Pharisees in this particular time and place, Jesus came down on the side of the Sadducees who did not accept the oral law but believed that only the written law was authoritative. Now this is important because Jesus is going to come into conflict with the oral law of the Jews right off the bat. Okay said the devil, if you are going to quote the Bible I can do that. So the devil took him up to the holy city and he sat him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "Now if you really are the son of God throw yourself down from here, because it is written." You quote scripture, I will quote scripture. "He shall give his angels charge concerning you and in their hands they shall bear you up, lest at any time you shall dash your foot against a stone." Now twice the devil has done this. He has started off by saying, If you are the Son of God. There is some doubt about this. And I think what we ought to do is, we ought to put God to the test. We should test this matter. We should prove it because if you are the Son of God, you should be able to command these stones to be made bread and they will become bread.

You should be able to cast yourself down, just step off the edge of the temple and the angels will grab you before you even hit the ground. Let's test this. And Jesus said, "It is written another place, you shall not tempt the Lord your God." You shall not put God to that kind of senseless test. And in fact, I think what Jesus is telling us is, we do not need to put God to the test at all. Really, we just need to do what we are told. We have the written word of God. It tells us what is right, it tells us what is wrong and we should live by that by faith without having to put God through some set of hoops along the way. I take it to mean that we should never ever voluntarily place ourselves in harms way on the assumption that God will bail us out. Again, the devil took him up to a very high mountain and he showed him all the kingdoms of the world and all the glory of them and he said, "All these things will I give you if you will fall down and do obeisance to me." And Jesus said, "Get away from me." One version says, "Get behind me." Matthew says, "Get away from here. It is written, You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve." And after this, the devil left him and behold angels came and ministered to him. Presumably brought food and water and helped him back to strength again. What Satan did was give him a temptation to idolatry, to put power and glory ahead of the service of God. And all three times, Jesus appealed to the written word of God, the holy scriptures, which is: The Old Testament. For not one word of the New Testament had been written. He appealed to this as his first line of defense. He

would live by that word and as a result, the temptation was ineffective because Jesus knew the difference between right and wrong.

And you know, there is a funny thing about that. The choice is not nearly as hard. Choices are not nearly as hard, if you know the difference between right and wrong. It is when you can kid yourself about what is right that the choice is hard. If when you can kid yourself that well maybe this is not all that wrong, that the choice is difficult. But when you know and you are certain of what God requires you, why if you believe God, then the choice is relatively easy. It was for Jesus. And the fact is, it would not be that hard for you would it? All you want to do is to do the right thing, right? Now Luke records these same three statements, but there are some subtle differences in Luke's account. For example, he starts off with again, we are talking about the words of Jesus and the way Luke puts it in the first version. "It is written that man shall not live by bread alone but by every word of God." Matthew says, "every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." Then the second one is, Luke says, "Get you behind me Satan for it is written, you shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve." And in third, Luke says, "It is said, you shall not tempt the Lord your God." Did you notice it? Did you catch the difference? The order is different. The second and third sayings of Jesus are reversed in Luke's version.

Matthew in the second temptation has Satan taking Jesus up to the temple and the pinnacle of the temple and saying cast yourself down and Jesus responds by saying, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God." Luke has that third. And Luke puts in second position, get behind me Satan. "It is written you shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve." Now I don't think this difference in order is very important and I doubt that you do either. But it illustrates something I said the last time we talked. There is a doctrine much exercised that the Bible is inerrant. That means, that the Bible, at least as written in the original documents is without error and infallible. We can conclude that Jesus did meet the devil and that these things actually happened and that they happened in some order, 1, 2, 3. Right? And we have two accounts of these with different orders, Right? Therefore, one of these accounts has to be in error. Right? Now don't get excited. I am not saying that the Bible is in error, but we have to deal with these things honestly, Right?

Now suppose you were sitting on a jury and a witness, who is brought in by the prosecutor and put on the stand describes this scene for you, giving you the events in the order that Matthew recorded them. Then another witness is brought in, not having heard the previous testimony and he testifies to precisely the same events, laying them out in the same order that Luke recorded them. Now are you going to conclude from their testimony that there is no way you can know whether the meeting took place. There is no way you can know whether these three temptations took place, because of a technical difference in the witnesses testimony? But both of our witnesses told the truth and since the order of events was not germane to the truth, we do not consider the testimony to be erroneous. It is true as opposed to accurate. And the truth, is what we are looking for. The fact is that in the court of law, we can send a man to the gas chamber or have him put to death by lethal injection, even though the witnesses differed in some technical aspect, if we know that their testimony

was true. Now consider how we came by this information about Jesus' temptation by the devil. Who was there? Well, the devil was there and Jesus was there. But as far as we know, there was not another soul anywhere around. So how did Matthew and Luke learn about this? Well, the devil didn't tell them so Jesus must have told them. How many times do you suppose in the 3-1/2 years of his ministry, Jesus told this story? Well, I will guarantee you he told it more than once. He probably told it dozens of times in different places, different times, to different people and these men were there with him all of the time and heard the stories again, and again, and again.

Now we have really two alternatives. One, in all the times that Jesus told the story, he mentioned the events in a different order on one or more occasions or second, Matthew and Luke heard the same thing but recalled it in a different order. Now you know that sort of thing happens all of the time because you have done it. You have seen it happen. Well I do not mean that you were the one that got it wrong. The other person who thought he got it right, he is the one obviously who got it wrong. But both of you had the information correct. You just remembered it slightly differently. Now, when it comes to the Bible, to the New Testament, why do you suppose God would let that happen? Why didn't the holy spirit cause them to remember this in the same order? There are people who believe that the holy spirit actually dictated the New Testament. Now if that were true, I would really not expect to find this little difference in the temptation of Jesus, would you? So that does not seem to be the case. What seems to be the case is, that these men sat down and wrote these things out and they remembered them slightly different.

Why did the holy spirit not cause them to remember it the same way? That is easy. If you want honest witnesses to tell the story truthfully, you do not mess with the witnesses. The technical differences in their stories establishes something very important. It establishes that they were not in collusion. That they are separate and distinct witnesses and it forms a part of their bonafides. It forms a part of their credentials, as independent, truthful witnesses of the words of Jesus. More words of Jesus after this break.

Again, the next day after, John was standing with two his disciples and as Jesus walked by he turned to his disciples and said "Behold the Lamb of God." Now I would give a lot to know, where he got that idea. He was a prophet of course and I would also like to know how that registered with his disciples because they immediately turned and followed Jesus. But the idea of Jesus as the Lamb of God transcends by far any idea of him being a great teacher or him being a Rabbi or somebody that these guys would want to study under. The Lamb of God includes within it the idea of a suffering Messiah. Of a Messiah who not only suffers but also dies. And this is a concept which is foreign to Judaism really. At least it was. Someone recently told me that everything we thought we knew about Judaism 40 years ago turned out to be wrong in the light of the Dead Sea Scrolls because Judaism as known, normative Judaism, did not think of the Messiah as a suffering dying Messiah but rather as a conquering Messiah but the Qumran community had a different view. And there are indications that they did see that there would be an anointed one of God who would suffer and of course, we come to know him as the Lamb of God and that he was sacrificed as

the Passover lambs were being sacrificed, that his blood was shed for our sins as the blood of the Passover lamb was taken and struck on the door posts of Ancient Israel that the death angel would pass over them. Now these men followed Jesus and he turned around and saw them behind him and said, "What are you looking for." And they said to him, "Rabbi where are you dwelling." And he said, "Well, come and see." So they came and saw where he lived and stayed with him that day. It was already late. And one of the two, which heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. And one of the first things he did was to find his brother Simon and say, "We have found the Messiah that is being interpreted, The Christ." And he brought him to Jesus.

And Jesus when he beheld him said, "You are Simon, the son of Jonas. You will be called Cephas." Right off the bat, Jesus looked at this man and stared him right in the eyes and renamed him. Oh, there is nothing terribly unusual about that. But usually it takes a while for a nickname to come along and be picked up and stick to a guy, but Jesus gave Simon a nickname right off the bat, he called him, a stone. The following day, Jesus was going to go into the Galilee and he found Philip and he said to him, "Come along with me." Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. And then Philip went out and found Nathaniel and said, "Hey, we have found him of who Moses and the law and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." He was excited. And Nathaniel said, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" And Philip said, "Well, come along and see for yourself." Now Jesus saw Nathaniel coming. Here are these two fellows walking back. One of them has gone out and recruited another disciple and they are walking down the road and as he came near before he had a chance to open his mouth, Jesus said, "Well look here, an Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile."

Now here is a man who does not mince words. Whatever is on his mind, that is what comes out. And Nathaniel said, "From where do you know me." Because he knew that that was true, that he was that kind of person. And Jesus said, "Before Philip called you, while you were under the fig tree I saw you." And Nathaniel answered and said, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel. You really are the Messiah." You know it is funny the way Jesus approached these men and you could almost see that he has his tongue in cheek. A little humorous about the whole thing and chooses different ways of touching them. In Philip's case, he decided to needle him just a little bit by calling him "an Israelite who was absolutely without guile and then telling him, Oh I saw you under the fig tree before Philip ever called you name." And he said, "Rabbi you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel." And Jesus answered and said, "Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, you believe? You will see greater things than these. You are easy to impress. Verily, verily I say unto you. From now on or later than this, you are going to see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

I don't know when Philip saw that but it must have struck him very deeply. Continuing the account, the third day, there was marriage in Cana of Galilee and the mother of Jesus was there. And Jesus was invited and his disciples were invited to the marriage. And when they wanted wine, they run out. The mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no

wine.” And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what have I to do with thee. Mine hour has not yet.” That is the authorized version. It is better translated this way. “Dear woman, why do you involve me? My time has not yet come.” It is a polite expression that Jesus says. There is no way that Jesus would have been rude to his mother. His mother then said to the servants, “Whatever he tells you to do, do it.” What is interesting about this is, Jesus’ statement, “Woman, dear woman, why do you involve me, my time has not yet come,” is almost like a small protest but his mother just brushes by it and tells the servants, whatever he tells you to do, you do that. She took it for granted that Jesus would do something about this and his response implies that, she expected something miraculous and he felt the time was not quite right. But having mentioned it to him. Her next words are to the servants.

You know, I think that Mary has seen miraculous things from her son before. Otherwise, it does not make an awful lot of sense that she would have responded to him the way she did. Well nearby, there were six very large water pots of stone. And Jesus said to the disciples or to the servants rather, “Fill the water pots with water.” They filled them up to the brim and he said, “Now draw out and bear to the governor of the feast.” And they took it and when the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine and did not know where it came from, he called the bridegroom and said every man at the beginning puts out the good wine and when have men have had too much to drink already then that which is worst but you have kept the good wine until now.

This beginning of miracles that Jesus did in Cana of Galilee and manifested his glory and his disciples believed on him. Why did Jesus do this? Well the personality of Jesus as it is developed in the Bible is of a gracious and generous man. He did it out of consideration for the guests and he did it because his mother asked him to do it. Until next time. This is Ronald Dart and remember, Do what your mother asks you to do.

This article was transcribed with minor editing from a message given by
Ronald L. Dart titled: "The Words of Jesus #2" (WOJ2) 2/26/98
Transcribed by: jsm

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