

### The Baptism of Jesus, Part 3

Acts 19:1-7

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

Those who study the bible believe that John the Baptist was probably a much more popular figure than most of us think. And, when you think about it, why wouldn't John be popular? A baptism for the repentance of sins isn't a bad idea. Who doesn't want to make a fresh start every once in a while...put the past in the past and make a new beginning. New Year's resolutions serve the same purpose. John's baptism was a new beginning, a chance to wipe the slate clean. You walked into the water and, symbolically, the past was washed away. You came out with a new resolve to start over, do things better. The sun has risen on a new day.

The problem is, you are the same old you, and, try as you might, there is only so much change you can make in who you are.

Statistics show that 97% of all New Year's resolutions will not be kept.

More than 80% of those who go on diets regain the weight within a year, and usually end up gaining more than they lost to begin with.

More than two-thirds of convicts released from prison are rearrested within three years.

It's a new beginning, but it's the same old us, and so, before long we are usually back to the same old place, doing the things we shouldn't, and not doing the things we should. We need something more than this; something more than an eraser for the chalkboard of our lives. We need a new us, a changed us, or, at least the power available to make changes if we truly choose to.

And that's where the difference lies between the baptism of John and the baptism of Jesus. There are actually three differences between John's baptism and Jesus' baptism. First, when you are baptized by John, you pledge to repent, make a new start, and your past is forgiven you. It is your will power that must make the change, and most of us know how far our will power gets us. However, when you are baptized into Jesus Christ, it is not water that cleanses you, it is the blood of Jesus. We are baptized into Jesus' death on the cross and his blood removes our sins forever, in God's eyes. But, it is not just the sins we've committed that are forgiven, it is our sinful nature that is forgiven. Jesus took our place, took upon himself the punishment we deserve, the sinful nature we have, so that, from this day forward, nothing stands between us and God. Second Corinthians 5:21 says God "*made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*"

The second difference is that, when we are baptized into Jesus Christ, our lives are no longer our own, we belong to God; and God, as I like to remind us every week in the benediction, never lets go of us.

In her autobiography, An American Life, Annie Dillard tells about her experience of God's refusing to let go of those who belong to him. By age seventeen, Annie Dillard had read through most of the books in her branch of the Pittsburgh Library. After reading widely in philosophy, she decided that Christianity was a bunch of baloney. So she resolved to have her name removed from the role of her church, to have nothing more to do with Christianity. She went to her church and demanded that her name be removed from the roll of Shadyside Presbyterian. Her pastor listened to her and then said that he would have her name removed.

"Is that it?" she asked.

"That's it," he replied.

"So my name is off the roll," she asked.

"Yep, you want it off the roll, it is off the roll."

"So I'm no longer a Christian?" she asked.

"I just said your name was no longer on the roll of the church," said the preacher. "You are still baptized. I know what you want, but who knows what God wants of you?"

"What is that supposed to mean?" she asked.

"We'll see," replied the old pastor.

Annie then walked out the door of the pastor's office and made her way down the hall. She overheard the pastor mumble to himself, "She'll be back."

She wheeled around, stormed back into his office and demanded, "What did you say?"

"Oh, I just said that I expect that you'll be back," he replied.

"No I won't! It's my life. And this is the way I want to live it. I'm not going to be back!" she shouted.

“Okay. We’ll see,” he said.

Annie Dillard said she stormed out, really perplexed by the old man’s attitude.

Then she said, “I am forty-five years old as I write this. Through a circuitous path, I find myself still in this faith. I’m back.”

In Jesus’ baptism, not only are your past sins forgiven you, but your sinful nature is forgiven. In Jesus’ baptism, you are not left on your own, you are adopted into God’s family, and God will not let go of you. And, here is the third difference between the baptism of John and the baptism of Jesus: whereas John’s baptism offers a new beginning, Jesus’ baptism offers the power to be permanently changed. When we are baptized into Jesus Christ, we are not left to our own devices, our own will power to make changes. We receive the Holy Spirit who begins to change us, and gives us the power to become different people. Each time in scripture when people are baptized into Jesus Christ, they receive the Holy Spirit, and they begin to display signs of the power of the Spirit within them. Here in Acts 19, they begin to speak in tongues and to prophesy. Other times, it is other spiritual gifts, but the power of the Holy Spirit’s presence is manifest to show that we no longer rely only on our own strength.

The New Testament Greek uses four different words for the kind of power available to us through God’s Spirit: *dunamis*, *energian*, *kratos*, and, *ischuos*. *Dunamis* is the word from which we get “dynamic” and “dynamite.” It is explosive power, *power to move a mountain*. *Energian* is where we get “energy,” the power to work, to keep things moving. Think of the Energizer bunny – it keeps going and going and going... *the power to climb a mountain*. *Kratos* has to do with sovereignty, authority. It is where we get all of our “-ocracy” words, like democracy, autocracy, aristocracy. The New Testament never uses “kratos” in reference to human power, it always has to do with God’s sovereignty over all things, and yet, the Bible says this power is available to us through God’s Spirit! God has given us authority over this creation, *power over the mountain*. Finally, there is *ischuos*, which means to be able. We talk about people who are “able-bodied,” having the ability to everything they were made to do. In a sense, this is the power within the mountain itself, volcanic power. You might say this is *the power to be mountains of power ourselves*.

In fact, “mountains of power” describes exactly the difference between John’s baptism and the baptism of Jesus. No longer are we left to our own devices, our own resolve and will power.

We have the Holy Spirit’s power enabling us to move mountains. Ask someone who was caught in the grip of addiction and is now free from it about the power to move mountains. Ask someone who has forgiven an abusive parent or spouse about the power to move mountains.

We have the Holy Spirit’s power enabling us to climb mountains. Ask someone who is having to persevere through extended periods of chemotherapy to battle cancer about the ability to climb mountains. Ask someone with a disabled loved one who requires years of selfless care about the ability to climb mountains.

We have the Holy Spirit’s power enabling us to have authority over the mountains in our lives. Ask those who work hard to be faithful stewards of this earth, of their home, their budget, their time about the difference it makes to have God’s Spirit available in their attempts to be good stewards.

And, we have the Holy Spirit’s power enabling us to become mountains of power ourselves – enabling us to make a difference in the world around us for the building up of God’s kingdom. That is what all of those spiritual gifts are about that Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 12 – the gifts that make us mountains of power to those who need our help, like those in Haiti right now. Ask those among us who volunteer at the Open Door shelter, or West End Ministries, or Meals on Wheels, or the countless other ways they make a difference in the world around them. Ask them where that power comes from.

Thank God we have more than the baptism of John on which to base our lives. Thank God we have the baptism of Jesus to cleanse us not only from our sins, but from our sinfulness. Thank God we have the baptism of Jesus which claims us, adopts us into the family of God so we no longer are in this world on our own. And, thank God we have the baptism of Jesus through which we receive the Holy Spirit and the mountains of power that come through God’s Spirit.

Thank God for the baptism of Jesus.