

Sermon by Philip C. Herrmann, February 4, 1973

Willo Bible Chapel, Willoughby, OH (44:30)

(poor recording in places)

Many thanks for the introduction. If I were to ask anyone or everyone here what is the most known chapter in the Bible, outside of the Psalms, outside of the 23rd Psalm, I guess most would say John 3. And that would be, I think, in the main, correct. There are also two other chapters of the number of 3 that very are well-known, Genesis 3, which tells of the fall of man, and Romans 3, which tells of man's spiritual fall, how man has gone much further than Adam did, and how he needs the redemptive work of Christ on the cross.

But John 3 is the first revelation in the New Testament of God's love. And it is matched by something else that I would like to speak on this morning. And it concerns the one who was the forerunner of the Lord. And if you'll turn with me to John, the third chapter, we'll begin at the place that most preachers don't, for they read the first part of the chapter, the first 21 verses. but the remainder of the chapter they leave alone, because that's not a part of the subject. The first part of course was where the Lord spoke to Nicodemus, the man who came to him by night, the Pharisee, the good man, the righteous man, the self-righteous man, the one who thought he was good and that would avail before God. But goodness is not enough for God; God demands perfection.

So let us read from the 21st verse, or the 22nd verse, of the third chapter of John's gospel. Remember that the John that is spoken of here in this part of the chapter is not the John that wrote the gospel. This is John the Baptist, the one who was just a few months, six months I believe, earlier in the world than the Lord was, that is by way of birth, but the John that wrote these things, wrote what we're about to read, and wrote the whole gospel, was the son of Zebedee. That was one of the things that makes it difficult to read the Bible, because you have so many Josephs, and so many Jacobs, and so many James, and Johns, that you have to identify them mostly by their father's names. John the gospel writer was the son of Zebedee.

Well, continuing now, starting with the 22nd verse, "after these things," that is after the Lord had been dealing with Nicodemus, "After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judea. And there he tarried with them and baptized." In other words, the Lord had left Jerusalem, where he dealt with Nicodemus, and was now in the part outside of Jerusalem, in the land of Judea, or in that place Judah had its being, and there he tarried with them and baptized. This is the first time, I believe, that we hear that the Lord baptized. But we'll see how that's modified. "And John," that's John the Baptist "and John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized. For John," John the Baptist, "was not yet cast into prison. Then there arose a question between some of John's disciples," that is, John the Baptist's disciples, "and the Jews about purifying. And they came unto John," that is John the Baptist "and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness," that is, the Lord, "behold, the same baptizes, and all men come to him. John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and

hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease."

Now if you have the Bible, the Bible that I'm reading, you'll see a paragraph and a change there, or a statement, a declarative statement concerning Jesus Christ. Evidently Mr. Scofield thought the remaining six verses were written by the writer of the book, the gospel writer, John the son of Zebedee. But I think it is more likely that this declarative statement of the last six verses fits in at the end of the 21st verse, and these words were said by the Lord Jesus Christ.

However, whichever is true, the statement is true. This is a divine statement, and back of it all is the Holy Spirit, who indited this gospel, but I like to think of it myself as the final words of John the Baptist, his tribute to the Lord. We just read, "He must increase, but I must decrease," that is, "he must grow greater, but I grow littler." And the statement that follows would seem to be his tribute to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, whom he had only recently come to know, and whom, you may remember that when he was later cast into prison because he had charged Herod with sin, he was put into prison and languished there, we don't know how long, couldn't have been too long, but Satan used that time to stir up doubts in him, whether the person that he had been preaching about, whom he had been directing men toward, was really the Christ.

You see for he had the same idea that all the Israelites of that day had, that the Messiah, the Son of God, would come and straighten out things, would restore the kingdom to Israel, the kingdom that they had lost 600 years before. They had been captives, and prisoners, and subject to four nations: the Babylonians, the Persians and Medes, the Greeks, and the Romans. And they were now in bondage to the Romans, although they denied it. You remember how they told the Lord, "we were never in bondage to any man," [John 8:33] which was a deliberate lie. But that was their thought, they were a very proud race, even as they are today. God has given them the marvelous ability, and he is going to carry out his promises to Abraham. Next week you heard that you will be hearing something about Abraham. Well to Abraham was conveyed the greatest message of the Old Testament, that is, that he would be the father of a great nation. That God would bless him, that God would curse those who cursed him and his nation, God would bless those who blessed him and his nation, and in him, that is, in Christ, because that's what God had in mind, and it's abundantly proven in the 22nd chapter of Genesis that in the seed of Abraham, Christ himself, the Lord from Heaven, all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

We were discussing this morning a little of the problems of the present day, how things seem to be deteriorating, between nations, between peoples and between nations, and how very simply civil war could break out in many nations today, because of the feelings, of the hatreds, the prejudices that exist. But God is withholding all of this, and in His good time He will bring out the person who is to be the Savior of mankind. Savior in the sense that he will preserve men from the fate that they would like to inflict upon each other. And the world is still to see a thousand years of wonderful blessing, at the end of which Satan will be loose, and he will come again, and do the same things to the nations, to the unregenerate mass of mankind, that he did to our first father and mother, to Adam and Eve. He will deceive them, and bring them as a force, as an army, to try to destroy the Lord and his people. And swift destruction will come upon them, and that will usher in the day of God, when men will be judged for their sins, and cast into Hell, and the wrath that the Gospel, that the last verse of our chapter speaks about, will then take place.

So then let us read this tribute then to the Lord that John the Baptist gives us. “He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthy, and speaketh of the earth:” (that was himself) “he that cometh from heaven is above all.” This was what filled the soul of John the Baptist, I believe. Here he was, just a person, just a man, like everyone else, although endowed with wonderful ability, but he had the privilege of introducing to the world, especially to the nation of Israel, and through them to the world, this wonderful person, from Heaven. “And what he has seen,” that is what the Lord has seen and heard, that he testifies and no man receives his testimony.” But we’ll see that this is not universal, there were exceptions. “He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true. For he whom God hath sent,” that’s the Lord Jesus Christ, “speaks the words of God: for God gives not the Spirit by measure to him. The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son,” or he that is not subject to the Son, or he that is disobedient to the Son, who does not obey the Son, that’s the thought in this “believing not the Son,” “shall not see life;” will not take part in that eternal life that God has for everyone that puts their trust in His Son, “shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.”

I think this is an exceptional statement, this last verse John 3:36. It’s in the same chapter that tells us of the wonderful love of God, a love so wonderful, that no one could possibly tell it out in its fullness. There aren’t words enough to express the intensity of the love of the heart of God, to give his Son. You remember this chapter contains the verse that almost everybody seems to know. I remember being in a hospital once, we were preaching, we were reading the Scriptures, and there was a man in one of the beds that was constantly interrupting, or making snide remarks. There are people like that that have no respect for the Word of God. It means nothing to them, it just seems to be something that they must sneer at. But when the reader came to the 16th verse, the man stopped his jeering, stopped his foolery, and he repeated with the reader this very verse. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only, his beloved Son, that whosoever believes on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” And that stopped his jeering and foolery, and the Word of God put a clamp upon his mouth, and we were able to go on with the reading.

Well it’s interesting to know something about John the Baptist. What is told us about him is not told us in one place. There are probably some 30 or 40 references to him in the Scriptures, in the book of Matthew, of Mark, and Luke, and John, and Acts. I don’t know that he is referred to in any of the other epistles. But in those five books we have some 30 references to the work of John, to the person of John, and the first one is in Luke 1, which of course tells us about the birth of the Lord. Prior to the birth of the Lord Zechariah was in the temple. He was a Levite, of the tribe of Levi, he was a priest. And while he was attending to the worship, the service there in the tabernacle, or the temple, rather, the angel Gabriel appeared to him. It was the same angel, the same high order of angel that had appeared to Daniel 600 years before. And his message, the angel Gabriel’s message to Zechariah was that God had heard his prayer, and his wife would have a son, and he was to be called John.

Now the meaning of the word John is “God is Gracious,” or “the grace of God, the graciousness of God.” God was coming out to man now, in a marvelous way, and here he had appointed this boy, this son, to be the fulfillment of two passages in the Old Testament, one in the 40th of Isaiah, which reads, “The voice of one that crieth in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.” And then there was another quotation, there was another prophecy in the last book of the Old Testament. Malachi, third chapter, “Behold I send my messenger before my face, and he shall prepare

the way before me.” [Malachi 3:1] So here was a divine revelation, by way of an angel, to an old man, that his wife, his elderly wife, would bear this son.

This came about, in due time, and he was duly named John. We won’t go into the circumstances, there are remarkable circumstances, you’ll have to read it, you’ll find it in the early part of the first chapter of Luke. What Gabriel has to say about this is equally remarkable: not only that he would be born of elderly parents, but that he will be a great person. He is said to be, “he will be great, in the sight of the Lord.” [Luke 1:15] He will bring many of the children of Israel back to the Lord, turn their hearts back to the Lord. He will go in the power and spirit of Elijah. And Elijah was a great character in his day, and had been considered one of the highest prophets, although he was prophesying in the land of Israel, the ten tribes.

Elijah was prophesied to be returning, but I believe the Lord showed from his answers to the disciples that the Elijah that was prophesied was really John the Baptist. John the Baptist fulfilled what was said about Elijah.

So we have a little of John’s background given us, in that from an early age, he was in the desert of Israel. He was not in the Temple, or in Judea, but he was in the wilderness, and even his clothing and his food are described. He must have been an unusual character, clothed in camel’s hair, with a girdle about his loins, and eating locusts and wild honey. If you just think of that for a moment; just think of any of us being satisfied to wear such clothes or eat such food. I think it would be very surprising to see anyone, throughout the earth, who would perform such a feat.

The clothes, camel’s hair, if you have been to a zoo and seen a camel from a close-up distance, you can imagine how scratchy any such clothes would be. Of course they make camel’s coats and so on, camel’s hair coats today, but they are protected from the skin.

And just think of eating wild honey. A man would have to be either acquainted with the bees, or impervious to their stings. So anyway this was a remarkable character. But it was what he preached, not only the way he lived but what he preached that stirred men’s hearts. God was preparing a remnant that would be appealed to, and it says they came from all quarters, to be baptized by John in the River Jordan. Now the River Jordan is a type of death. It’s the river that the Israelites crossed on their way into the Promised Land. after their 40 years in the wilderness. And they had to pass through the sentence of death before they could get to their destination, and then fight for that land. It wasn’t given to them, they had to fight for it.

And it’s a picture of the Christian today. We don’t get anything except we struggle for it, we study, and strive for it, that is the way to get blessing out of the scriptures, out of our eternal life that we have with the Lord. Now the message that John preached was a message of repentance. And the baptism that he effected was not for salvation, but was a proof of the confession of their sins. By being baptized they confessed their sins, they realized that they were no better than the man of the Syrian army that had been baptized or had been immersed, immersed himself in that case, and his case was for deliverance from leprosy.

Whereas the baptism that John preached, that he performed, was a one-time event that signified, by an outward sign, the reality of an inward work. For he didn’t only baptize, but he insisted that they bring forth fruit, meet for repentance. That was the way they were to prove the reality of the work in their souls. The baptism of John was different from Christian baptism, because Christian baptism takes

place after a soul is converted.

Now repentance in John the Baptist's case was not fully salvation, although I believe that confession of sin and a real belief in the person that was to come, that is, on Christ, would have availed them of salvation after the Lord died. For all the worthys of the Old Testament had faith in Christ, and that faith was applied to the work that Christ did upon Calvary's cross. So they were saved in the same way that we are, by trusting in Christ. And I just want to point out the difference between this baptism, the baptism before the cross, and the baptism that the disciples performed afterwards.

All of the book of Acts shows that baptism, water immersion, is performed only once, and that only after a person has signified their belief in Christ. They were saved and then baptized. Mark, the end of the book of Mark, confirms that he that believes and is baptized will be saved. But he that believes not, shall not be saved, shall be lost.

Unfortunately, some believe that baptism is a part of salvation. It's just a sign that is performed once, to show to the world that we have died with Christ and that we are raised again, just as Romans 6:6 tells us. "Know ye not, that so many of us as have been baptized into his death, Christ's death, have died with him, and in his resurrection we have been raised with him." The baptism there is an outward sign of an inward work, nothing more, nothing less.

Well the character of John the Baptist must have been great, and the Lord brought to him those people that were reading the signs of the times, that knew a little bit of the human heart, of their heart, could see the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and the Saducees, the chief priests, the scribes, the elders, all those who took a higher place, all those who considered themselves righteous and needed no repentance. The very fact that these people came to John the Baptist to be baptized showed that they were taking their place outside the establishment, using the word establishment in the accepted sense, that it was outside of the ruling force. They were having a personal experience.

Now, unfortunately, I think that their repentance was not deep-seated, or in some cases was not true. Just as in the case of Jonah and Ninevah. You remember that because Jonah preached in 40 days Ninevah would be overthrown, that God spared the city. But a hundred years later, that city was destroyed, and the whereabouts of it are not known. So that repentance is not salvation. Repentance is the first step toward salvation. Repentance towards God is what the Apostle Paul preached after Christ's death and resurrection.

In the dispensation in which we are, in this era, in this Christian era, he preached this formula, repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's what it is. Repentance is the first step, it's the necessary step, it's the step in which we believe that we need to turn to God, turn from ourselves, turn from our sins, confess our sins, and plead the blood of Christ, the work of Christ upon the cross, as the way of salvation. If we do that, God will give us all that He had in His heart from eternity, that He is giving His son, that to share with Him.

Well the message, not only of John, was to repent. Although the message that he preached is only given us in a short few sentences, if all that was preached by the person of John the Baptist were given us in one place, it would occupy just one chapter out of the gospels, so little is given us. But we know from what is stated in the 30-some-odd places that speak of him, we know that he preached not only repentance, but to turn to the one who was coming. And at first he didn't know who this person was.

He didn't know the real person. Although he knew he was his cousin, although he knew the Lord by sight, and they must have met together and enjoyed their company, we are told in the first chapter of the gospel of John that it was only when the Lord was baptized by John in the River Jordan and he saw the Holy Spirit, as a dove, light upon the head of the Lord Jesus Christ, and God's voice from heaven, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well-pleased" that he understood that this person, now, was far more than his cousin, was far more than the person known as Jesus; he was the Son of God.

And John was also, in his recognition now of the person, he says of him "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." And while the expression "the Lamb of God" is a strange one to the one who is not acquainted with the Scriptures, seems like a very odd expression, every Jew, every Israelite would know instantly that this meant that this person who was called the Lamb of God was God's sacrifice, was to be God's sacrifice, he was to be the fulfillment of all the Old Testament sacrifices for it was the lamb that was slain on the Passover night, and it was the blood sprinkled over the door and the doorposts that prevented the destroying angel from destroying the Israelite. So every Israelite applied that blood, and roasted the lamb, and enjoyed its meat, in recognition of the salvation that their forefathers had experienced that night in Egypt when all the firstborn of the Egyptians were slain.

You know the Old Testament abounds with God's judgment, and it's too bad we don't read the Old Testament sufficiently, We like to stay in the New Testament because we think it's more applicable to us, but we learn something of the character of God in the judgments that He has extended upon the earth. The first eleven chapters of the book of Genesis is nothing but one judgment after another, the final judgment taking place in the flood, and then upon Sodom and Gomorrah. And then the wonderful promise to Abraham as I have told you, it changes the picture. Then God comes out in grace. He establishes one man, he takes one man out of the wicked world, and fixes on him a nation that is to be God's representative in this scene for Him, and to bring forth His son, who was to be the savior of mankind.

Well John had wonderful success, far more than the Lord had. There must have been multitudes coming to John to be baptized in that River Jordan. And evidently, from what we read in the third chapter of John the crowds were so big that he had to go to another place where there was more water. And I hope it was cleaner water than the River Jordan, because if you've ever seen the picture of the color of the River Jordan you'd wonder how anybody would step in it, let alone be baptized in it. But it's one of the remarkable rivers in the world. It's far below the surface of the sea, and it runs down to the Sea of Tiberius, and the Dead Sea, or, I forget the other name that men give it now, it's not the Dead Sea.

But the success that John received shows that there was a work going on by God in the nation of Israel at that time to prepare the way for his Son. Unfortunately, I think there was failure connected with the baptism of John and his work, his work of calling men to repentance. As I said before, I believe it was apostle work, as all works are that have to do with mankind. When God sent his Son, and when the Lord began to do his work, and John was put in prison, we read of only very few, we don't read of the multitudes coming to the Lord to hear his word, although there were multitudes who came to be healed of their diseases, but there were mighty few that came because of their sins. We read of very few incidents in the gospels that tell us of the remarkable work of the Lord in saving souls.

You know when Lord did say that "Thy sins are forgiven thee" they rose up in protest. Why, who can forgive sins? That's God's work only. You see they didn't realize this person that John had been

preaching, he had been telling them to believe on for their soul salvation, that he truly was the Son of God. That had been revealed to John the Baptist, but it evidently wasn't revealed to the masses.

So we now come to our chapter, and before we close just a few words of comment I would like to make. You see, the work that John was doing was not allowed to be uninterrupted. There was controversy between the Jews and the disciples of John about the Lord's baptizing that showed what a lot of misunderstanding there was. John the Baptist was mistaken for the Lord. It says, I believe in the gospel of Luke, that all men after they came to John, they wondered whether he was not the Christ. And John had to tell them plainly that "I am not the Christ." John the Baptist was also confused with Elijah. John the Baptist had to tell them "I am not Elijah." That we read in the first of John.

And then they asked him, if you're not Christ, or Elijah, are you then the Prophet, The Prophet of Deuteronomy 18, the Prophet that was to be like Moses and he was to be like God, whose words they were to listen to. And anyone that didn't listen, would be judged. And the Lord was confused with John the Baptist. It showed what a lot of misunderstanding, and questioning on the part of them. Instead of just coming to him and asking him right to his face, they just took it for granted that it was as they thought.

Well all such, I believe, are just a picture of what we have today. We have religion unbounded. I understand in the city of Los Angeles there are hundreds of sects, perhaps even more than that, that thrive on philosophy, and good feelings, and a lot of false doctrines, and that do not conform to the Scriptures, just as in the days when the Lord was upon earth. He had to face misunderstanding and misconception, and whatnot, and the plain and simple things he told men were just disbelieved, or men didn't concern themselves with them afterwards. They took his miracles, his works of healing, and all the wonderful things that he did that attested his Deity, they took these for granted. You rarely hear that anyone even thanked him. It was the lepers who came back to thank him. It was just a few that really understood him. But thank God that though the truth is so strange, one would think that so reasonable a way of salvation, so reasonable a person, so wonderful a person, one who showed 100% love, far better than any of the love that we read about or hear about in today's papers, or in the philosophy that's going around, you would think that men would run to it, would accept it with open hearts; no, it takes a work of God to bring it to the soul. And that I think is what God is telling us through John the Baptist, here. Notice after he says, "He must increase, and I must decrease," just before that he had said that a man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.

This salvation that God is pressing upon your soul and mine, is something that we must receive, we must be willing to receive it. We must receive it as a gift. There is nothing we can do to work for it. And then you notice how John the Baptist stresses the fact that the one that comes from Heaven brings a divine message. And what he has seen and heard, that he testifies. I like to tell that in the Gospel of John alone we have eight times in different words, in different places, the statement by our Lord himself, the words he was speaking, the words he was speaking that could give life to a soul if he would but receive it, but they were the very words of God. God was giving him the words from Heaven; he was speaking them here upon earth. And that was the double witness that the Jews demanded: the Lord gave then four.

Now he said that John was a burning and a shining light. He was not the light, as the Lord was, but he was a burning and a shining light and what he had to say was true, as men testified a little later in

the gospel. So John did no miracles, but all that he said of this man was the truth. He saw that we have a divine message to give, and if it's refused, or if it's delayed to be refused, or if men temporize with it, play with God, say I'll accept it on my deathbed, or something like that, it shows that they are not ready to receive what God has.

Even if we receive this testimony, that is the testimony of the Lord himself, here upon earth, and he was speaking the very words of God, ??? ... that God is true??? "For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God gives not the Spirit by measure to him."

You see here we have the Trinity, many deny the Trinity, I was reading that the Muslims, 300 million of them, and this is one of their cardinal points against receiving anything of the Gospel, how can there be any but one God, and how can there be any but one Mohammed, his prophet. And so what is abundantly testified to in the Lord's words, and throughout the Scriptures, is there are three persons in the Godhead, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, is denied. But here we have it, "he whom God has sent," that is Christ, "speaks the word of God," that's God the Father, "for God giveth not the Spirit by measure to him."

The Spirit of God was in creation; we read of him in the second chapter of Genesis, "the Spirit of God moved above the waters." The Father loveth the Son, and has given all things into his hands. This Holy person whom we know is Jesus Christ, who suffered so much at the hands of man, and Satan, but was so beloved by God, and is loved by all that have received his message, and will receive his love, and in some small way seek to return that love again. God has given all things into his hand, and everyone who has put his trust into the person who has died for them upon Calvary's cross is going to share all of this. God has given all things, spiritual, material, eternal, into his hands, and he will share it with us.

But here is the nub of this question. This is the point, this is the place of no alternative. There's no middle ground here. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him. I think I referred to this ...

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