

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Luke 3: 15-20

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the Bible again. We'll continue to read Luke Chapter 3 and today we will read verses 15 to 20.

When John the Baptist was baptizing the crowds on the other side of the Jordan River—that is, the baptism of repentance—because his preaching was full of power, and because this was the first time, after God had been silent for more than 400 years, that He spoke His word through a prophet in the wilderness.

Verse 15: “Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ or not,”

Today it is the same. When we hear a powerful preacher in the church, our hearts are unknowingly drawn to him. Therefore, John very plainly and directly tells us.

Verse 16: “John answered, saying to all, ‘I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.’”

John was very clear about his own position. He was the voice in the wilderness. When the voice finishes speaking, it disappears. And the purpose of the voice in the wilderness is to proclaim that a true Messiah is coming after me; I am the one preparing His way. Therefore John said, Today I baptize you with water, but there is One coming after me who is much mightier than I am, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose.

Today, every one of us saints who learns to speak for the Lord and bear testimony for the Lord should have this same attitude. We are precious not because of ourselves, but because of the Lord who is in us, the Lord whom we are speaking about, and the Lord Jesus Christ whom we are testifying of. When the Lord comes forth, we should fade away, for we are not worthy even to untie His sandal strap.

Because the crowds lacked sufficient spiritual understanding, they were often easily confused between the vessel that spoke God's word and God Himself. But John very clearly pointed out that he was merely the voice; and the One who was truly coming, he was not worthy to loose His sandal strap. Today he baptized with water; but the One who is coming, He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, using water as a symbol. We recognize that we are not good, and we are willing to be washed clean. But John said that the Christ who is coming will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. Water is only a symbol of removing uncleanness; but the reality behind the symbol is the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit comes, He gives you an eternal, God-centered life. Today every Christian's baptism, in outward appearance, looks similar to John's baptism — a person is immersed in water and comes back out — but in reality, the spiritual meaning is entirely different.

John's baptism only showed that a person knew they were sinful, corrupt, and needed cleansing. But today a Christian's baptism represents union — through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, we are united with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore, today the spiritual meaning of a Christian's baptism is far richer than that of John's baptism at that time, because it contains the reality of the Holy Spirit. John's baptism alone is not enough — there must also be the spiritual baptism that Jesus brought when He came.

This is recorded in Acts chapter 19. In Ephesus, there were some disciples who only knew of John's baptism, and Paul very directly told them that John's baptism was not enough. In Acts 19:4–6, "Then Paul said, 'John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.' When they heard this, they were baptized

in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them.”

Actually, when John began his ministry, he very clearly told those who followed him: he was not the Christ, and his baptism was a baptism of repentance. There would come One after him, who was much more powerful, and He would bring the spiritual baptism. John added one more sentence here: “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” To be baptized with the Holy Spirit — this we understand — this is the spiritual reality behind the water baptism we practice today.

But what does it mean to be baptized with fire? Many people associate it with Acts chapter 2, when the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, and the Spirit seemed to divide as tongues of fire upon each of them. Personally, I believe that understanding is inaccurate, because we must continue reading verse 17 to see what John really meant.

Verse 17: “His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.”

In other words, after John finished speaking about the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire, the example he used was the threshing of wheat on Israel’s threshing floor. When the wheat harvest was gathered, they would place the grain on the threshing floor, and roll heavy stones over it to separate the grain inside from the outer chaff. Then they would go to a high place where the wind was blowing and toss the threshed wheat up into the air. The grain, being heavier, would fall close by, while the chaff, being lighter, would be blown farther away. In this way, by wind power, the grain and the chaff were separated.

So verse 17 is speaking exactly of this. With His winnowing fan, He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor. After the grain and the chaff have been separated, the grain will be gathered into His barn, but the chaff will be burned with unquenchable

fire. When a person is baptized, if that baptism has true spiritual meaning, inside of him there will be the life of God. The life of God is represented by wheat — something solid on the inside. The chaff, however, looks similar on the outside, yet is hollow and empty within.

In the church, it is unavoidable that there are some so-called nominal Christians. Outwardly they appear to come to worship every Sunday; some may even serve, and some may even give offerings. Yet within them, there is no real wheat — no true spiritual life. One day, when Christ returns, He will thoroughly cleanse His threshing floor. He will make a distinction within His church between the wheat and the chaff. All those who are wheat — those who have God's divine life within — will be put into His barn.

The barn represents, after the great harvest of the Feast of Tabernacles, all that belongs to God being brought into His eternal storehouse — entering into the New Jerusalem. But the chaff, which outwardly looks similar to wheat but has no life, no reality, will be burned with fire. So the spiritual baptism that every Christian receives today will one day be tested by fire. When He returns, the fire represents judgment. If one is merely a nominal Christian, without God's divine life inside, he will be burned with that unquenchable fire.

This is truly a very serious matter. Thus, salvation has two sides. The first side is repentance — the baptism of repentance preached by John. We must know our true condition, know that we cannot please God by ourselves, and cannot save ourselves. Therefore we are willing to humble ourselves, and willing to receive God's grace — to be united with the death of Jesus Christ and united with His resurrection.

This is also the spiritual meaning behind every Christian's baptism today. When this reality is present, your baptism becomes a true spiritual immersion. I sincerely hope that brothers and sisters will be clear on this point, because this concerns our eternal life.

Verse 18-19: “And with many other exhortations he preached to the people. But Herod the tetrarch, being rebuked by him concerning Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done,”

The Herod here was Herod the Tetrarch, or Herod Antipas; he was the ruler over the region of Galilee. Herodias was originally the wife of his brother. They had not divorced, yet Herodias afterward married Herod. Because such a matter was unrighteous, ordinary people did not dare to speak about it, for he was a man with power and authority. But John openly rebuked him face to face; and because John confronted him, he had John put in prison.

Verse 20: “also added this, above all, that he shut John up in prison.”

In the other Gospels, this part is spoken of in more detail, but Luke had no intention to elaborate and simply mentioned it briefly. John was put into prison, and his doing so was to bring forth the ministry of Jesus Christ. For John was the forerunner who prepared the way for Jesus; and while John was still fulfilling his ministry, Jesus was unwilling to begin His work. Only after John had been imprisoned did Jesus begin His ministry.

The Son of God, Jesus Christ, came into the world to become the Savior of mankind. Yet during His time on earth, the first thirty years, He lived under the Law. When the time was fulfilled, He came forth to carry out His ministry. Before He began His ministry, the time of His ministry also required that John the Baptist finish his forerunner assignment. In everything He did, He was entirely according to God’s requirement— there was not one thing done outside of His appointed portion.

Therefore Luke records very simply that John was put in prison. The Son of God, Jesus Christ, came to the earth and yet accepted all kinds of limitations— how much more should we? We must learn from the example of Jesus Christ: though He was the Son of God, He was still willing to accept all kinds of restrictions. We also must learn in our living, work, and service in the church, in every aspect of

the limitations God gives us, that we accept and submit; and in our submission, through the leading of the Holy Spirit, allow the life within us to grow.

Let us pray together: Lord, we thank You. You tell us that we are the wheat— and the wheat must be rolled over by stones on the threshing floor; then the outer chaff is broken, and only then can the inner, true wheat life be released. We ask You to help us, that in all kinds of limitations, we may be full of peace and full of joy, and enjoy being in such circumstances. May God help us and bless us, that in our living today, our conduct may be according to Your will. We pray in the holy name of Jesus Christ. Amen!