

A Baptism For The Hopeless

by Carter Conlon

This sermon focuses on the concept of a baptism for the hopeless, emphasizing the need for repentance and the recognition of our inability to be godly without God. It delves into the transition from John's baptism of repentance to the transformative power of encountering Jesus, who brings hope, victory, and a new life. The message highlights the simplicity of salvation through Jesus Christ and the invitation to open our hearts to Him for a life-changing encounter.

Scripture: Luke 3:2, Galatians 3:24, Romans 7:14, John 1:29, Ephesians 2:8, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Romans 10:9, Colossians 2:13, Acts 2:38, Revelation 3:20

Topics: "Baptism of Hope", "Transformation through Christ"

Description

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Transcript

I want to talk to you tonight for a few moments about a baptism for the hopeless, a baptism for the hopeless. Father, I thank you, God, with all my heart. Oh, God, I just, I'm so glad to be alive at this time.

I'm so glad, Lord, to see you bringing institutions like Yale University and Harvard back to their roots. They were formed to train pastors for the ministry. God, and somehow they lost their way, but you're, like the prodigal son, you're bringing them home.

Thank you, Lord, that you're touching Christian colleges across the nation now. There's a stirring among young people. Oh, Jesus Christ, what a great day to be alive.

Thank you for your presence here in this meeting this evening so powerfully, God, just confirming, Lord, that you are here and you're on the move, and you've heard our cry, and you've heard, oh, God, the petitions we've made for our families, our homes, the addicted, our children, the impoverished, the imprisoned, oh, God, those that are tormented in their minds, those that are on the verge of taking their lives. God Almighty, you've heard our cry, and Lord, you've come down as you have done so many times throughout history in mercy to set us free, in mercy, Lord, to call the people unto yourself one more time.

It's not that we deserve it.

We never have deserved your mercy. It's just because you are merciful, God, that you choose to come down and you choose, Lord, one more time to reveal yourself and open the floodgates of heaven and allow whosoever will to come in. Give us the grace, oh, God, to live our lives for you and for the sake of others that they may come to know you as Lord and Savior.

God, have mercy on Yale University. Have mercy on the students that will be listening. Those who don't have the courage to come into the quad will listen through their windows.

You have mercy on them, oh, God. Call them out of darkness and into life. And the things that you're doing at Ashbury and Lee College and Valley Forge and other places now, God, do it there too as well, Lord.

Let there be a cry that no power of hell can stop, oh, God, for you tell us in the scriptures that when you open the door that no man can close it. So we ask you to open the door to eternal life in these colleges, oh, God. And no matter who has laid down what rules about religion and prayer, let those rules be blown to the wind by the power of your Holy Spirit.

God Almighty, as we saw a whole football stadium go to prayer when a young man had a heart attack on the field, let it be in our generation, oh, God, that all the rules will go to the wind and everyone start crying out to you, Lord. Jesus Christ, we ask you to destroy the weapons of evil that have built up these fortifications all over the nation against the name of Jesus Christ. God, let these walls fall one more time as Jericho's walls once fell before the people of God.

I do pray, Lord Jesus Christ, that you would keep us walking a righteous walk before you. God Almighty, that your name would be glorified in all that we do and everything that we are, and we give you praise for it and we give you thanks in Jesus' name. A baptism for the hopeless.

Luke chapter 3, if you have your Bible or similar device with you, chapter 3 and verse, beginning at verse 2. While Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. Now, I want to stop there just for a moment. This is supposed to be the promised land, but somehow the promised land is described as a wilderness.

And it's a season where the people for many, many years had not been hearing the voice of God. They had been hearing about God in some measure in the temple, but it was a dry place. And I think America has been in a very, very dry place for a very, very long time.

Hearing things in the house of God, perhaps about him historically and such like, but not hearing his voice. And after 400 years of drought, years and years and years, generations not really hearing a living word from God, suddenly the word of God comes. And it comes to a man in the wilderness.

And he went into all the region around Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make his path straight. Every valley shall be filled in every mountain and hill brought low.

The crooked places shall be made straight and the rough ways smooth. And all flesh shall see the salvation of God. In other words, you prepare your heart to receive him.

You give him an entrance into your life and into your heart and every obstacle, every mountain will be brought down. God will lift up those places of depression. All the crooked places will be straightened for him to come to you.

Every rough way made smooth and you will see the salvation of God. Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come. Now another version of this says it was really the scribes and the Pharisees, he called this, those that had done their best in a sense through the religious system to bear the fruit of God.

Wherefore he says, bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father. In the old Testament, there was a promise made to a man called Abraham that I'm going to bless you.

I'm going to multiply you. I'm going to increase you. And through you, your descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the sky.

And through you, all the families of the earth are going to be blessed. Now God says, I'm going to do this through you, Abraham, even though you're too old to do it in yourself. I'm going to do this.

I'm going to do something in you and through you. And you and I know today, the promise made to Abraham is being fulfilled today through you and I as the church of Jesus Christ. We were the stars in a sense that God spoke to Abe, not just the nation of Israel, but the church of Jesus Christ that would be born through the tribe of Judah.

But he said, don't say to yourself that we have Abraham as our father, because God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. In other words, the work of God is a supernatural work. God does in us what we cannot do for ourselves.

God does through us what we could never do to honor his name. God takes us where we could never go. He makes us what we could never be and gives us what we could never possess.

It's all of him that no flesh should glory in his presence, the scripture says. That at the end of my days, my testimony is one name, Jesus. There's no other testimony in my life.

It's the name Jesus. It's the power of Jesus. It's the love of Jesus.

It's the redemption of Jesus. It's the carrying power of Jesus. It's the mercy of Jesus.

Everything in my life is about Jesus and Jesus Christ alone. And then he said, now the ax is laid to the root of the trees and every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Now that doesn't sound like a very, doesn't sound like a very comforting evangelistic message, does it? Either bear the fruit of God or prepare to be cut down and burned.

That's what he was basically saying. That was John's message and it was his baptism. And his baptism was the culmination of a very long, a very difficult and actually an impossible journey.

The journey began in Genesis chapter three and verse five, when the devil came down into the garden of Eden and told Adam and Eve essentially this, he said, if you listen to me and you break out of the confines of just, just having this relationship with God and listening to the words of God and letting your life be governed by the words of God and you begin to think for yourself, you can be, you can be just as godly as

you are right now. And you can be, you can be judges of what is good and what is evil. Basically he said, you can be godly without God.

And that's the essential sin nature of the human heart is that without God, I can be godly. Without God, I can, I can, I can govern my own future. I can, I can go from glory to glory as it is.

I can be a better person and all this stuff. When there's this inherent law of sin, once it was sown into humanity, it's like gravity. It just, it just drags you down and, and there's no way out of it.

And, and most everybody here knows what I'm talking about. If you don't, you will soon enough. Soon it'll come your way.

Now I'm, I'm not going through the whole story of redemption in the Old Testament, but for time's sake, let's just say some of the descendants of Abraham who believed they could be godly without God, God says, okay, if you believe you can be godly without me, I'm going to give you a 600 plus laws to obey. And all you have to do is obey these laws. And it proves in a sense, you can be godly without God.

But if you break one, it means you've broken them all. And then you have to offer a blood sacrifice. There has to be a sacrifice.

And you got to, it's almost like monopoly. Go back to go, do not collect \$200, go straight to jail. And you have to offer a sacrifice to get back on the board and start all over again, which produced this system of religion of constantly sinning and confessing, sinning and confessing, sinning and confessing, coming back, trying to be righteous, trying to do good.

And I love to create a picture of this, of how hopeless this whole system must have been. It must have been. Paul the apostle says in Galatians chapter 3 and verse 24 that the law was a schoolmaster, a teacher, an instructor to bring us to the understanding that we can't do this in ourselves.

We can't be God through human effort. We can't be godly through human effort. We don't even know the difference between right and wrong without God telling us what right and wrong actually is.

And so this whole system produced a river of blood. What it did, constant sacrifices. Can you imagine the depression of being raised in that era, of trying to be godly without God? And maybe you were sincere, but sin is now sown inside of your human life and you really do want to obey the laws of God.

And so you go to the temple and you bring in your lamb with a rope and you give it to the priest and he does his thing and you do your cleansing rituals and he offers the sacrifice and pronounces you clean and how did you go? And it must have felt so good, you know. And then you're only 50 feet from the temple and somebody runs over your new shoes with their cart and you curse him out as he goes down the road. Oh no.

So you go back to those that are selling doves and stuff, how much for the goat? Just how much for the goat, you know? And you pay your 50 bucks and you get your goat on a rope and the priest says, didn't I just see you on this? Never mind, just sacrifice the goat. I got it. See, that's what it was like.

It was a river of blood. It was a religion of hypocrisy. Eventually everybody tried to hide behind their homemade robes and they just couldn't come clean.

They just, it was hopeless. It was an absolutely hopeless place. I'm so glad I don't live there.

I'm so glad I'm not part of that system. Actually Paul describes that condition. Let me read it to you in Romans chapter 7 verse 14.

He said, For we know the law is spiritual. In other words, it was given by God and anything given by God is not evil. He's not the author of evil.

He can't author evil. But he said, I'm carnal. I'm sold under sin.

For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice. But what I hate that I do.

Anybody, can I get an amen? Anybody know what that's like? When you want to change, how many make resolutions at New Year's, especially the older guys like me that are here, you know, and the older, I won't say older girls because there's no such a thing, but I mean, there's, there's older guys here and the New Year's Eve, you went and you say, I'm going to be a better husband. I'm going to be a better employee. I'm going to be a better friend.

I'm going to tell the truth and I'm going to et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And it lasts about 10 minutes. You know, we sing old lying sign and it's all over and then you're back to who you were.

You know what to do, but don't know how to do it. And Paul says even beyond that, what I hate, I do. Most sinners hate themselves.

They hate what they do. Don't want to do it. I know I shouldn't be, but I, I can't stop.

And Paul says, if I then, if then I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now it's no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me, that is in my flesh, nothing good dwells.

For the will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good, I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do, but the evil I will not to do that I practice. And so now after many, many years of this, suddenly the voice of God comes.

What a relief that must have been. Except the message wasn't really complete. The message was repent of trying to be godly in your own strength and be baptized.

That's John's baptism, was a baptism of repentance. And you had this, suddenly people began to recognize this is God calling. I don't know where it's leading, but I can sense him calling.

There's people listening to me right now online tonight. You can hear God calling. You're not quite sure where it's taking you, but you know it's God that's beginning to call you.

Feel it inside your heart. And so you see this stream of people coming out of the city as it is, and they're going to the River Jordan where John was, and they're confessing their inability to be godly in their own strength, and going down into the waters of this baptism of John. And you can just imagine how how hopeless that must have been.

Like just an admission that I can't be godly without God. I can't do this without the strength of God in my life. The people that had robes and people who were dressed in rags, everybody's coming together to this baptism, and they're lined up, and they're going into the waters of baptism.

But the problem with John's baptism is you go down in the water hopeless, and you come out of the water hopeless. The only difference is you've admitted your hopelessness. There's no solution in John's baptism.

You understand? Remember there was a man in the New Testament, Apollos, who was mighty in the scriptures, but he was only preaching the baptism of John. I understand this because I did this for years. Go into churches and preach the baptism of John, thinking that's revival.

Bringing people to an awareness of their sin, calling them to an altar, and where they admit their failure. I remember coming home and saying to my wife Teresa, I said one day, the Jesus that I preach is deficient. The Christ that I preach offers no victory to people.

I'm revisiting the same churches, and the same people are crying the same tears over the same sins year after year after year. At some point this hopeless thing's got to come to an end. You can picture yourself just finally admitting Pharisees coming, Sadducees coming, saying I can't be holy in my own strength.

I can't be godly in my own strength. I can't discern between right and wrong in my own strength. And they go down in this water of baptism, this hopeless place, and they come out and they've admitted their failure, but where do you go from there? If that's all you know is the baptism of John.

A lot of people think that that revival is just repentance. Well it's not just repentance. Repentance is just the beginning of revival.

Because what revival? Revival happened when suddenly one day somebody shows up at the same water at the same time who doesn't need to be baptized. And John looked at Jesus and said, I need to be baptized of you. What are you doing coming into this pool, this water of baptism? And Jesus said, let it be done this way because this is what has to happen for righteousness to be fulfilled.

And this sinless, spotless Lamb of God went down into this dirty water of everyone's failure. The water of what was in there, hypocrisy, depression, suicide, alcohol, addiction, selfishness, anger, it was all in that pool. And the Son of God immersed himself in our failure.

And when he came up out of the water, it was essentially he led us from the place of hopelessness to a cross where he triumphed over all the powers of darkness, destroyed the power of sin, death, hell, and the grave. You see, repentance is not revival. Revival is when you see Jesus after your repentance.

Revival is when you and I begin to walk with him. And as the scripture says, as we behold him, as we behold the Lamb of God, as we behold his mercy, as we behold his cross, as we behold his victory, as we behold every promise he's ever made to us, we are changed by the Spirit of God from image to image and glory to glory. That is what revival is.

Glory to God. I'm just so sick of all of this stuff in the religious circles that thinks the more we snot and snivel at the altar, the more revived we are. No, no, no.

That's just the beginning of where God wants to take us. Behold the Lamb of God. I love that when in John's gospel, when the people went down into the waters of baptism, that's when they saw the Lamb of God.

You don't see the Lamb while you're still trying to be holy. You don't see the Lamb while you still think you can do it in your own strength. You don't see the Lamb when you're still trying to hide your spiritual bankruptcy with nice clothes and sweet talk.

You see the Lamb when you go down and say, I'm done. I'm dirty. Finished.

I can't do this. And you come up out of the water, and suddenly that voice that came to you in the wilderness says, there's the Lamb of God. Follow Him.

Follow Him. Praise be to God. That's what revival is.

When we begin to follow the Lamb, the Lamb becomes our source of life. The Lamb becomes our righteousness. The Lamb becomes our future.

The Lamb becomes our hope. The Lamb becomes our victory. Everything is about Jesus Christ.

And then John said, I'm not even worthy to untie His shoes, but He, I baptize you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire. I looked up the word fire today in my Greek concordance, and there's only two words for that word. One is fire, and the other one is lightning.

I love that. I think I like lightning better. He will baptize you with lightning.

Hallelujah. Glory to God. That's a power.

You can create fire on the earth, but you can't create lightning, folks. Lightning comes from heaven, and you better get out of the way because it's going to burn you. It's, nobody is going to stand when lightning comes down.

He'll just change that word out. He'll baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with lightning. Hallelujah.

I like that. I like that. I really like that a lot.

Praise God. If the translators were still alive, I'd say, you got the wrong word. It should be lightning.

He'll give you something that only comes from heaven. It does not come from human effort. It's not by power.

It's not by might. It's not by learning. It's not by all these things.

As good as they are, it's by the presence of God. It's the victory of God. It's this internal life of God.

If anyone be in Christ, He is a new creation. The old things are, and all things are become new. That's the truth of the gospel.

A new life. The life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. It's a supernatural life in Christ.

It's an amazing life. And so if you need to repent, it's a good thing. Do that, but don't stop there.

That's not revival. That's not revival. That's just the open door.

Because when you come out of the water, as a matter of fact, I just love the picture of Jesus going into that dirty water. The sinless, spotless Lamb of God goes into my dirty water. You just think of all that was in that water.

The failure, the rank hypocrisy, the hopelessness, the addiction, the destroyed lives and families are all in that water. The DNA is in that water. It's stuck to the people.

And when they went in the water, it became part of the water. And then you have the sinless Lamb of God who immerses himself in our dirty bathwater and takes it all upon himself and then goes to the cross and destroys the infusion of the devil that he put in the hearts of people, that you can be godly without a relationship with God, destroys it. And we become a people that are proud to be called the children of God.

We're not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We're not ashamed of the fact that we came down, we came to Him not through strength, but through weakness, not through success, but through failure, not through having it all right, but having almost nothing right. We're not ashamed to say, my whole life was hypocrisy.

Even my victories were short of what God's purpose was for my life. And our song becomes about Him. He becomes everything to us.

Oh, yes, John's baptism might have been a hopeless baptism in one sense, but it leads to the hope that God has for each of our lives through Jesus Christ. And so if you can hear me tonight online, those that are listening online, there's, after a lot of years, it's funny that America is a 400-year-old nation, just a little more than 400 years, and it's almost as if the scripture is being fulfilled again. After 400 years, the voice of God is calling one more time, make a straight path.

How do I do that? Open your heart. Just open your heart. Just open your heart.

That's the straight path that God needs. That's what John was saying. That's what his ministry was.

That's how Isaiah prophesied about John, that he was saying, make a pathway for God to come to you by just simply admitting your condition. Don't try to hide it any longer. But then with the admission, believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross and took your place so that you might be forgiven.

Confess Him as your Lord and Savior, then just start to shout and dance. Keep it simple, folks. Don't make this thing complicated.

Jesus Christ, you're my Lord from this day forward. I admit my condition. I'm a hopeless father.

I'm an alcoholic. I'm addicted. I'm depressed.

I'm selfish. I just give it all up. I go into this water of baptism for the repentance of the way I've lived my life.

And suddenly, this inner voice of God says, behold, the Lamb of God. Behold, the Son of God who came to die in your place so that you can be restored to a living relationship with the one and only God of the universe. It's all you have to do.

Like if you can't figure it all out, just say, Jesus, help me. That's a prayer I prayed all my life and it works. Just say it.

Jesus, help me. Just come to me. Save me.

The blind guy on the side of the road, he didn't have a whole lot of theology. He said, Son of David, have mercy. The guy on the cross just said, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

And Jesus turned to him and said, today you'll be with me in paradise. Just don't complicate something that is really simple. He loves you.

He wants you for his own. He came to get you. He went into the waters of your failure and carried all your failure with him to the cross, then died in your place.

And when he rose from the dead, the Bible says he took your captivity captive and gave you giftings of God. Lightning. May I call it that? Lightning.

Lightning. Hallelujah. Father, God, in Jesus' name, I pray, Lord, I know somebody has heard this tonight online.

Somebody somewhere is listening. Pray this prayer with me, those that are online tonight. Lord Jesus Christ, I can't save myself and I admit my failure, but I ask you tonight to come into my life and be the Lord of my life.

I believe that you died in my place to give me eternal life. And so I invite you into my life tonight to be my Lord, my Savior, and my God. Thank you for coming to get me because I couldn't get back to you.

Thank you for giving me a new life and an eternal life. Thank you for washing my sins away in Jesus' name. So Father, I pray tonight, God, you would seal this work in every heart.

Don't let anybody, anybody online tonight walk away saying, well, that was good for somebody else, but not for me. Whoever prayed this prayer tonight, seal that work, oh God. Oh Jesus Christ, I ask for a shout of glory in hearts everywhere.

Homes, park benches, cars, wherever people are listening tonight or in the future. God, let there be a shout of glory coming to every heart. Just like you came into mine in 1978.

I didn't know much of the Bible, but I knew something had happened to me when I just said, Jesus, come into my life. I give you my life. God, thank you.

God, in this last day, we ask you for millions and millions and millions of people to come into the kingdom of God. Lord, destroy every wall that keeps people away from you. Let your love be revealed in a new way.

We thank you for it in your precious name.

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