

DO I HAVE TO BE BAPTIZED?

Matthew 3: 13-17

Today in the church is called “Baptism of the Lord” Sunday. Which is an interesting celebration day because when you stop and think about it, why was Jesus baptized? After all, Jesus was without sin and baptism washes away sin, right? So, if Jesus was sinless, what was being washed away?

The other question is whether the Baptism in this passage is really about God? God’s purpose. God’s plan. God’s focus. For if the baptism is about God, looks like it would have been described differently.

So, I want to invite you to do two things today: (1) what is this passage about? What is its message? What does it say about Jesus? (2) after we look at the meaning of baptism in this passage, what implications does it have for my life and your life? Join me.

A disclaimer to begin. There is one thing I had not realized until my study this week. We get all wound around the axle about Jesus being baptized. We get confused because

we believe Jesus was without sin; so, why is baptism even necessary? I know I have wondered that fact when studying this passage and never have had a good answer to the question.

Well, the issue is about Jesus being divine and human...that is without sin ... It was never an issue until the third or fourth century A.D. When the baptism happened in Jesus' life, Jesus being sinless was not an issue. It was not even a topic for consideration. Now, I am not suggesting that Jesus was a sinner. However, his sinlessness is not an issue in the time about his baptism,

It really surfaced particularly in the Nicene Creed. The authors wanted to ensure that the divinity of Christ was of the same substance as God. They declared,

We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ eternally begotten of the Father. God from God. Light from light. True God from true God, begotten not made of one being with the Father.

They wanted to clarify for everyone that we did not have three Gods or were polytheist. They also wanted to declare the purity and sinlessness of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. They did not want any confusion.

This, for me, is helpful information so I don't have to struggle with the question of why Jesus was baptized if he was sinless. It was not connected. So, we can look more closely at the reason for the baptism of Jesus. And the issue of sin is off the table.

There are several points in our passage giving us clues as to the importance of the baptism of Jesus.

First is the issue of John baptizing Jesus. John was hesitant as he said, "I need to be baptized by you and do you come to me?"

John was clear that things are in reverse order here. Yet, they were not. People were swarming from all over to be baptized by John. Jesus was clear he wanted to identify with the people for whom he was born. He believed it was necessary, even required, to be baptized by John. It was a way that the Savior of the world could identify with the rest of humanity.

One of the joys of the Christian faith is the fact that Jesus was human and also was God. He walked on the earth among all of us. He identified with the experiences of humanity. He was God with us.

Our faith has a human side to it. Jesus identified with us humans. He had feelings and emotions. He suffered pain and anguish. He was disappointed. He was angry. He wept over the sinfulness of the world. He was God with us!

Which is very different from many other religions. While they all have their gods and leaders, none are as connected with the human race as the Christian faith. None are as human as Christianity. None are as concerned with the whole of life as our faith is.

So, Jesus being baptized identified with the people for whom he was born. Jesus was one of us. And this fact is clarified through his baptism by John.

Second, in verse 15, is Jesus' response to John. Jesus declared, 'Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.' Notice this baptism is collaborative. "it is proper for US..." John was part of this important aspect of Jesus' ministry.

This baptism was the first public act of Jesus. And with John, they were doing what God had called them to do. They were to "fulfill all righteousness."

The term 'righteousness' is not easy to define. What is being conveyed is that they are fulfilling what God's plan is. It was God's plan for Jesus to be baptized as part of the

plan of salvation. This baptism modeled for the world the way to full obedience and commitment to God. John and Jesus fulfilled God's plan through the baptism.

The baptism is a marker. It declared the direction or commitment of Jesus in his ministry. It marked him as God's son indicating what his purpose was to be. His purpose was complete obedience to God's purpose and plan. Jesus was not his own. He was an instrument of God's plan living it out on this earth.

The baptism clearly declared Jesus purpose and plan in life. Through the baptism, Jesus affirmed this plan and purpose. He committed to being in full allegiance and step with God. He publicly declared who he was and whose he was.

Thirdly, we read the very *telling and moving piece about the baptism*. “*The heavens opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.’*” **BINGO.** God's approval. God's endorsement. God's support.

All of which declares that this baptism is part of God's master plan to bring salvation to the world. God has approved the baptism. God has approved the plan. And God has claimed Jesus, ‘the Beloved,’ to do the work before them. It is done. It is the

first public action of Jesus that sets the stage and launches his ministry for the next three years. It is the beginning of his ministry.

So, pray tell, what does this baptism story have to say to you and to me?

First of all, I believe we have to dislocate and set aside our image of baptism. It is far different from this story.

We get all caught up in the drama around baptism: the cute little baby; the young couple and a perfect looking family; the ancestral baptismal gown, completely starched, and into the 7th generation of baptisms. All of which are important and meaningful. But baptism is far more radical than the image we have in our minds.

First of all, to have your child baptized means you give him or her over to God. God claims that young life. God declares that though he or she is human, they now belong to God. We are declaring that the child is now a child of God and is to be completely obedient to God.

The baptism places a marker on the child of their new relationship and their new kinship. They have become a part of a greater purpose in life than just continuing the

family name and tradition. They are now a part of bringing in the Kingdom of Heaven. They have a higher purpose.

Do you believe that? Was that your thought when you had your child or children baptized? Did you give him or her over to God? Did they obtain a new identity than just their surname?

I think it is a big decision because it means we will raise our children in a certain way. We will have certain morals and values imparted to them. We will live a very Christ-centered life in all we do.

That is what Jesus did. He had a new identity with a specific purpose and reason. His life was not his own, because he was living to a higher calling.

Do we connect our baptism with living out a higher calling? Are we willing to declare we belong to God in good and bad times? Does our being baptized cause us to take a certain route or direction with our lives?

You see, we live at a crossroads. And we have to decide the direction we shall go. In Jesus baptism, his direction was clearly marked. Does our baptism mark us in a very new and different direction?

In baptism, we realize we are not our own. We now belong to God, not to our family or traditions or other protocols. Our life is God's. Our purpose is God's. Our direction is God's.

It is a declaration that we no longer belong to ourselves, but to God. To God's purpose. To God's Kingdom. All of which is our effort to fulfill all righteousness. To fulfill what God has in mind for us. To complete our lives as God desires.

It's a pretty awesome experience to realize Jesus' baptism and the message that sets for us. As we have seen, the baptism was really not about Jesus. It was all about God. All about God claiming his Son with whom he was well pleased. Jesus was marked and his life was defined.

The fact that baptism is all about God is beautifully illustrated in infant baptism. Many people believe that they need to be baptized. They get to a point when "they are ready." They want to admit their sin and be baptized.

That desire seems to turn the meaning of Baptism all around. Baptism is not about me. It is not about my desires. It is not about our parents. It is not even about the church. Baptism is all about God!

Where God claims us. Where God names us. Where God sets us on a journey called life to fulfill God's purpose. In infant baptism, it is a beautiful picture of God's action because the infant is clueless on what is going on. Except someone is messing with their head with some cold water.

Yet what is happening is deeply spiritual and personal. God is claiming that child and that life for him. Baptism is God's claim on my life. I, then, have the opportunity to participate in a Godly driven life exploring all that God has in store for me.

Often at memorial services, wording is declared that the deceased's baptism is now complete. When we enter into that eternal relationship with God. Baptism begins us and baptism ends us. In between is our opportunity to live our fully our baptism.

A free gift from God claiming us as his own. What more would one want or desire?

ISAIAH 42: 1-9

1 Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.

2 He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street;

3 a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice.

4 He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

5 Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it:

6 I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations,

7 to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

MATTHEW 3: 13-17

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him.

14 John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

15 But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.

16 And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.

17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."