

The Baptism of Jesus

Matthew 3:1-2, 13-17

Introduction

We have been making our way the Gospel of Matthew. Today we arrive at the third chapter. In this chapter we meet John the Baptist and the practice of baptism and we will see the baptism of Jesus.

Since we find baptism in our text today and we have some people presenting themselves today for baptism, it will be helpful for us to briefly consider what baptism means.

Matthew 3:1-2 (ESV) ¹ In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ² "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Matthew 3:5-11 (ESV) ⁵ Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, ⁶ and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹ And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰ Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹ "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Matthew 3:13-17 (ESV) ¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, 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 thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. ¹⁶ And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; ¹⁷ and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

This begs to questions. What is baptism? Why was Jesus baptized?

What is Baptism?

Note in first one that before baptism came preaching. Before a person was baptized, he first heard John's preaching. "*John came preaching...*" John's ministry began with preaching, then, after the preaching was heard, the response was baptism (v.5-6). Thus, baptism is a response to having heard a message.

What was John preaching? Two things; **repentance** and that the coming of the **kingdom** of heaven was near. John called people to repentance as an appropriate step of preparation for the coming near of the kingdom of heaven.

Repent (v.2)

What does it mean to **repent**? The word repent (Greek *metanoēō*) means both, "to change one's mind" and "to be sorry for sinful actions."¹ However, it also includes being sorry enough to stop² sinning and to start doing what is right. Yes, it includes changing your mind about what is the right thing to do, but it also entails being convinced enough to begin doing things differently. To truly repent means to "abandon rebellion and embrace obedience."³ True repentance means both thinking differently and also acting differently. It means you finally see sin not merely as a "mistake," but as a horrible evil that must be completely forsaken. True repentance brings both confession of sin and the fruit of changed behavior.

True Repentance Brings Confession of Sin

We see both aspects of this fact in this story. When John preached "**repent**," the people responded by "**confessing their sins**" (v.6). Baptism flows from a confession of sins. The right and proper candidates of baptism are those who know they are sinners who are in danger of God's just judgment and stand in need of forgiveness of their sins. These are willing to confess their sins. Confessing sins means verbally agreeing with God that what he defines as sinful is actually sinful, and then asking him for forgiveness.

The significance of being baptized in water points to the fact that by confessing sin, it is possible to be **cleansed** from sin. Water, in the Old Testament (OT), is associated with God's judgment on sin. Recall the Flood found in Genesis 6. That flood came as a result of God's judgment on the unrepentant sin of humanity. The flood waters of judgment purged the world from sin by the death of all sinners.

¹ D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 99.

² James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 49.

³ R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 95–96.

However, God chose to be gracious to eight sinners by placing them safely in an ark that carried them through his just judgment. Noah and his family were brought safely through those waters of judgment and after the flood abated, they were graciously given a second chance. We might say there was a cleansing that brought forgiveness and gracious second chance. By being baptized in the Jordan river as they confess their sins, the people were agreeing with God that their sins make them worthy of death, but by asking God for forgiveness from those sins God then graciously cleansed from sin and gave a new life, a second chance. Thus, baptism entails confession of sin and pictures cleansing from sin.

True Repentance Bears Fruit of Changed Behavior

It is possible to express sorrow for your sinful actions and even to agree that certain things are wrong and sinful. However, true repentance results in changed actions, a different lifestyle. John points this out to the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to hear what he was preaching (v.7-9). He said to them, “*bear fruit in keeping with repentance*” (v.8). He calls them to change their behavior. They have heard his preaching and now they must actively respond. He warns them that God’s just wrath against all sin—both Jewish and Gentile—is coming, but the real question is will they change their behavior? If they refuse, then wrath awaits them. If they refused to bear the good fruit of true repentance, then they are in danger of being “*cut down and thrown into the fire*” (v.10). Luke tells us that the refused to be baptized by John even though this was God’s will for them (Lk. 7:30). They came to hear John preach, but they refused to change their behavior. There was no true repentance in them.

John preached that the “*kingdom of heaven was at hand*” (v.2). The point here is that one must be ready to meet the King. If the kingdom of heaven was coming, then the King of heaven was about to arrive. And if the King of heaven was drawing near, then the question is, how should you prepare to meet him? Are your actions in accord with the character and commands of the king? John was calling people to prepare to meet their King.

We Christians ought to ask ourselves this question. If we are truly the children of the King Jesus, then does the conduct of our lives accord with the character of our king. If our king is holy, then our lives ought to be holy. And if there is anything in our lives that is not holy, then it ought to be changed. The people who really received John’s message that the kingdom of heaven was at hand are the people who confessed their sins and then bore fruit in keeping with repentance. They confessed their sins, and then they changed the lives accordingly.

Who is Welcomed Into the Kingdom?

Notice here that *repentance*, not *race* is the requirement for being welcomed into the kingdom of heaven. John warned the Pharisees and Sadducees that repentance was required of all who would be welcomed into the kingdom of heaven, including them. No one ought to think that they will automatically gain entrance into the kingdom of heaven because of their ancestry or parentage. John warned them against putting their faith in Abraham and their common family

tree. The only person Abraham got into the kingdom of heaven was Abraham. True repentance is required for all who would enter the kingdom of heaven, whether Jew or Gentile.

So what is baptism? Baptism, as we see it here, is for those who want to be ready to meet their heavenly king. Baptism is for those who have truly repented of their sins. They have confessed their sins and are ready to act upon that confession by bearing the good fruit of repentance being lived out by changed actions.

Why was Jesus Baptized?

Well if that is what baptism is, then why did Jesus get baptized? Was he confessing *his* sins? Did he have sin in his life of which he needed to repent? There answer is no and we see this v.14. When Jesus went to John to be baptized, John tried to stop him.

Matthew 3:13-14 (ESV) ¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, 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?"

John knows Jesus and he knows that Jesus does not need to be baptized. You'll recall that Jesus' mother, Mary, and John's mother, Elizabeth, were relatives. When Mary discovered that she was pregnant by the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, she went and spent three months with Elizabeth who was similarly miraculously 6 months pregnant with John.⁴ This means that they would have spent time together as they grew up. John sees Jesus as his superior. Since baptism a confession of sin and the beginning of repentance, John looks at Jesus and says, "You don't need to do this." In fact, John actively tries to prevent Jesus from being baptized. He clearly believes that Jesus was more righteous than himself for he says, "*I need to be baptized by you!*" (v.14). From the perspective of John, Jesus had no sins to repent of and nothing to confess. Thus, Jesus was not presenting himself for baptism because of his own sin. He had none.⁵ There was another reason.

Matthew 3:15 (ESV) But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.

Jesus did not want to be baptized because of any sin, but rather because "*it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.*" Jesus wanted to be baptized to fulfill God's plan for righteousness to be worked through his entire life. Righteousness is everything that accords with the character and will of God. Thus, there are at least four aspects to this fulfilling all righteousness.

First, although Jesus had no sin of own to confess, by submitting to John's baptism he was affirming John's message that God's plan of righteousness for his people is fulfilled by

⁴ Luke 1:36, 39, 56.

⁵ Lk. 23:41, 47; Jn. 8:46; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Ptr. 2:22; Heb. 4:15; 7:26; 1 Jn. 3:5.

repenting of sin, confessing sin, turning away from sin and doing righteousness. By submitting to baptism Jesus is placing his stamp of approval on John's message. Repentance from sin and embracing obedience is the necessary first step to fulfilling God's will for your life.

Second, Jesus is also setting the righteous standard here for all subsequent conduct of his disciples. Jesus is the leader and Lord of all his disciples and if the leader and Lord was baptized then clearly this is the right path to follow for all who would come after him. Jesus knows that he will one day give the command that all of his disciples are to be baptized.⁶ Thus, he enters into the waters of baptism because he will call all who follow him to do the same. If Jesus had not submitted himself to baptism, some of his followers might say, "We don't need to be baptized because Jesus wasn't baptized." However, since Jesus was baptized he clearly affirms that baptism is God's will for his children. And if sinless Jesus was baptized, then how much more do we who are sinners need to be baptized?

Third, by humbling himself and entering into the muddy waters of the Jordan, Jesus signifies that he is entering with us into the muddy sin of humanity. He identifies with us in our sin, but then he rose up sinless from it. He submersed himself in our sinful world, but was resurrected from because he was sinless. Thus, if we sinners yearn to be free from stain of our sins, then we must identify ourselves with him who is sinless. Just as he identified with us sinners, so in baptism we identify with him who was sinless, by being baptized in his name.

Fourth, by submitting to baptism God the Father proclaimed his delight in his son and He anointed him with the Holy Spirit to empower him to do all that God intended him to do. God the Father could not contain his joy in His son at that moment and so at Jesus' baptism God the Father shouted with pleasure at the obedience of his Son. "***This is beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,***" or "in whom I delight" (v.17).

Then, as soon as Jesus came up from the water, the Holy Spirit descended upon him in the visible form of a dove and "came to rest on him." Luke tells us that the dove was not merely a vision, but an actual bird ("in bodily form" Lk. 3:22). This visibly confirmed to John⁷ that Jesus is God's only messiah. Apparently John was the only person who fully understood the significance of the presence of the dove and what it meant, since God had previously told John that this would be the sign by which He would reveal the one whom He had chosen to "baptize with the Holy Spirit" (Jn. 1:33). Thus, this is the reason that hereafter John began preaching that through Jesus God would pour out His Holy Spirit upon His people, by baptizing them into the Holy Spirit.

John preached that Jesus was "lamb of God who takes away the sin" and he is "the one who baptizes you with the Holy Spirit." Jesus does both. He takes away sin so that he can give the Holy Spirit. We need both if we are to live with God. We need our sin taken away and we need

⁶ Matthew 28:19-20.

⁷ See John 1:29-34.

the Holy Spirit poured out within us in order to commune with God. Jesus is the only person who does this. He is the only person who died to atone for sin (i.e. take away our sin) and he is the only person who was resurrected to receive the right to pour out the Holy Spirit upon all who hope and trust in him. This is why Jesus gave the command to his disciples to "Go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And behold I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Mt. 28:19-20).

Conclusion

Thus, this is what we want to do today. We want to baptize four people. The four come confessing that they are sinners in need of forgiveness of their sins. They believe that forgiveness and cleansing from sin is possible through Jesus. They are repenting of their sin and embracing obedience to their king Jesus. They are renouncing the kingdom of this world and Satan and they are embracing King Jesus. They are pledging their love to him as their only God and turning away from all others. They are entering into the waters of baptism as an act of obedience to King Jesus and as a sign of receiving his Holy Spirit.