

Why Was Jesus Baptized?

Matthew 3:13-17

This morning five people are being baptized; in a few minutes you will hear them tell in their own words how and why they came to faith in Christ. In preparation for these baptisms, I'd like us to consider the passage just read about the baptism of Jesus. All four gospels mention the baptism of Jesus, but Matthew gives one detail that the other don't: **John's reluctance to baptize Jesus**.

First we are going to see why Jesus insisted on being baptized by John. And second we're going to talk about why Jesus' baptism is important for these five being baptized (and for all of us really).

Listen again to verses 13 and 14 of Matthew 3:

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 was reluctant to baptize Jesus because he had been calling people to a "baptism of repentance." His basic message was, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near" (v. 2). To repent meant to reorient your life or to change course. If you were headed east and you repented, you turn around and head west. The reason people needed to repent was to align themselves with God who was on the verge of establishing His kingdom. Those who wanted to repent, confessed their sins and allowed John to baptize them. We don't know exactly how much John understood at that point about Jesus' identity and mission as the Messiah. But we see in verse 14 that John knew Jesus well enough to know that if one of them **had** to baptize the other, Jesus should baptize him; the greater should baptize the lesser.

Jesus replied this way:

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

Notice Jesus' explanation why John needed to baptize Him: "for it is fitting **for us** to fulfill all righteousness." Jesus says that if John baptized Him that **both of them** would be fulfilling all righteousness (not Jesus alone). Why was that the case?

It's important to understand how the term "righteousness" is used in the gospels. In the writings of Paul, righteousness usually means "**right standing**"; if you are righteous, you are in a right relationship with God. But in the gospels, righteousness means "**right living**" or "the will of God" (Carson, p. 108). Jesus is saying that if John baptized Him, together they would be doing the will of God.

John would be doing the will of God because his assignment was to “prepare the way of the Lord” (see 3:3). We’ll see in verses 16 and 17 that after the baptism of Jesus God confirmed that Jesus was indeed His unique Son whom He loved.

Jesus would be doing the will of God because He would declare by His baptism that He accepted the assignment God was giving Him. We’ll see in verse 17 that the unmistakable point of this passage is that Jesus is being identified as the Servant who would suffer for the sins of the world.

In verses 16 and 17 Matthew records this:

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.”

Notice two elements that link Jesus to the promised Suffering Servant in Isaiah. First, **the Spirit** came from heaven (i.e., from God) and rested upon Jesus. Second, God declared from heaven that He was “**well pleased**” with Jesus; Jesus was His “beloved Son.” With these two elements in mind (the Spirit and God’s pleasure), listen to Isaiah 42:1.

1 Behold 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.

At His baptism the Spirit of God descended and rested upon Jesus and God pronounced His delight in His Son. Jesus’ baptism confirmed that He was the suffering servant who would bring justice to the nations. He would establish God’s kingdom whatever the cost.

In the context of the Old Testament, the rulers of the nations and their peoples followed other gods besides YHWH; as a consequence of following gods who were cruel and oppressive, the rulers oppressed their people in all sorts of cruel ways, and the people experienced bondage in every way. Bringing justice to the nations would involve releasing them from oppression **through a relationship with the one true living God** who is the opposite of cruel and oppressive. YHWH is “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth” (Exodus 34:6). If we keep reading in Isaiah, we’ll see in chapter 53 that kings and nations would be astonished at this Servant - primarily because He was willing to suffer for the sins of all the peoples. The punishment that they/we deserved fell upon Him as our substitute.

At His baptism, God declared that Jesus is His Son who would bring justice to the nations by establishing God’s kingdom. By submitting to baptism, Jesus was declaring that He was fully committed to this mission as the suffering Servant.

Why is all of this important for us today? Those who are being baptized today are basically saying, "I believe everything that was declared at Jesus' baptism. He is the suffering Servant who died for my sins. He is the beloved Son of God who is establishing God's kingdom and bringing justice to the nations. Therefore, I will learn to obey all He commanded and will be involved in extending God's kingdom through sharing the gospel and making disciples."

In a couple minutes you will see on the screen portions of the testimonies of the five people being baptized this morning. One reason we baptize believers in front of the church (as opposed to privately) is so ***we have fresh examples*** of how God works in people's lives to bring them to Christ; it never gets old hearing how God opens people's eyes to the gospel. Before they are baptized, each person will make a series of affirmations concerning their faith and their commitment to walk with God. After they are baptized, we will be asked, "People of God, what is our response?" We will then respond:

We receive you into the household of God! Confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection and share with us in his eternal family!

Another reason we baptize believers in front of the church is so that the person being baptized can receive this affirmation from the body of Christ and this challenge to share Christ along with us.

8:30 Service - Troy Stambaugh (Colton Haney)

9:45 Service - Maddie Soehner (Brian Anderson)

11:15 Service - Sheridan Bach (Nick Long), Joey Gillette, Shashika Perera (Steve)