

JESUS, WHY DO YOU SEEK A SINNER'S BAPTISM? – MATTHEW 3:13-17

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Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, 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, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

The hope of Israel united them. Pharisee & Sadducee, tax-collector and semi-heathen soldier, the hope of 'the Kingdom' united them. The kingdom which was promised in God's Word from Moses and the prophets. A kingdom which would be restored to them after a long exile in Babylon. The root of Jesse was still buried deep underground, as Egyptian, Syrian, Greek and Roman soldiers had trodden over it. The Maccabees had tried to bring about this kingdom and failed. And now they heard a voice in the wilderness crying, "**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**" It was heard in the wilderness, not more than a few hours from Jerusalem. It's no wonder so many flocked to hear what this voice was saying. Everybody was wondering, waiting, expecting this kingdom to come.

Their expectations were in for a rude shock. Instead of armed resistance, he called for repentance, instead of hope for earthly possessions, he called for purity, nothing he said would excite passion, his appearance was nothing to write home about – no fancy clothes, but a simple prophet's garb. This is how the forerunner of the Messiah was described in the Old Testament, and yet it would have been disappointing for many. This was not the kingdom they were hoping for, this was not the hope which united them.

But then one day, something strange happened. Jesus, John the Baptist's cousin, made his way from Nazareth in Galilee to the Jordan River. This is the first time we have heard about Jesus since he went home from the Temple with his parents when he was just 12-years old. Eighteen years later, Jesus walks up to John and says, "Baptize me!" John is the first of many who question the reason of baptizing Jesus – he had no sins to repent of, he was superior to John in every way. And yet Jesus says, "Baptize me!" Have you ever wondered why Jesus was baptized? Have you ever given it much thought? Today, we too will ask the question with John, JESUS, WHY DO YOU SEEK A SINNER'S BAPTISM?

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We can see why John was so hesitant to baptize Jesus. For months now he had been proclaiming, "**Repentance**" "**Be baptized and wash your sins away.**" And now here comes Jesus, he had no need to repent of anything, nothing to be sorry for, because he had done no wrong, he was perfect. Jesus didn't need to be baptized. But to answer the question, "JESUS, WHY DO YOU SEEK A SINNER'S BAPTISM?" we must take a look at what Jesus said. After John tried to deter him, Jesus said, "**Let it be so now; it is**

proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” In those few words, Jesus not only gives the reason for why he should be baptized, but also the reason why he is here. Let’s take a look at those words again right now.

“Let it be so now” Jesus begins. With these words, Jesus is acknowledging John’s hesitation. In most cases, John would be absolutely correct, Jesus should baptize John and not the other way around. But now, at this time, it is different. It is Jesus exerting his authority, like a commanding officer giving an order. Jesus is still superior to John, even though he is asking for John’s baptism.

“It is proper for us to do this.” Notice, Jesus did not say it was necessary for him to do this. There is no place in all of Scripture that makes a baptism a requirement in fulfilling God’s law. There is no place in all of Scripture that makes it necessary for the Messiah to be baptized either. Instead, Jesus said it was proper. Now what’s the difference? It’s a huge difference. It’s not necessary for me to hold open a door for a lady, but it is proper. It’s not necessary for me to tip my waiter, but it’s proper. It’s not necessary for me to give flowers to my wife on occasion, but it is proper. The main difference between necessary and proper is motivation. If it is necessary, we are driven by something outside of us. If it is proper, we are doing it willingly. One reason Jesus SOUGHT A SINNER’S BAPTISM is because he wanted to, not because he was forced to.

The reason why it was proper, **“to fulfill all righteousness,”** Jesus concludes. So first of all, Jesus didn’t come to be baptized because he had to, in order to fulfill some requirement, but because he wanted to, in order to demonstrate his righteousness. “Righteousness” is one of those Bible words that is synonymous with perfection or holiness, living up to what God wants. For thirty years, Jesus righteously kept God’s commands. He actively kept God’s commands. But this wasn’t *all* the righteousness he needed to fulfill. Now Jesus’ baptism by John signals a turning point. It signals his willful passive obedience as the lamb of God who is led to the slaughter and sacrificed for the sins of the world. It was not necessary for Jesus to do this (be baptized), but it was proper.

And to think, John tried to deter Jesus. He felt the only proper thing to do was to have Jesus baptize him and not the other way around. And John had very good reasons for thinking this, but Jesus had better reasons. John isn’t the only one guilty of deterring Jesus, his disciples too were guilty of deterring Jesus, but so have we. We have not seen Jesus face to face, but that has not stopped us from our deterrents. Oh sure, we have good reasons for acting the way we do – we want others to come to church so we drag them along, we want to be able to move into a new more expensive facility so we guilt people into giving more. Maybe we feel worship should only be done one way, and if people don’t like it, tough. Or maybe we just deter Jesus by ignoring him, thinking I’ll be OK if I don’t hear his Word every day, my emotional relationship with Jesus is OK, I know what he wants, so I don’t have to read about it.

The thing that all these deterrents have in common, they are all under the umbrella of the law. What do I mean by that? It means we are acting like the Old Testament Israelites who said we must do all these things – go to church, give to God, feel right with God – in order to be saved. Our insistence upon these things condemn us. Because God says, **“No one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law.”** The law is not the place we go to get saved, it will only condemn us. And so like John we must consent to the gospel.

It's back to that whole "necessary vs. proper" idea. Jesus didn't need to be baptized in order to save us, but it was proper. Jesus needed to obey the whole law perfectly in our place to save us, and he did. As followers of Christ, bought by his blood, we are perfect in God's sight. There is nothing we *need* to do. There is nothing we need to do, but there are things that are proper to do. Those driven by the need have a ceiling that limits what they can do. Those driven by propriety have no limits.

That's what makes being a Christian so easy, but that's also what makes being a Christian so hard. Take an example from a recent movie, *I Robot*. It takes place in the future where society has grown dependent on robots. These robots are governed by three simple laws, 1) A robot must not harm a human being. 2) A robot must obey the commands of a human except where it violates the first law, and 3) A robot must protect itself unless it violates the first two laws. With laws in place, it is very easy for the robots to know what to do. By the end of the movie, the main robotic character, Sonny, is no longer bound by those rules. And he is wondering what he must do. He has the freedom to do what he wants. That is what we have as Christians, we have freedom, we are not driven by the need to obey God in order to make him happy. We have the freedom to give 1% of our income, we have the freedom to give 50% of our income, we have no ceiling. We have the freedom to choose when, where and how we worship.

But with that freedom comes responsibility. We are given guidance and direction in God's Word. The guidance to not give up meeting together, the direction to give God your best – in your life, in your offerings. Nobody can tell you what you must give, where or how often you must go to church. But also realize, that God works through people too. Families can encourage you, friends can nudge you. And that is the encouragement we need sometimes.

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If John wasn't sure about the baptism of Jesus before, he certainly was made more sure about doing the proper thing after Jesus came up from the banks of the Jordan River. He, along with everybody else there, received a sign that only happened twice in all history. **"Heaven was opened...the Spirit of God descending like a dove...alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, with him I am well pleased.'"** Confirmation from God the Father himself, with God the Holy Spirit coming down upon God the Son.

To say that Jesus only began his mission at this time is not completely accurate. It was at this time that Jesus publically identified himself as God's Messiah, as the Savior from sin. God the Father confirmed the validity of Jesus' mission. When Jews would ask him later who authorized what he was doing, he could point back to God. Jesus' mission has the authority of God the Father behind it. Remember that Epiphany equation I gave you last week? New Year + Old Jesus = New You. We are here talking about the "Old Jesus." The same Jesus that lived for 30 years before his baptism was now being publically declared to the world. The same *old* Jesus is the one we look to for our salvation today.

Who knows what people were thinking when they heard the voice from heaven crying out approving his Son. Perhaps the very same thing that you thought when you heard about Jesus in God's Word. Because the voice from heaven and the voice from God's Word are one and the same, they carry the same message. There are certainly some whose eyes were not opened – either beside the banks of the Jordan, or through God's Word today, but that is certainly not God's fault. They continue to be bound to their own expectations, their own rules, their own laws. Laws that may seem good, but can never save.

Thanks be to God he has opened our eyes, he has made known to us what he has done. So that we no longer live under the curse of the law, but we live in the unbound freedom of Christ. Christians, go live your purpose! Amen.