

## **“Jesus’ Baptism”**

### **Matthew 3:13-17**

Baxter T. Exum (#947)  
Four Lakes Church of Christ  
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### **Introduction:**

I will have to admit that I have not always been very smooth in every baptism that I have ever performed. I remember telling you several years ago about the first two baptisms I ever did—involving two young people down in Janesville. I was preaching there for the summer, and the baptistery had been neglected to say the least. In fact, the water was so green that I could not even see the first step down into the water. The bugs and millipedes were so thick that we actually kept a net by the baptistery to help scoop them out. It was a steel tank that held roughly 800 gallons, was covered in lead paint, and it did get the job done; however, as I lowered those young adults down into the water, I must have lowered them a little too far, because the water came in over the top of my waders! I was just about as wet as they were, and I went home that night and scrubbed harder than I had ever scrubbed before!

Not long after that, I remember baptizing a fellow student at Freed-Hardeman University down in Henderson, Tennessee. As I remember it, we had studied the Bible at a small church out in the middle of nowhere that did not have a baptistery, so several of us drove into town to the church building right by the campus that will probably seat around 1,000 people. They had what I would describe as an Olympic sized baptistery. There were just a few of us in this huge dark building, I lowered her into the water—only to realize that the floor was slippery and I was not quite strong enough to lift her straight back out. So, I pulled her along under water for several feet until finally whacking her head on the side of the baptistery. I have often thought since then that if I had accidentally killed her in the baptistery, she might have been the only accountable person to die in a perfectly sinless condition—her sins are forgiven, and then she is killed by the preacher on the way out of the water.

Several years later, I remember baptizing a young woman in Janesville, and we find out just a little too late that she is terrified of water. Halfway down into the water, both arms fly up over the edge of the baptistery into the auditorium as she holds on for dear life. We had to do it again, and it was not exactly a dignified occasion.

Then, there was the time when Brett brought someone down to Janesville, and it actually took four tries to get the woman under the water. Brett did it first, but one of her elbows flew up into the air. There were four of us standing around the baptistery, so on the next attempt, I held that elbow down, but then a foot flew up! On attempt number 3, Keola held down the foot, but then her other foot flew up. Thankfully, there was one more person there, so on attempt number 4 every single

limb was accounted for, and we were able to immerse the woman completely in water.

Probably most of us have some very interesting memories from various baptisms, but this morning I would like for us to look together at one of the most unique and powerful examples of baptism found anywhere in the Bible.

This morning's lesson comes as the result of a very recent request. It goes back to a question that was turned in after Bible class last Sunday morning. You might remember that brother Clint taught the class on baptism, and in that class we very briefly referred to the baptism of Jesus. Well, after class someone handed me a card, and the question on the card was this: Why was Jesus baptized?

What an excellent question! This morning, then, I would like for us to study together the account of Jesus being baptized, and as we just start thinking about the baptism of Jesus Christ, we see a number of possible problems—and certainly it is these concerns that led to a very honest question.

Several weeks ago, we looked at Jesus at the age of twelve. He stayed behind in Jerusalem to study the Scriptures with the scholars in the temple. And then we found that Jesus is not heard from again until He pops up at the age of thirty as he travels to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. Well, what is the big deal? What is the problem?

Well, when we look at the Scriptures, we start to understand why John would have been as hesitant as he was. Over a period of roughly six months, John had performed hundreds, if not thousands, of baptisms. John was a little confused, then, because he knew just about everything there was to know about baptism, and it appeared that Jesus did not meet the criteria. By way of background, please look with me at **Matthew 3**. In **Matthew 3**, we have some information about the purpose of John's baptism. **Matthew 3:1-12**...

***<sup>1</sup> Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, <sup>2</sup> "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." <sup>3</sup> For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, "THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT!' " <sup>4</sup> Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. <sup>5</sup> Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan; <sup>6</sup> and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins. <sup>7</sup> But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup> "Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; <sup>9</sup> and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. <sup>10</sup> "The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good***

**fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.** <sup>11</sup> **"As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.** <sup>12</sup> **"His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."**

And so we find in **verse 2** that John was preaching a message of repentance. John had been condemning sin, and he was telling the people to repent—to change their hearts, to turn their hearts back toward God, to regret the sins they had committed, to correct their sinful behavior. In fact, according to **verse 6**, John's baptism was performed, **"...as they confessed their sins."** In **verse 7**, some of the religious leaders were coming to be baptized, but they refused to repent, so John turns them away with some rather harsh words. John's baptism, then, was for sinful people, and the baptism itself was to be preceded by repentance.

We can turn over to **Mark 1:4**, and we see another aspect of John's baptism. Mark tells us (in **Mark 1:4**), that, **"John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."** And so we start to see John's dilemma. Jesus, the sinless Son of God, appeared to be coming to John to be baptized with a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

The dilemma is recorded for us back in **Matthew 3**, the text for this morning's lesson. **\*\*PPT\*\***

If you will, please look with me at what happens—**Matthew 3:13-17**...

**<sup>13</sup> Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. <sup>14</sup> But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" <sup>15</sup> But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted Him. <sup>16</sup> After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, <sup>17</sup> and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."**

In **verse 14**, the Bible tells us that John **"tried to prevent Him"** from being baptized. Those who have studied the Greek language tell us that John **"kept on trying to prevent"** Christ from being baptized. This is something that John did not want to do. John understood that Jesus was not a normal candidate for baptism. There was no sin to repent of. There was no sin to be forgiven. And so John responds in **verse 14**, **"I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?"** Maybe I could imagine getting a call from Brett Favre during this afternoon's game. I'm watching the TV, and I can see him on the sidelines talking on the phone, and Brett says, "Baxter, I'm in a tight spot here, and I really need some advice on throwing the ball. I need you to tell me what to do for this next play. Can you help

me?" He would never do that! And perhaps in a similar way, John was shocked that Jesus was coming for baptism, and so John persistently objected.

But then we notice that Jesus basically "pulls rank," as He says, "**Permit it at this time....**" Or, as the NIV and the ESV both put it, "**Let it be so now....**" In other words, Jesus was telling John to make an exception.

This morning, then, as we look back at the account in **Matthew 3**, I would like for us to very briefly outline a number of reasons why Jesus was baptized.

**I. First of all, as we look at the parallel accounts of what happens here, it becomes very clear that JESUS WAS MAKING A TRANSITION FROM ONE STAGE OF LIFE TO ANOTHER—in other words, THE BAPTISM OF JESUS WAS THE BEGINNING OF HIS EARTHLY MINISTRY. **\*\*PPT\*\*****

When we look at Mark's account starting in **Mark 1:1**, the Bible says, "**The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.**" And then Mark immediately tells us about John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus. Mark totally skips the birth of Christ and associates the beginning of His ministry with His baptism. When we look at Luke's account, we find in **Luke 3** that Luke describes the baptism of Christ and in the very next verse says, "**When He began His ministry, Jesus Himself was about thirty years of age...**" (**Luke 3:23**). And then back in Matthew's account, Jesus is baptized and is then immediately led out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. In all three parallel gospel accounts, therefore, the baptism of Jesus is His very first appearance as an adult. To me, this seems rather significant. Jesus is born, we read about him at the age of twelve, and then there is an eighteen year gap until that silence is broken by Jesus leaving His home in Nazareth to be baptized by John in the Jordan River.

You may remember from the book of Leviticus that Aaron and his sons were washed with water when they began serving as priests in the tabernacle. That washing represented a change of focus, because at that point they were set apart for ministry to God. I don't know if there is a total parallel here, but it is interesting to me that Jesus is described in **Hebrews 4:14** as a "**...great High Priest.**" And so it appears that it was this moment in the life of Christ that served as a turning point.

This emphasis on baptism being the beginning of Jesus' ministry seems to be repeated in **John 1**, because it appears that John did not officially recognize that Jesus was God's Son until His baptism. You may want to look with me at **John 1:31-34**. Looking back on it, John said, "**I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water.**' **John testified saying, 'I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God.'**" It was at the point of Jesus' baptism, then, that John the Baptist officially recognized Jesus as

being the Son of God. And so His baptism was the beginning. It was the point of transition from one phase of His life to another.

Even today, baptism can be compared to the gun that goes off at the beginning of a race. Until that gun goes off, we cannot start running the race. Baptism is like the wedding ceremony. It is not the end, but it is the beginning of a long relationship. Up to this point, Jesus had been a carpenter, but after His baptism He never turned back and kept on moving forward until His mission had been completed. We can imagine Jesus leaving His shop in Nazareth for the very last time—finishing projects, sweeping up the sawdust, getting everything put away, handing it over to His younger brothers. If He were living today, He would have reprinted His business cards—changing it from, “Jesus: Carpenter,” to, “Jesus: Lamb of God.” His baptism marked that change in His life.

In a similar way, baptism marks a change in our own lives. In **2 Corinthians 5:17**, Paul says that, “***...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.***” Baptism is where we cross that line from the old life to the new.

As Jesus comes up out of the water, God the Father breaks a silence of nearly 1,500 years. As far as I can tell, God had not spoken with a thunderous voice from heaven since the giving of the Ten Commandments. And as His only Son is still standing there in the water dripping wet, if we ever wonder what God is thinking at a baptism, that question is answered in **Matthew 3:17**, “***This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.***” What had Jesus done to make His Father so happy? He hasn’t yet taught in the synagogue. He hasn’t yet overcome the temptation of Satan in the wilderness. He hasn’t yet preached a sermon. He hasn’t yet healed a single sick person or raised anyone from the dead. All He did was wade out into the water and allow Himself to be immersed by John the Baptist. Do we think perhaps that baptism is important to God? Jesus’ baptism, therefore, was the beginning of His public ministry.

A number of years later, Peter would be called upon to preach the first sermon to a Gentile, and he starts out in **Acts 10** with a summary as he says, “***...you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.***” Even the Gentiles understood that the ministry of Jesus started with His baptism. His baptism was the beginning.

**II. As we look back at Matthew 3, we find a second reason for Jesus’ baptism as we find that HE WAS SETTING AN EXAMPLE OF RIGHTEOUS OBEDIENCE. **\*\*PPT\*\*****

As the Lord is responding to John’s objection in **Matthew 3:15**, He says, “***Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.***” All

through the Scriptures, we find that "righteousness" is very closely connected to obeying God's commands. In **Psalm 119:172**, for example, the author of the **Psalm** is addressing God and says, **"Let my tongue sing of Your word, for all Your commandments are righteousness."**

Over in the book of **Hebrews**, the writer quotes from **Psalm 40** and applies it to Jesus. In **Hebrews 10:7**, the writer quotes Jesus (who was quoting from the Old Testament), and says, **"Behold, I have come...to do Your will, O God."** In other words, Jesus came into the world to do the will of God. Whatever was required, Jesus was ready and willing to humbly submit to the will of his Father in Heaven.

Jesus, then, was demonstrating the importance of submitting to the will of God through a personal example of righteous living. Over and over in the four gospel accounts, Jesus emphasized the importance of righteousness. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, **"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness" (Matthew 5:6)**. A little later He says that, **"...unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."** In **Matthew 6:33**, Jesus says, **"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."** As I understand it, righteousness literally refers to being "right." Righteousness, therefore, is the state of "rightness." In the Bible, the term sometimes referred to someone who was holding up his end of a covenant.

In **Isaiah 53:11**, Jesus is referred to as, **"...the Righteous One, My Servant, [who] will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities."** Later on in the New Testament, Jesus is referred to as the **"righteous Judge"** (in **2 Timothy 4:8**). We are told in **Acts 17:31** that God will, **"...judge the world in righteousness,"** through Jesus Christ. And then in **1 John 2:1**, the Lord is referred to as, **"Jesus Christ the righteous."** And so as our righteous example, Jesus was willing to humbly submit to God's will by being immersed in water.

He was obeying the command of God and giving us an example so that we might follow in His steps (**1 Peter 2:21**). And so we find in the Scriptures that Jesus set an example—from His baptism all the way through to His crucifixion—Jesus lived a righteous life in perfect obedience to the will of God. He has never asked us to do something that He Himself was not willing to do. He obeyed His Father in Heaven.

For just a moment, consider what would have happened if Jesus had not been baptized. He would put Himself in a very disturbing category. Sometime later, Jesus would get in an argument with the Jewish leaders concerning the baptism of John. After Jesus discusses the situation in **Luke 7**, Luke makes an interesting observation in **Luke 7:29-30**. He says, **"When all the people and the tax collectors heard this, they acknowledged God's justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John."** Those who were humble, therefore, submitted themselves to John's baptism, but many of the religious leaders rejected it completely. Jesus, then, set an example of obedience to the Father.

**III. Before we close, I'd like for us to notice one more reason for the baptism of Christ, as I believe it contains at least A LIMITED PREVIEW OF HIS OWN DEATH, BURIAL AND RESURRECTION. **\*\*PPT\*\*****

When we look at what the Bible actually says, we realize that Jesus was immersed in the Jordan River. When I went looking for a painting to go along with this morning's lesson, it was hard. It was hard to find a painting of the baptism of Jesus that pictured an immersion. A vast majority had John pouring a little water over Jesus' head. But Matthew uses the word that we discussed in Bible class last Sunday morning. And when you use a computer program to read the Bible, you can click on each word and see the Greek word behind it. When you click on "baptize," the root word pops up, and definition of that word is, "to dip." In other words, literally speaking, Jesus came to John to be "dipped." John basically says, "No, I need to dip you." Jesus responds, and after He is "dipped," he ***"...came up immediately from the water."***

Later on in the New Testament, we find that baptism is a picture (looking back) at the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. We find in **Romans 6:3** that, ***"...all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death. Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."*** Baptism looks back at the death, burial and resurrection.

Certainly God could have told Jesus to be sprinkled with water, but it would not have fit in with the plan. And so as I see it, as Jesus is buried in water and lifted back out, the process is looking forward to what was coming 3-½ years in the future. And so at least in a symbolic sense, the ministry of Christ began just as it ended—with a death, a burial, and a resurrection.

**Conclusion & Invitation:**

I am so thankful for the good question that led to this morning's lesson. I hope our study has given all of us something to think about. Certainly Jesus was not baptized as the result of any repentance. He was not baptized (as we are) for the forgiveness of sins. And yet we do learn something from the baptism of Christ.

- At His baptism, he basically said to God, "I'm in!" His immersion in water was the beginning of His earthly ministry.
- Secondly, by being baptized, Jesus set an example in righteousness. He led the way in obedience—doing whatever His Father asked Him to do.
- And finally, at least in some limited way, His immersion in water was a preview of what was about to come 3-½ years in the future.

In many ways, it almost seems arrogant to hear someone in the denominational world claim that they are Christians but that they do not need to be baptized. If the

sinless Son of God did it, then how much more do we need to do it! The Bible explains that we are to respond to the amazing grace of God by turning away from our sins and by allowing ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins. If you are ready to meet Jesus in the waters of baptism, we hope you will let us know about your decision as we sing the next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [church@fourlakescoc.org](mailto:church@fourlakescoc.org)