

## **The Story – Jesus’ Baptism**

We are leaving the Old Testament in our sermon series as of today. Last Sunday we talked about Nehemiah and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. This was around 440 BC as the exiles returned from Babylon to Jerusalem and the land of Judah. They got the walls up and the city rebuilt. The books of Ezra, Nehemiah, along with the last three books of the Old Testament, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, are what we call post-exilic, i.e. they were written after the people returned from the Babylonian exile. As you know, Malachi is the last book in the Old Testament. He is preaching about two or three generations after the return from exile. The people have grown lethargic and he calls them to obedience and points to the coming of a forerunner who, in the spirit of Elijah will prepare the way for the coming of Messiah.

Malachi lays down his pen and there is approximately 400 years of silence. There is no prophet and no word from the Lord. Fast forward 400 years and that brings us to the opening of the New Testament and the ministry of John the Baptist, the forerunner who calls people to repentance and prepares the way for Jesus the Messiah. In case you wonder what happened in those 400 years of silence (we call it the intertestamental period – time between the Old and New Testament). About 100 years after Nehemiah in 323 BC, Israel falls to Alexander the Great and the Greeks. Alexander dies and gives control to his generals who fight over control of Palestine. Eventually the Jewish people manage to gain independence for about 100 years during the time of the Maccabees (167-63 BC), and then they were ruled by Rome from 63 BC until after the time of Jesus when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. They basically didn’t have control over their own destiny again until 1948 when Israel became a sovereign nation.

Each of the four gospels make mention of John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus at the beginning of his public ministry. Turn to Matthew 3 as we look at the baptism of Jesus and then we are going to baptize a number of people. **“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 lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’” Matthew 3:13-17**

We know Jesus was the perfect, sinless, Son of God, so why should he be baptized? First of all, understand **Jesus' baptism was an identification with us in our sinful condition.** Jesus starts his public ministry in the same way in which all of his public ministry is conducted, associating with and identifying with a lost and dying world. By submitting to baptism he condemns the self-righteous and takes his place among the common people and the sinners. He has come to be the sin bearer for us so he identifies with us in our sin even though he never sinned. **He takes his place WITH us sinners at his baptism, preparing for the day when he will take the place OF us sinners at his crucifixion.** The second thing we notice:

**Jesus' baptism was a full and complete surrender to the righteous plan and purpose of God the Father.** He said this was proper in order to fulfill all righteousness. Jesus' baptism was an act of consecration to God. He was all in. At baptism you aren't just a little bit wet, you are 100% wet. The act of baptism identifies Him (and us) as fully, totally, 100% completely given to the Lord – body, soul and spirit.

**Jesus' baptism was the initiation of the new covenant of the Kingdom of God.** From his baptism on Jesus was announcing “the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.” At his baptism Jesus “stepped through the door” into this new epoch of the kingdom of heaven. The heavens opened, the Holy Spirit came upon him and the Father spoke, all confirming that Jesus was the Son of God and essentially commissioning him to the mission of redemption, the purpose for which Jesus came.

There are other reasons we could discuss as to the importance and significance of Jesus' baptism but time is limited. His baptism was unique in history, but what about us? Why are we baptized? First of all,

**Our baptism is an act of obedience.** We do this because Jesus said to do this. He told the disciples, **“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...” Matthew 28:19** From the beginning the disciples and the church obeyed what Jesus commanded. In Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost, Peter told the people to repent and be baptized and about 3,000 people accepted his message, repented and were baptized that day. Your baptism is an act of obedience.

**Our baptism symbolizes our union with Christ.** When we repented and asked Jesus to save us, our old self of unbelief, sin and idolatry died and a new person of faith and submission to Christ was born. We were born again. The bible says if we are in Christ, we are a new

creation, old things have passed away. That old person and the old way of living has passed away and a new life has begun with us following after Christ and living for him. Water baptism is a symbolic way of showing that spiritual reality to ourselves and the rest of the world.

Think of baptism as a drama or play. It shows the old me, the sinful me - dying to myself and sin. That's what happens as we go under the water of baptism -- it represents our death and burial. Then it shows the brand new me, made alive in Christ, rising up from the water as a new person in Christ! The bible says, **"We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."** **Romans 6:4** We are raised, spiritually and physically out of the water to live a brand new life in Christ!

I suppose the simplest analogy is that our sins have been washed away by our faith in Jesus Christ and baptism is a symbol of that spiritual act – the washing away of our sins.

Jesus' baptism announced the initiation of the new covenant and that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. **Our baptism announces we have entered into God's new covenant by His grace and His kingdom has been established in our lives.** We are part of that new kingdom and now we live by a new standard. We have a new King. Our lives are under new management. We have a new way of talking, living, behaving, treating others. We have a new identity in Christ and we live as sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father.

**Jesus identified with us at His baptism. At our baptism we identify with Jesus.** Baptism is a public act. We are publicly declaring our sins have been washed away and we are 100% fully consecrated and dedicated to serving and obeying and living for Jesus and we want the world to know it! We are in Christ. Paul said, **"...for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."** **Galatians 3:27** We have clothed ourselves with Christ, in Christ. That means we are identified as belonging to Jesus in every sense of the word. We are not our own any longer, we belong to Him. We are declaring "I am a member of the family of God by his saving grace. I am a follower, servant and a lover of Jesus Christ, my Savior and Lord. I renounce sin and all my old way of living and I declare that by his mercy and grace I will live for Jesus and walk with him now and forever." **Baptism for all of us is our public declaration of a new life in Christ!** I'm proud to Go Public!

I hope this helps in our understanding of baptism. Now let's rejoice with all of these who have decided to go public and follow Jesus in baptism!