

“Baptized in Obedience”

Matthew 3:13-17

Baptism is an issue of obedience to God, not a matter of salvation.

Baptism is a Conscious Choice

Baptism is a Matter of Obedience

Baptism is a Public Declaration

Baptism is a Conscious Choice

Matthew 3:13, NKJV

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him.

Jesus did everything with intention. He operated under the direction of the Father through the instruction of the Holy Spirit in the same way all of God's people ought to be living their lives. Jesus expressed this when He spoke with the Pharisees by saying, *“...Jesus answered and said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel...I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me”* (John 5:19-20, 30, NKJV).

Everything that is done outside of God's will is of the person's personal desire and preferences. Jesus is saying that He does what the Father desires rather than what He desires when He proclaims He *“...can do nothing of Himself...”* and *“...I can of Myself do nothing...”*. Jesus chose to do what He saw the Father doing and what the Father desired for Him to do. This also made the judgments of Jesus consistent with the perfect and righteous judgments of the Father in heaven who sent Jesus into the world to do the Father's will rather than His own will.

The first step of beginning the ministry God the Father sent His Son to accomplish was to identify with the lives of those He came to save from the bondage of sin. This meant participating in the baptism of repentance. Jesus had nothing of Himself from which He personally needed to repent from, but He was going to be taking on the sins of the world to receive the full wrath of God on sin for sinners (Romans 5:6-10).

John the Baptist did not invent or come up with the idea or concept of baptism. The washing with water to ceremonially cleanse a person was given by God in the Law. In the celebration of the Day of Atonement the command to wash as a manner of cleansing was something that was common. Leviticus 16:26-28, *“And he who released the goat as the scapegoat shall **wash his clothes and bathe his body in water**, and afterward he may come into the camp. The bull for the sin offering and the goat for the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the Holy Place, shall be carried outside the camp. And they shall burn in the fire their skins, their flesh, and their offal. Then he who burns them shall **wash his clothes and bathe his body in water**, and afterward he may come into the camp”* (NKJV, emphasis added). The concept of water being used for cleansing was given to the people by God early on when He introduced His

laws to them as His people. Those who became ceremonially unclean were provided a means of becoming ceremonially clean again.

It is recorded in Exodus 30:17-21 Aaron and the other priests were to wash their hands and feet in the bronze basin before entering into the tabernacle, approaching the altar to serve, and prior to presenting burnt offerings. Disobedience made a person unclean and in need of cleansing. Bodily discharges also in connection with a disease, menstruation, and child birth were also considered unclean (Leviticus 13:34, 15:8-12, 19-24). There were many washings due to uncleanness. Places to wash were publicly provided for in such places like the Pool of Siloam and Bethesda which are regarded by many New Testament scholars as being places for people to perform ceremonial washings. Understanding this gives insight to the significance of Jesus telling the blind man to, "*Go, wash in the pool of Siloam*" (which is translated, *Sent*). *So he went and washed, and came back seeing*" (John 9:7, NKJV).

This understanding of ritual washing was understood as making oneself suitable for the presence of God. It is the washing off of uncleanness and provides the one washing with a sense of newness. In each case there is a choice made by a person to be cleansed before the Lord for service and the ability to worship Him. Jesus' choice to go into the waters of repentance was in obedience to the will of the Father in preparation to be the ultimate sacrifice as the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

Therefore, Jesus going to John the Baptist in the beginning of His ministry was done from a knowledge of what He had been sent into the world to do. Jesus told Pilate when He stood before his judgment, "*...You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should **bear witness to the truth**. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice*" (John 18:37, NKJV emphasis added). The Gospel writer John was inspired to describe Jesus as, "*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, **full of grace and truth***" (John 1:14, NKJV emphasis added).

The truth is, mankind is hopelessly and helplessly lost in their sinful nature with only one means of salvation available. Salvation from the wrath of God is only through the grace of God through faith in Christ Jesus who became sin for people to pay the penalty for sin once and for all (Psalm 14:1-3; Romans 3:21-26; 2 Corinthians 5:20-21). The truth about life is that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord who saves us from the wrath of the Father on sin (Romans 3:23, 6:23). Jesus willingly identified with people in their sinfulness so that He could be the sacrifice for sin on their behalf.

The baptism of repentance that John performed was different from the ceremonial washing or the symbolic washings found in Jewish traditions. It is also different from the believer's baptism that is practiced by much of the Church. John's baptism was a, "*...confession of sin and of the need of moral cleansing, and was a symbol of forgiveness and of moral purity...*"... *but did not imply entrance into [the kingdom of God] itself*" as the baptism of believers practiced by the Church (ISBN: 0-8028-3781-6, pg. 418). Jesus was coming to John for baptism out of a need to be connected with mankind who He would die on behalf of who were in need of moral cleansing, forgiveness, and moral purity in their lives. This is impossible for people to know and experience until they in faith turn to Christ in acceptance of their sinfulness and His sinless offering to God on their behalf.

It is for this reason those who confess their faith in Christ as the Son of God, believe He was killed for their transgressions, and raised bodily on the third day from the grave, ascended into heaven, and is returning just as He promised must follow Jesus into the waters of baptism out of obedience to publicly proclaim their confession of faith.

Baptism is a Matter of Obedience

Matthew 3:14-15, NKJV

And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?"

But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him.

The confusion for John was that Jesus was coming to Him for a baptism of repentance when there was nothing that He had to or ever would need to repent of in His own life. John recognized his need to be baptized by Jesus rather than to baptize Jesus.

John knew what his calling to ministry was under the authority of God. *"...I am 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Make straight the way of the Lord," '...I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know. It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose...I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God" (John 1:22-34, NKJV).*

John the Baptist was approximately six months older than Jesus who was related to him through Mary (Luke 1:11-17, 36-37). The prophecies surrounding John and Jesus' birth had to have been known at least among the family as they were growing up. There does not seem to have been interaction between Jesus and John prior to their encounter at this time of Jesus' baptism. Yet, they had some knowledge of one another from the conversation that was recorded by Matthew.

Jesus persuaded John to baptize Him by saying, *"...for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness"*. There are three words that stand out which need to be understood in order to comprehend the obedience issue that is of concern for those who have committed their life to following Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord.

Jesus said it is *fitting*. The Messiah is described by the writer of Hebrews as, *"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted" (Hebrews 2:14-18, NKJV).* It was proper for Jesus to come to John to be baptized since He was made like people in every way in order to be a sacrifice on their behalf. Jesus' baptism was a symbol of His

connection with people who were hopelessly lost in their sin who in His perfection would supply them with the means of redemption they so desperately were in need of receiving.

Jesus also said His baptism was to *fulfill*. All that Jesus did and said during His earthly ministry was spoken of by the prophets of the Old Testament as signs for them to look for and be able to identify the Messiah of God when He arrived. Isaiah 53:8-9 proclaimed, *“He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked—But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth”* (NKJV). Jesus is the Suffering Servant spoken of in Isaiah 52:13-53:12. His death brought forgiveness to those who belong to God because there was no sin found within Him, even though Jesus died condemned as a criminal. People are law breakers; God is the Law-maker who satisfied the law in Himself. This has provided redemption from the wrath of God on sin because Jesus suffered condemnation from God on their behalf. Jesus therefore fulfilled what was said about Him by coming before John to be baptized in the waters of repentance.

Lastly, Jesus said it was to fulfill *righteousness sake*. Jesus identifies Himself as the righteous Judge when He said, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man”* (John 5:25-27. NKJV). Jesus proclaimed the need to be baptized with the waters of repentance to be connected with sinful mankind as their perfect sacrificial Lamb before God the Father. Christ judged the sin of all mankind by entering into the waters of repentance Himself. The righteous act of obedience was all part of God’s plan which is why Jesus insisted that John baptize Him.

Baptism is also a matter of obedience for those who follow Christ as Savior and Lord of their lives. Publicly entering into the waters of baptism is a proclamation of the change God has brought about in a person’s life and their commitment to worship and service of God. Jesus accepted the ministry of the cross to die on behalf of mankind, and people are called to accept the cross of Christ proclaiming our death with Him and life in Him through the ordinance of baptism.

Baptism is unnecessary for salvation which is evidenced by Apostle Paul in Romans 10:9-10, *“...if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation* (NKJV). Jesus also speaks of the requirement of being welcomed into the kingdom of God when He said, *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven”* (Matthew 7:21, NKJV) and *“...‘Who is My mother, or My brothers?’ And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, ‘Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother”* (Mark 3:33-35, NKJV).

The one who places their trust and faith in Christ should never be overly concerned about performing or under-performing for God since salvation has nothing to do with works but is completely based on the grace of God through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). This was confirmed by the exchange between Jesus and the one thief who was being crucified

with Jesus who said, *“Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.”* And Jesus said to him, *“Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise”* (Luke 23:42-43, NKJV). The thief had a short time to live without any opportunity to do anything in the service of others or Christ, but simply by faith was guaranteed by Jesus that he would be with Him where He was going.

Those of this world have convinced many people that their faith is a private matter and should not be shared with anyone. Jesus makes it clear in the passages of Scripture that have been touched upon that it is a matter of public obedience to proclaim faith in Christ. Denying Christ on this earth is not only rejection of Him but also remaining silent about Him. Jesus said, *“For I have come to ‘set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’; and ‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.’ He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me”* (Matthew 10:35-38, NKJV). Baptism is the perfect way to proclaim faith in Christ since it publicly proclaims your sinfulness, Christ’s death on your behalf, and His redemption of your life.

Baptism is a Public Declaration

Matthew 3:16-17, NKJV

When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, “This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

Matthew records that Jesus came up immediately from the water. This clearly reveals that Jesus was immersed in the water. This was a full commitment to the will of the Father that He chose to be committed to out of obedience. Then there was the audible voice of God proclaiming from heaven, *“This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”*. Jesus’ obedience also brought about visible confirmation of the Father’s words by *“the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him”*.

These were more than comfort and confirmation to Jesus personally, but also a public proclamation of Jesus literally being the Son of God. We must never forget that Jesus was completely human as well as completely God at the same time. It was for this reason the devil attempted to tempt Jesus by sowing doubt into His heart as He once before did with Adam and Eve. The serpent said to the woman, *“... ‘Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’”* and later said to Jesus, *“...If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread”* (Genesis 3:1, NKJV; Matthew 4:2, NKJV). Jesus was told by God at His baptism that He was His Beloved Son and that He was pleased with Him. Yet the first thing the devil challenges Jesus with after He has been alone for forty days is *“...If You are the Son of God...”*.

The most frustrating thing about following God is what happens when a public proclamation of faith in baptism or testimony of the salvation found in Christ is made by a person. There is a flood of temptation and struggle that comes after publicly identifying oneself as a follower of Christ. The struggle is caused by the declaration of war against the principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of this age, and the spiritual hosts of

wickedness in the heavenly places that baptism and testifying to salvation of the Lord makes. God's people are a threat to the kingdom of darkness and will be fought against in order to minimize the growth of the kingdom of God by way of people coming to faith in Christ Jesus.

Those who choose to be disobedient to the Lord's direction to proclaim their allegiance to Him in baptism and testifying of the Lord to others miss out on seeing God do the miraculous through them and in their lives. They choose to build upon the foundation of Christ with wood, hay, and straw as Apostle Paul spoke about in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15, "*Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire*" (NKJV). These individuals are still part of the kingdom of God, but did not build on the foundation of Christ in their lives. They are more concerned with their comfort rather than serving God with a genuine desire to see Christ lifted up in their lives so others would be drawn to Him in repentance.

The announcement that Jesus was God's Son by the Father from heaven was the fulfillment of Psalm 2:7, "*I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You'*" (NKJV). The willing obedience of God's people and their public proclamation of faith is what undeniably reveals God through them. The apostles had this same attitude and refused to stop doing what they knew God had commanded them to do in spite of the cost and discomfort they had to endure. The high priest threw the apostles in prison, but God sent His angels to release them and instructed them to continue preaching the name of Jesus (Acts 5:17-21). Their miraculous escape from prison and strength to do what was impossible for them came through the Holy Spirit's power to help them do what they could not do themselves.

The high priest questioned them saying, "*...Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!*" But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "*We ought to obey God rather than men*" (Acts 5:28-29, NKJV). The world is still telling the people of God to stop speaking about Jesus and the salvation and forgiveness that He offers to all who will place their faith in Him as the Son of God.

If you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, God in the flesh, who took all your sins upon Himself when He died for you in your place, that God raised Him from the dead on the third day, after which He ascended into heaven, and is preparing to return again, will you publicly proclaim your faith and submission to His will today in the ordinance of baptism?