

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS  
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So a Rabbi, Presbyterian, and Pentecostal preacher walked into a soup kitchen one day having a discussion about which denomination Jesus belongs to. The Rabbi piped up first "clearly Jesus was a Jew, his mother was a Jew, and he attended Temple faithfully and kept all of the commandments." The Petecostal preacher puffed his chest up a little bit, "no, no, Rabbi, you got it all wrong. Jesus sent us the Holy Spirit, and baptized all of us with a holy fire, so that makes him Pentecostal." Finally the Presbyterian spoke up, "boys, boys, have you ever heard of the 12 Disciples? Yeah. Well, they were Jesus' committee see. So, that means deep he's a Presbyterian."

Well, I kid, but today we're going to pretend to be Baptists since we're celebrating the Lord's Baptism. Of all the stories about Jesus, this is one that always struck me as a little weird. Sure, the event itself is fairly simple, but there's something Jesus said that's interesting: "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." (Matthew 3:15)

In thinking about this text, a question we should be asking is: what does Jesus mean by 'fulfilling all righteousness'? After all, it's not like Jesus was unrighteous, or that he was a sinner, and so we can understand why John the Baptist was taken aback by his request to be baptized. Regardless, I think 'fulfilling all righteousness' has to do with repentance and recognizing that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.

As the Son of God, Jesus did not need to repent of his sins because he had none; but as the Son of Man, Jesus needed to repent in a particular way. The Greek root of repent is a word called *METANOIA*, and it literally means 'to change direction' or 'to turn around.' In this sense, Jesus needed to repent because up until that point, he was living a private life - he wasn't engaging in any sort of public ministry (none that we know of anyway) apart from teaching scriptures. So when Jesus got baptized, he was setting aside the carpenter, and becoming who he was born to be - our Messiah.

We also have to consider how John the Baptist's mission in life was to prepare the Way of the LORD. Later Jesus referred to himself as "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (John 14:6), and so John's job was to literally prepare Jesus. He did that by baptizing others and telling them the Kingdom was near. By this, I think he was rolling out the red carpet for Jesus in a manner of speaking. Because as soon as Jesus began his public ministry, the language changed from 'the Kingdom is near' to simply 'the Kingdom is.' Jesus speaks of the Kingdom as something that you can enter in the here and now.

This is why getting baptized is like getting your passport stamped. It's a visible mark of something invisible. Along with communion, it's a sign and seal of the New Covenant. We do it in public because we very much want the person getting baptized to know that they are not alone in their walk with Christ. It's a promise we make with one another as citizens of the Kingdom to treat the person getting baptized as one of us.

When we baptize babies or little children, we don't expect them to know these things. How could they? That's why we have this big thing called Confirmation that happens every year. Today, our new Confirmation Class is forming. It consists of: Charlie Fennell, Davis Sherrer, Liz Cason, James Logan, Edwin Burnett, and Jackson and Ava Hamm. They're going to learn about Christianity in a fresh new way, so that they can confirm the baptism they received when they were little and decide whether or not to stay a citizen of the Kingdom. On a personal note, I covet your prayers for our youth - so please lift up our confirmands.

But for those of you who haven't been baptized - we don't do altar calls in this denomination, but if you're an adult or a parent who would like their child baptized, then please reach out to an Elder or anybody on staff so we can make that happen for you. For those who are curious: it is not necessary to be baptized in order to be saved - because it is Christ alone who saves. But, when we get baptized we are able to experience the fullness of the Kingdom, because it's an opportunity to set aside who the World thinks we are, and become who God made us to be. Sometimes we forget that, which is why we need to repent and correct our course.

Because in the end, there are only two kinds of people according to C.S. Lewis (paraphrased from *The Great Divorce*): people who say "MY will be done" and people who say "THY will be done." Even Jesus said it himself in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 7: <sup>21</sup> "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of My

Father who is in heaven *will enter*.<sup>22</sup> Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?'<sup>23</sup> And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; LEAVE ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS'."

The Greek word for "lawlessness" there is *ANOMIA*, and the root of that is *ANOMOS*. You English majors know that the prefix *A-* means "without" and *NOMOS* being "law." It's where we get the English word "animosity" from - it means to behave without law. And so what Jesus is saying is that even if you're coming to church and doing all the things we expect believers to do, unless you're doing those things for the right reasons, they won't matter to Jesus. There's plenty of Christians out there who make their ministries all about themselves, and not about others.

We get another glimpse of that in *Matthew 22*:<sup>15</sup> Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in *His* talk.<sup>16</sup> And they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men."<sup>17</sup> Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"<sup>18</sup> But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, "Why do you test Me, you hypocrites?<sup>19</sup> Show Me the tax money." So they brought Him a denarius.<sup>20</sup> And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription *is* this?"<sup>21</sup> They said to Him, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."<sup>22</sup> When they had heard *these words*, they marveled, and left Him and went their way.

Here the Pharisees were trying to catch Jesus and ask him if it was lawful to pay taxes in the scriptural sense. They wanted to know where Jesus stood - on the side of the Mosaic Law or Roman Law. This is why later in *Matthew 22*, yet another Pharisee tries to catch Jesus:<sup>35</sup> Then one of them, a lawyer, asked *Him a question*, testing Him, and saying,<sup>36</sup> "Teacher, which *is* the great commandment in the law?"<sup>37</sup> Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'<sup>38</sup> This is *the first and great commandment*.<sup>39</sup> And *the second is* like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'<sup>40</sup> On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

And so the message here is clear. Those people that Jesus said who 'practice lawlessness' are people who do not obey the greatest commandments of loving God and their neighbor. Now, is it possible for an unbaptized believer to

keep these commandments and be about our Father's business? Of course! But as I said before, if you want to fully experience the Kingdom, you have to get baptized. It's like the difference between traveling to a foreign country for vacation and living there as a resident. Getting baptized is like getting your visa.

Once you get baptized or confirm your baptism as it may be the case, it's all about changing your *ME*-mindset into a *WE*-mindset. Just rotate the letter "M" into a "W." Once you enter into the Kingdom, your life is not strictly about you anymore. You are not the main character of the story - Jesus is. And just like Jesus was about his Father's business, so do we need to be. So how can we do this? Briefly...

**Step 1, start asking this question: *how are we doing?*** This question brings a mindset change because it means we have to let go of 'how am I doing?' As important as 'how am I doing?' is from the standpoint of personal health, in the context of a marriage or any other relationship, when you focus solely on your own personal well-being and happiness it can sabotage the overall well-being and happiness of both you and your partner. The question of 'how are we doing?' can change the way you lead an organization too. Instead of focusing entirely on the bottom-line and personal performance, the *WE*-mindset leads you to consider the bottom-line of others and how everyone contributes something to the team or group you're a part of.

Even if you're not in a leadership role in the group or organization you're in, asking 'how are we doing?' to your co-workers or teammates can open the door to a conversation about how the both of you can work better together. And so I would encourage you to ask 'how are we doing?' with anybody you consider important in your life. And don't stop with just 1-on-1 conversations either. We should all be asking 'how are we doing?' as a congregation, as the city of Greenwood, even as our state and nation, and world. Simply put, when you're living in the Kingdom, the *WE*-mindset overcomes the *US-THEM* mindset.

**Step 2, ask the follow-up question: *how can we render unto God what is His?***

In answering this question, we first have to identify what belongs to God. But that's easy: it's EVERYTHING. In asking this question, we are able to let go of the *MINE*-mindset and embrace a *THINE*-mindset. A baptized believer cannot think of their possessions and assets as their own, but rather as God's. And here's the kicker: YOU BELONG TO GOD TOO! And so in closing, I wanted to read **Romans 12: 1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies**

of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. <sup>2</sup> And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

The way that we can present ourselves as a living sacrifice can start at the baptismal font, but it certainly doesn't end there. That's why I think it's important for us to ask 'how are we doing?' and 'how can we render unto God what is His?' If we keep asking those questions, I think we'll experience the Kingdom *now*.

**Prayer** → Heavenly Father, I thank you for the gift of water that you gave us - *baptismal water* that flows from chalice to head - and reminds us that we are your beloved, in whom you are pleased. Lord help us remember that we are beloved. And Lord, if we need to, then give us the courage to step up to the baptismal font. And for those who are baptized, give us the wisdom to discern what it means. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.