



Matthew 3:13-17

“Why Did Jesus Need to be Baptized?”

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

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

15 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.

16 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.

17 And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Next Week we will discuss verses 16-17 but today I want to focus on verses 13-15 and the actual baptism of Jesus.

Last week going over verses 1-12 we discussed how John was commissioned by God to be the last and greatest of the Old Testament prophets, the one who would be there to see and literally point out the Messiah. The earlier prophets of the Old Testament had spoken again and again of the time when the Messiah, the anointed one of God, would come but none of them had lived to see that day. John the Baptist did. And not only that he was honored to prepare the way for Him. We spoke of how, when a city knew that the king was coming they would go out and fix up the road, filling in the pot holes, and doing all they could to make the surface smooth so that his journey would be easy. The road in this case referred to the hearts of the people, preparing the way meant preaching repentance and faith in God's promises. And he also came to baptize those who repented. John's baptism, was not Christian baptism, it wasn't instituted by Christ or done in the name of the Trinity, it wasn't a sign of the covenant, and later we see in the book of Acts that the Apostles baptized those who were baptized by John.

But it was none-the-less an important sign, it pointed to repentance, and the cleansing from sin that Holy Spirit works in the hearts of believers. John himself had conceded that like ministers today, all he could do was apply water to people, but that he had come prepare the way for the one who actually

does the real washing by pouring out the Holy Spirit on believers and thus washing away the guilt of sin and filling their hearts with the Spirit who would change and empower them for ministry.

And then one day, John is Baptizing the multitudes when the one whom he has been proclaiming appears. There is his kinsman Jesus. He is not there by accident, and was not in the neighborhood, John was baptizing around 70 miles from Nazareth. A long hard journey in those days. Jesus has come to him specifically. The Messiah is here, and what a meeting it must have been. And Jesus does something that horrifies John, he makes it clear that he wants John to baptize him! John's response is like Peter's 3 years hence at the last supper when he realizes that Jesus is about to wash his feet, never! You musn't do this. John recognizes that he is in the presence of the Messiah, and he says to Him in essence, this is backwards, I need to be baptized by YOU. I'm a sinner, you're the sinless savior, I'm a messenger, you're the King. I must decrease, you must increase.

I remember once a long time ago when we had just moved to the old building on Ramsey I was getting ready to preach one evening when a Reformed icon showed up. A pastor of a large congregation I'd heard more times than I could count at conferences, I'd read his books, and so on. And here he was and I was about to preach my evening or "B-side" sermon. And I thought, I'm going to preach to you? I have need to have you preach to me!" And he was just a man, but the difference in capability and seniority was immense. Now of course I get to experience that on a weekly basis, but...

Here we have the Messiah, the Son of God, asking for a mere man to baptize Him. John doesn't understand it. Jesus even indicates this isn't the normal way of things when he says to John, "permit it to be so now" *Do it this time John.*

So we have to ask, why? Why did Jesus Need to be Baptized? This was a baptism of repentance, but as Hebrews 4:15 tells us Jesus was "without sin", so why come? We could say he was supporting the ministry, and affirming the fact that John was sent by God, and was a preacher of righteousness. But he could have done that without being baptized by him.

I believe there are **THREE reasons** why Jesus had to begin his ministry with this baptism. And the key really to all of them is to be found in his answer that it is "fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" It is proper for us to do everything according to God's commandment. Today I will be discussing the first and most important:

The first reason then was that it the right way to begin His ministry as our High Priest: Again and again, the bible tells us that Jesus is our High Priest.

Hebrew 4:14 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

Hebrews 7:26 For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens;

Hebrews 8:1 Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens,

Jesus is not just *a* High Priest, he is THE high priest, all the high priests that came before were just shadows of the real high priest. Matthew never tires of telling us that Jesus is the fulfillment of all the prophecies. The fullness of everything that had happened before in the Old Testament. As James M. Chaney put it, **“Jesus is, emphatically, our Great High Priest. He is the only real priest that ever was in the world. Aaron’s priesthood was typical of his, so that Aaron and his descendants may be called typical priests, and Christ the real priest.”**

Now there’s this wonderful detail that Luke gives us about when Jesus appeared here, **Luke 3:23 Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age.** Now why would he tell us that? Why did Jesus wait that long? We see him at 12 teaching the teachers at the Temple, eager to be about His father’s work. Why wait until he was 30? Because that was the legal age at which the priests could serve at the temple. The law specified in Numbers 4 that those who served God were 30 years and above. A high priest couldn’t be younger than that. So he begins His ministry at the first point that He could.

And when the High Priest was being prepared to serve, he had to be ceremonially washed with water, and anointed. Turn if you would to Exodus 29.

Exodus 29:1 "And this is what you shall do to them to hallow them for ministering to Me as priests: Take one young bull and two rams without blemish,
2 "and unleavened bread, unleavened cakes mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers anointed with oil (you shall make them of wheat flour).
3 "You shall put them in one basket and bring them in the basket, with the bull and the two rams.
4 "And Aaron and his sons you shall bring to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and you shall wash them with water.
5 "Then you shall take the garments, put the tunic on Aaron, and the robe of the ephod, the ephod, and the breastplate, and gird him with the intricately woven band of the ephod.
6 "You shall put the turban on his head, and put the holy crown on the turban.
7 "And you shall take the anointing oil, pour it on his head, and anoint him.
8 "Then you shall bring his sons and put tunics on them.
9 "And you shall gird them with sashes, Aaron and his sons, and put the hats on them. The priesthood shall be theirs for a perpetual statute. So you shall consecrate Aaron and his sons.

And at this moment he is not just washed with water as it was poured or sprinkled on him by John the Baptist in the way that priests were ceremonially washed, but he was also anointed. Oh not with ordinary oil being poured on His head, but with the spiritual reality that the anointing oil could only

symbolize.

1 Sam. 16:13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel arose and went to Ramah.

The oil symbolized the anointing of the Holy Spirit for the office that God had given to them. Messiah, Meshiyach in Hebrew, for instance, means literally anointed one. This was the moment in which God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit for the ministry of Redemption as the High Priest of our salvation. It's even in the right order, first the water of cleansing and then the oil of anointing.

The Apostles knew this. That is why Peter proclaimed it in Acts 10

Acts 10:36 "The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ -- He is Lord of all --

37 "that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached:

38 "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

39 "And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree.

John could pour out the water of baptism, but only God could pour out the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and the Prophets had said he would. In what I have called the most beautiful run on sentence ever written, Isaiah 61 spoke of the ministry of the Messiah:

Isaiah 61:1 "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound;

2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn,

3 To console those who mourn in Zion, To give them beauty for ashes, The oil of joy for mourning, The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; That they may be called trees of righteousness, The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified."

It's no accident that Jesus chose those verse for his first sermon preached at the synagogue in Nazareth.

It wasn't of course that Jesus didn't have the Spirit before, and His divine nature was not in need of strengthening, but his human nature, made like ours was. And this was his empowering and strengthening for this ministry. What was the ministry, the ministry of reconciliation, the ministry of peace with God, how appropriate then that the visible shape taken on by the Spirit was that of a dove, the symbol of peace. When God's wrath against man was over, Noah sent forth a dove from the Ark

and it returned with an olive branch in its mouth. God sends us the Holy Spirit to bring us peace.

And while we will discuss this more thoroughly next week, please note that in these verses we have a reminder that it is not merely Jesus but all the members of the Godhead, father, Son and Holy Spirit who undertake the work of our salvation:

As JC Ryle put it: **Surely we may regard this as a public announcement, that the work of Christ was the result of the eternal counsels of all the Three. It was the whole Trinity, which at the beginning of creation said, "let us make man." It was the whole Trinity again, which at the beginning of the Gospel seemed to say, "let us save man."** – JC Ryle

Application: This was the inauguration of the great High Priest

Hebrews 10:11 And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

12 But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God,

13 from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool.

14 For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

15 But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before,

16 "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,"

17 then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."

18 Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.

19 Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus,

20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh,

21 and having a High Priest over the house of God,

22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

We have here a reminder of the importance of Baptism and the means of grace generally.

Baptism itself doesn't save, but do we have the reality that it points to

You are about to see a Baptism

Have you been baptized?

Not outwardly

but inwardly

Salvation is not tied inseparably to the moment in which it is received

In fact it is always generally administered either before it occurs or after it, just as circumcision was in the OT

But do you have it? Have you closed with Christ?

Baptism points to a work that God must do in us, not that we do

We don't baptize ourselves

Even Jesus didn't baptize himself

We don't pour out the holy spirit upon ourselves

Salvation is the work of God

He is the one who must cleanse us from our sins

HE is the one who must put his spirit in our hearts