

WHY WAS JESUS BAPTIZED?

Matthew 3:13-17

Intro: The Lord's entire ministry on earth was marked by one thing: humiliation. His humility, as Paul described it in Phil. 2:7, 8, took the form of humiliation. His glory was veiled, and He appeared to most men as an ordinary man, a sinner.

It has often appeared strange to me that John the Baptist would not have recognized the Lord since, according to Luke 1:36, Mary, the mother of our Lord, and Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, were related. But that is not hard to figure out since John the Baptist probably spent most of his life in Judea, while our Lord lived in Nazareth. I have many relatives in southern California, but in talking to some of them, I find that I know more about some of our relatives than they do because when I am down there I try to get in touch with some of them at least. On the other hand, they live a few miles from each other, and yet have not seen each other for years. I am speaking about some of them.

And so we are told by John the Apostle that the Lord would be identified to John the Baptist when he saw the Spirit of God descending upon the Lord in the form of a dove.

So we must assume that when the Lord went to be baptized by John in the Jordan River, John the Baptist did not at their first encounter know who the Lord was.

One thing we do know is:

I. THE PURPOSE THE LORD HAD IN GOING TO JOHN THE BAPTIST (Matt. 3:13).

It specifically says in Matt. 3:13 that our Lord made the trip from Galilee down to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. This would perhaps not have been so amazing if it had not been for the purpose that most people came to be baptized by John. Matthew tells us (3:6) that they came "confessing their sins." Since our Lord was sinless, He was completely out-of-place to be there. But that is the reason that He went there, to be baptized by John.

Campbell Morgan says this about that nature of things in Israel in those days:

...these events took place in a time of general consciousness of sin, and of that great moral movement throughout the whole region consequent upon the ministry of John the Baptist (Matthew, p. 24).

Therefore, it would be concluded that those who came to be

baptized, came for the purpose of confessing their sins. And, according to this third chapter of Matthew's Gospel, this meant that they were prepared to make things right in their lives that were wrong. They were to "bring forth...fruits meet (worthy) of repentance" (Luke 3:8).

John seems to have been able to discern those who were sincere as compared with those who were doing it simply because it was the popular thing to do at the time. John strongly denounced the Pharisees and the Sadducees for their hypocrisy. But when Jesus came to him, John sensed that there was something about the Lord that was entirely different. Perhaps it was at this point that he began to wonder, possibly even to realize, that Jesus was the Messiah, the One Who would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

And so we read of:

II. THE RELUCTANCE OF JOHN TO BAPTIZE JESUS (Matt. 3:14).

Matthew said that "John forbade him," i.e., Jesus. This means that he tried to talk Him out of it. He did not feel that this stranger from Galilee needed to be baptized. There was something about our Lord's very presence and his behavior which impressed John the Baptist with the fact that this man was not a sinner. In some cases John refused to baptize men because he sensed their insincerity; but with the Lord he did everything possible to turn the Lord away because he felt that the Lord did not need to repent.

In fact, John told the Lord (apparently without knowing for sure Who He was), "I have need to be baptized of thee, **and comest thou to me?**" John was clearly amazed, and we can assume that having to baptize the Lord appeared to John to be the most difficult thing he had ever done--just because he was deeply convicted that the Lord had nothing to confess.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if there were more who were like the Lord Jesus in this? It is possible, you know, for us to live in such a relationship with the Lord that we are set apart. That was true of Peter when he went to the house of Cornelius. It seems to have been true of some of the prophets in the OT. It is not something which we can do for ourselves; it is the result of walking in close fellowship with the Lord.

And then Matthew tells us:

III. THE LORD'S CONVINCING RESPONSE (Matt. 3:15).

The Lord did not deny that what John said was true. John the

Baptist, the mighty man of God that he was, needed to be baptized by the Lord. That is, he needed that which this baptism signified.

Those of you who were here this morning will remember that I spoke about baptism, and at least two kinds of baptism which are spoken of in Scripture. We were examining Paul's statement about being baptized into Jesus Christ, or being baptized into His death. And I sought to explain that this took place when our Lord died, but that we do not benefit from it until we are born again. But that kind of baptism had nothing to do with water. It can be pictured by water baptism. But no water is involved, or was involved, when we were baptized into Christ's death.

Tonight we are talking about water baptism. And this leads me to say that, as I understand water baptism in the NT, there are at least three different kinds of water baptism, although I believe that they all involved being immersed in water. The three are:

- 1) John the Baptist's baptism of the multitudes in Israel. This was probably the baptism carried on by our Lord's disciples up until the time that our Lord died.
- 2) Our Lord's baptism by John which was set apart from all the other baptizing that John the Baptist was doing.
- 3) Baptism in the church today, and since the church began in the book of Acts.

We need to keep all of these separated in our minds. Even though John the Baptist baptized others before and after he baptized Jesus, yet the baptism of Jesus was uniquely different. And that is brought out by what our Lord said in His response. (Read verse 15.)

The Lord agreed with John the Baptist. He did need to be baptized by the Lord even though he was a mighty prophet of God. But the Lord said, "Suffer it (i.e., let it) to be so now." And yet we have no record that Jesus ever baptized John. We are told by the Apostle John that the Lord never baptized anyone. (Cf. John 4:2.)

But the significant thing that the Lord said was this: **"For thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness."**

"Fulfil" means to provide, or to accomplish, or to make complete satisfaction, for "all righteousness."

This is one of the most important statements our Lord ever made. It would fit right into the book of Romans, or the book of Galatians. Our Lord was saying that confession does not save. Baptism does not save. That which saves is for a

sinless substitute to take the place of the guilty sinner. God cannot, because He is holy, simply forgive sin like you and I might forgive each other for some wrongdoing. God is a holy, righteous God. His righteousness must be upheld and satisfied. That is why the Lord Jesus Christ came. And we have a wonderful picture of salvation here in the baptism of our Lord. He was taking John's place; John was taking His place. And this was necessary for God to be able to declare John the Baptist righteousness in His sight!

It does not mean that John the Baptist was saved because the Lord was baptized in his place. But the baptism pictured the substitutionary death of Christ on the Cross where our Lord was going to die to save John the Baptist from his sins. There was no other way for anyone to be saved. It was necessary for the Lord to take John's place so that John could have the same acceptance with God that the Lord Jesus had. And that is true of you, of me, and of everyone who will ever be saved. He died that we might live. He took our sins on the Cross. And here in the waters of the Jordan River we see a prophetic act of humiliation which our Lord took, picturing the greatest humiliation of all, when He would die as a criminal on the Cross (although He had never done anything wrong), and through that act He became our Substitute by which we have been declared righteous, and thus fully acceptable, to God.

The last point in our text has to do with:

IV. THE LORD'S BAPTISM (Matt. 3:16, 17).

Try to picture what happened here. The Lord was standing in line with sinners. Sinners were baptized before Him, and sinners were baptized after Him. Some may have sinned grievously against God; others, not so grievously. But all were sinners. Then the Lord stepped forward, and went down to John in the waters of the Jordan River and was baptized like all of the sinners were baptized. But John knew that He was being baptized for John himself, and for every sinner that ever had been saved, or who ever would be saved. I repeat: He did not save them by His baptism in water, but by His baptism of death on Calvary's Cross.

What happened as the Lord came out of the river? Two things:

- 1) The Spirit of God descended upon Him in the form of a dove. And the Apostle John recorded in John 1:32 that the Spirit "abode upon him." What did this mean? It marked the beginning of His public ministry. This was proof positive to John that our Lord was the Messiah, the Redeemer Who had come to save sinners.

But what else happened?

2) A voice spoke from heaven, the voice of God. What did He say? He said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

If anyone has any question about the Deity of Jesus, this ought to be all of the answer they would ever need. No other could do what the Lord claimed here that He had come to do.

But notice the last part of His statement: "In whom I am well pleased." It meant not only that the Father saw nothing unacceptable in Jesus, but that all of His delight was centered in His Son. And that what the Lord had come to do, to take the sinner's place, to die that sinners would not have to die, had the full approval of the Father. Here we have the Lord's word that through the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus, righteousness would be provided for all who would place their trust in Him.

Concl: But let me say one more thing about John's baptism.

The baptism of our Lord, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the voice of the Father from heaven, actually explained why all of those people were being baptized. It was not their confession, nor their water baptism, but that which it all represented, and which was made clear at that time to John the Baptist as he baptized the Lord.

There were two men during our Lord's ministry who should have understood substitution: John the Baptist, and Barabbas. I know we are going to see John the Baptist in heaven; I am not so sure about Barabbas. I don't mean that Christ died to save Barabbas. I don't know that. But I do know that he saw substitution before his own eyes. If Jesus had not died in his place, physically died, Barabbas would have died.

And so at the very beginning of our Lord's ministry we have the Gospel pictured in His inaugural act, taking John's place that John might have His place.

Make sure that you are depending upon the crucified Savior for your righteousness and your hope of being in heaven some day.