

“One Extraordinary Life: Our Greatest Example”

Matthew 3:13-17

Years ago, the communist government in China commissioned an author to write a biography of Hudson Taylor with the purpose of distorting the facts and presenting him in a bad light. They wanted to discredit the name of this consecrated missionary of the gospel. As the author was doing his research, he was increasingly impressed by Taylor's saintly character and godly life, and he found it extremely difficult to carry out his assigned task with a clear conscience. Eventually, at the risk of losing his life, he laid aside his pen, renounced his atheism, and received Jesus as his personal Savior.

Whether we realize it or not, our example leaves an impression on others. Never underestimate the power of example!

Matthew shows us in this text how Jesus began His public ministry by coming to John and being baptized.

The idea of Jesus being baptized is almost as hard for us to understand as it was for John. Not only did John know Jesus' human identity, but he also knew full well Jesus' divine identity. He knew Him to be the Son of God, perfect in every single way.

John 1:29 - “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’”

As we have already seen, John's ministry of preaching and baptizing was intended to prepare the way for Jesus' coming, and those he baptized were those who came confessing their sins and understood their need for repentance.

Why would Jesus come to John to be baptized? We are given several clues in the text as to why this was necessary:

1. His baptism involved a PLAN from heaven (3:13-15)

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

We must be careful not to miss the purpose clause in verse 13. Matthew tells us that Jesus came all the way from Galilee to where John was for a specific purpose--to be baptized by him.

Nothing that Jesus ever did was accidental or incidental in nature. Every detail of His life was in fulfillment of heaven's plan.

John's HESITATION

"And John tried to prevent Him..."

We don't know exactly how long John had been preaching in the Judean wilderness. What we do know is that thousands of people flocked to hear him and were baptized by him in the Jordan. John had been very direct in his preaching style.

At some point, from the midst of the many thousands who had come, Jesus made His way to be baptized. Upon seeing Jesus, John's attitude changed. The fiery preacher suddenly became like a little child.

John was BOLD before men and BROKEN before God.

As Jesus came for baptism, Matthew tells us that John was very reluctant and tried to prevent Him. John recognizes his own need!

How true it is that all too often, we don't see things from God's perspective. It was necessary for Jesus to be baptized, but John could not grasp this truth.

Isaiah 55:8-9 - "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."

Part of John's hesitation came from the fact that his baptism was a baptism of repentance from sin, and he knew full well that Jesus had no sin that He needed to repent of.

John had right motives. It was because he was aware of and committed to the truth of Christ's deity that he tried to prevent the baptism. However, even though we often have right motives, we can still be far from the heart of God.

God's REVELATION

John recognized and acknowledged his own sinfulness, and his baptism was for those who had turned from their sin and were living in anticipation of the King's rule. In light of this, why would the sinless King desire to be baptized? It only stands to reveal the truth that Jesus was sinless.

Though the Bible says that Jesus was fully man, it also shows Him to be fully God and without sin. He was sinless in attitude, in word, and in action.

2 Corinthians 5:21 - “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

Hebrews 4:15 - “For we do not have a High Priest, who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”

1 Peter 1:19 - “...but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”

1 Peter 2:22 - “Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth.”

1 John 3:4-5 - “Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.”

Why would the sinless One who takes away sin go through with a ceremony that represents confession and repentance from sin?

Jesus gives the answer in verse 15:

“...it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”

Wayne Grudem - *“...through the thirty-three years of His life, Christ obeyed God in our place and as our representative, thus succeeding where Adam had failed, where the people in the wilderness had failed, and where we had failed.”*

As our representative, it was necessary for Jesus to be baptized by John, lending credence to his ministry, and was necessary in order for Him to identify with sinful man.

John 1:29 - “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

This was a reference that pertained to the Old Testament sacrificial system. The lamb that was slain on the Day of Atonement had to be a lamb without spot or blemish. A blemished lamb could not serve as an atonement for sins.

John sees Jesus as the fulfillment of this.

Heaven's AFFIRMATION

The fact that Jesus' baptism was part of the plan of God is further seen in verses 16-17:

“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.’”

All three members of the Trinity were present: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

God the Father quotes from the Old Testament:

Psalm 2:7 - “I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You.’”

Isaiah 42:1 - “Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.”

The same words that God the Father says at Jesus' baptism are also the words that He says later on at the mountain of Transfiguration:

Matthew 17:5 - “While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!’”

It all testifies of the truth that Jesus alone is designated as King and Savior for humanity. No one else will do!

2. His baptism indicates a PATTERN for us to follow (3:16)

“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.”

Everything that Jesus did in His life, even to the smallest detail, was part of the divine plan. His life was in perfect agreement with the Father's agenda.

John 8:29 - “I always do those things that please Him.”

Thus, there was no insignificant detail in His life, including His baptism. Jesus sets the example for His followers and in His baptism we find a pattern that we are to emulate.

An IMPORTANT pattern

There came a day when the carpenter of Nazareth laid aside His tools, bid farewell to Nazareth, and walked approximately 70 miles to where John was baptizing in order to be baptized by him. We better never call something ‘unimportant’ which Jesus walked 70 miles to do.

Baptism is very important and is an essential part of one's discipleship. Though it is not necessary for our salvation, it is necessary for our obedience.

Disciples are commanded to be baptized and to baptize others who believe.

Matthew 28:19-20 - “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Some people make the following wrong responses to baptism:

- Some depend upon it for salvation
- Some disregard it altogether
- Some delay it until a later time

Biblically, a person is to follow through with believer's baptism when they repent of their sin and turn in faith to Jesus. Their baptism is their public declaration of faith in Him.

An IDENTIFYING pattern

Another reason for Jesus' baptism had to do with His identifying for those He came to save.

Isaiah 53:12 - “Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

Luke 19:10 - “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

When Jesus was baptized, He was identifying with sinful men. He who had no sin came to take His place among those who had no righteousness. When we are baptized, we are identifying with our Savior. We who have no righteousness have come to take our place with Him who has no sin.

3. His baptism illustrates a PICTURE of salvation (3:17)

“And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’”

Baptism is a picture of salvation in several ways:

It is a picture of DEATH

By submitting to baptism, Jesus was submitting to death. It foreshadowed the reason for His coming--He came to die.

In many ways, the meaning of baptism has been obscured in the church today. It is much more than a ceremony or a ritual. Baptism is a picture of death.

It is a picture of BURIAL

The word 'baptize' literally means to immerse or to dip. One who is baptized is fully submerged under water.

Platt - *"Dipping (immersion) symbolizes a decisive, even violent turn from yourself and your way of life, including any dependence on your heritage, your righteousness, or your success. Baptism indicates that you are going to rely on the mercy of God. It is a confession, a profession, that there's nothing you can do to save yourself from your sins; you need the Lord to do that."*

It is a picture of RESURRECTION

Romans 6:4 - **"Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we should walk in newness of life."**

In His baptism, the Savior was identified with sinners so that sinners could be identified with the Savior.