

Hope Christian Church
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Sermon Series: *Jesus Said What?*



It is Fitting for Us to Fulfill All Righteousness

Introduction

This morning there are seven people who are presenting themselves for baptism. The reason we Christians baptize is because Jesus commanded it. Among Jesus' final words to his disciples before he ascended into heaven was this command,

(Matthew 28:18-20 ESV)

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

So we baptize people who want to become a disciple of Jesus because that's how Jesus commanded that his disciples be identified. But this raises questions.

- Why did he command this?
- What does baptism mean?
- Who should be baptized?

Lately we here at Hope have been focusing on the teaching of Jesus. Jesus said some absolutely amazing things. Sometimes what he says is staggering and shocking. We have entitled our present sermon series "Jesus said what?" The particular sentence I'd like you to ponder with me this morning is found in Matthew 3:15, where Jesus answers the question, "Why should you be baptized?"

Matthew 3:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."

So part of the answer to the question why should Jesus' disciples be baptized is because baptism is *part of God's plan for our lives to "fulfill all righteousness."* But before we go any further, let's go back and read a few verses that precede this verse which will help us fill in some of the blanks concerning what baptism means and who should be baptized.

The Beginning of Baptism

Baptism bursts onto the Jewish religious landscape in the first century under the life and ministry of the person the Bible refers to as John the Baptist. John is the cousin of Jesus and was born six months before Jesus was born. He lived out in the Judean wilderness along the Jordan River.



John was an evangelist. But he did not preach on street corners in the city to oblivious passersby who ignored him.

No, he preached out in the unpleasant, out of the way places of the wilderness. And people did not ignore him. They listened. John caught the attention of the people of his day.

(Matthew 3:1-2 ESV)

¹ *In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ² "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

Here we have the first clues of the meaning of Baptism. It is preparatory. ***Baptism arose as a response to the arrival of the kingdom of heaven*** (Mt 3:2). The coming of the kingdom of heaven brings with it certain contrasts to the kingdom of earth. Preparation for its arrival ought to happen. The appropriate response to the arrival of the kingdom of heaven is ***repentance***. John preached that people ought to repent as they consider the arrival of this heavenly kingdom. He called them to repentance.

Repentance doesn't merely mean feeling your sorry for your sins. True repentance means that you ***hate your sins***. True repentance is being so disgusted at your sins that you turn around and walk away from them. Repentance is realizing that your sins will carry you to hell and then turning around and running from them. Repentance is realizing that your sins will only earn you the right to be eternally separated from God and then crying out to God to forgive you of those hideous habits, which only ever cause you sadness, regret, confusion, and condemnation. ***Repentance is realizing how lovingly, wonderful God is and letting go of every other thing and running full speed straight into his open arms***. This is what John was preaching out the Judean wilderness. And people listened.

(Matthew 3:5-6 ESV)

⁵ *Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, ⁶ and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.*

John baptized people in the Jordan river. He walked out into the river and stood there waiting for people to come out to him in the water. When they did, he baptized them. He ***submersed*** them in the water. He took them under the water and then brought them up again.

John preached that the heavenly kingdom was coming and you couldn't take with you into that kingdom a suitcase full of your favorite sins. He baptized people who wanted to enter the heavenly kingdom. He baptized people who knew they were sinners and were ready to confess their sins. He baptized sinners who willing to let go of their sin and reach out in faith toward a God who was reaching out to them. ***Those who confessed their sins were the ones John baptized***. Baptism is a symbol of being washed and cleansed from all your sins.

Baptism is also a symbol of entering into God's judgment on your sins and then safely surviving that judgment. In the Bible water is often a symbol of judgment. Think about the waters of Noah. God used the flood during the days of Noah to purge the world of sin. The flood waters were waters of judgment. Think of the waters of the Red Sea as they drowned the rebellious Egyptians who intended to capture and kill the fleeing Israelites. Those massive flood waters were waters of judgment. The water of baptism is symbolic of God's judgment against our sin. Because of our sin we deserve to die, but we don't die in baptism. We live.

God judges our sins - we go under the water, but then he forgives us - we rise up from the water. Baptism is a symbol of both death and life, of judgment and forgiveness.

(Matthew 3:11 ESV)

¹¹ "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

John explained what he was doing. This is why I'm explaining to you what were doing today. I want you to know what baptism is and what it is not. Baptism is a symbol of repentance and forgiveness and cleansing. But is it also a symbol of life and living and newness of life. It is a symbol of receiving the Holy Spirit.

Jesus commanded that all his disciples be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is the Son who takes away our sin. It is Jesus who died so that our sins could be forgiven. But it is the Holy Spirit who gives us life and raises us up. *Baptism is a symbol of a new beginning with a changed heart and new affections.* Baptisms is a symbol of new breath. When you come up out of the water you breathe in a deep breath. It's an outward symbol of taking in new life. It's a symbol of breathing in the breath of God, of receiving the Holy Spirit.

Summary

Baptism is a symbol of our repentance. It is an outward demonstration of an inner cleansing from sin that happens by the washing of regeneration worked by the Holy Spirit.¹ It is symbolic of God's judgment against our sin—that we deserve to be buried for our wickedness. And it is a symbol of God's great grace in granting us new life. It is a symbol of a fresh start and a new direction. It is a picture of receiving the Holy Spirit and a new heart which loves God and yearns to obey. This is what baptism means.

Who Should Be Baptized?

Who should be baptized? Anyone who understands that they have sins that need to be confessed. This means that infants should not be baptized. Who should be baptized? Anyone who is willing to turn away from their hideous habits and run to God through faith in Jesus. Infants can't do this. Only persons old enough to know they need a savior can do this. Baptism is an act of obedience, which even Jesus obeyed.

(Matthew 3:13-17 ESV)

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" ¹⁵ But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. ¹⁶ And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he

¹ Titus 3:5.

went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; ¹⁷ and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Jesus had no sins to confess. John knew this. This is why he objected. He knew Jesus was greater than himself. He knew Jesus was holy. There was nothing for Jesus to confess. And so John asked, "Why do you come to me to be baptized?" John had his own sins, but Jesus had no sins. John said, "Jesus, you need to baptize me." Then Jesus said, "No. Let it be so now, for it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."

Jesus went before us as an example. If we are to be his disciples, then we are to follow in his footsteps. He was baptized in order to fulfill all righteousness. He was baptized so that he could say to all of us, "Do as I did. Be baptized. Obey me. Follow in my foot steps. And listen to our Father say that he is pleased with such obedience."

Conclusion

There are no examples in Scripture of infants being baptized. There are dozens of examples of baptism following belief in Jesus. Jesus commanded that we make disciples of all nations, that we teach all that he taught, and that those who understand and obey his teaching should be baptized. Infants can't be taught the teachings of Jesus, but older persons can. Therefore all persons old enough to understand that they are sinners, and believe that Jesus can forgive all their sins, and who are willing to surrender their lives in humble obedience to Lord Jesus ought to be baptized.

Baptism is a symbol of dying to a life dominated by and sin and then living to a new kind of life empowered by the Holy Spirit and obeying all the teaching of Jesus.