

Matthew 3:13-17
The Significance of Baptism

Jesus is faithful & true... this theme runs throughout the gospel of Matthew and the first 4 chapters reveal to us how Jesus is faithful in all the ways that Israel and we are not.

Looking at the life and history of Israel in the OT we find:

- 1. Israel was brought out of Egypt**
- 2. Israel passed through the waters of the Red Sea**
- 3. Israel was tempted in the wilderness as they followed God**

Matthew reveals how the life and ministry of Jesus are the fulfillment of what was promised, or as Jesus says in Matthew 3:15 “this is the way for us to fulfill all righteousness.”

Look with me at Matthew 3:13-17... (read passage)

- 1. Jesus didn't need to be baptized for repentance (Matthew 3:13-14)**
- 2. Jesus was baptized to fulfill all righteousness**

You see, in these first few chapters of the gospel, Matthew presents the birth, life, and ministry of Jesus as the fulfillment of righteousness and the promises of God. This is the foundation he is laying so we can rightly understand the substitutionary atonement of Jesus at the end of the gospel.

To understand the substitutionary nature of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection we need the foundation of Jesus' identification with us in his birth, life, and ministry.

Jesus is the Son of God, see Matthew 3:16–17 (CSB), “¹⁶ When Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water. The heavens suddenly opened for him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased.”

He is by His nature righteous, meaning He is without sin, and not even capable of sin. Matthew presents to us the revelation that Jesus is the one in Isaiah 42 that the Father delights in.

Isaiah 42:1 says, “This is my servant I strengthen him, this is my chosen one; I delight in him. I have put my Spirit on him; he will bring justice to the nations.” Jesus is this servant.

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Isaiah 42:6 says, “I am the Lord. I have called you for a righteous purpose, and I will hold you by your hand. I will watch over you, and I will appoint you to be a covenant for the people and a light to the nations.” Jesus is the one sent for the righteous purpose. Jesus is the maker of the new covenant and the light to the nations.

Jesus has come to fulfill all righteousness, and his baptism is one of the means by which God reveals who Jesus is; so that the world will understand His purpose.

In Matthew 1-4 we see Jesus identifying with Israel in the following ways:

- **Jesus came up out of Egypt**
- **Jesus passed through the waters of baptism**
- **Jesus was tempted in the wilderness**

Jesus did all of this as the righteous and holy Messiah. And in the moment of His baptism He is revealed as the promised Son of God. He is the one in whom God is pleased, or as it says in Isaiah 42, the “chosen one, I delight in him.”

There is one more thing that happens as a result of Jesus’ baptism.

3. Jesus commands us to be baptized

Jesus teaches that baptism is something that those who are saved should do; and something that those who are sharing the gospel should perform.

Later in the gospel of Matthew, Jesus authoritatively commands his followers to baptize new converts.

Matthew 28:18–20 (CSB)

¹⁸ Jesus came near and said to them, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. 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, ²⁰teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Jesus, who we see revealed in Matthew 3 commands those who know Him make disciples, baptize, and teach those who come to faith in Him.

Jesus teaches that baptism is something that those who are saved should do; and something those who are sharing the gospel should perform.

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The presentation of the gospel by the apostles included baptism as a response to faith in Christ.

Acts 2:38 (CSB)

³⁸ Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Those who were converted in the NT were baptized after their salvation.

Acts 2:41 (CSB)

⁴¹ So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand people were added to them.

Throughout the NT there is the assumption that Christians have been baptized.

Romans 6:3 says, ³ Or are you unaware that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

Galatians 3:27 (CSB) says, “²⁷ For those of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ.”

Colossians 2:12 (CSB) says, “¹² when you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.”

Three things that happen when you are baptized:

1. Baptism is a public commitment of your faith in Christ

2. Baptism is an affirmation of your faith by the church

No one baptizes himself.

3. Baptism is an act of identifying with Christ and separating yourself from the world.

Your baptism mimics the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. It is an act by which you identify yourself with the one who has saved you.

Baptism is the churches way of marking believers off from the world. People who are baptized are saved, they belong to the kingdom of God. The act of baptism is synonymous with joining the church. This too is a sign of what has already happened in your life.

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You join with the church because you have become a part of the church by your faith in Jesus. In the same way that the Bible doesn't speak of unbaptized Christians, the Bible doesn't speak of loner Christians either.

So often the thief on the cross is used as a case study for avoiding baptism and being a part of the church. The overwhelming experiences in the NT are filled with baptism and belonging to a body of Christians. If you want to use the thief on the cross, then you use him for those who are death bed conversions, those who live where there isn't any water, or those who live where there are no other Christians. I think its safe to assume that had he not been in the act of being crucified he would have been joyfully baptized and a part of the church. His salvation is a great comfort and display of the mercy and grace of God toward sinners. But, his lack of opportunity to live for Christ after his salvation is not an excuse or justification for those who would ignore or rebel against the clear teachings of Jesus and His Word.

Is immersion really that important? Yes

1. Immersion is the method that maintains the message of the Gospel.

Immersion mimics the spiritual reality of salvation

2. Immersion is how Jesus was baptized

We haven't replaced the method of the Lord's supper, because the method is demonstrating the message. The same is true for baptism... to change the method is to change the message.

Is infant baptism a valid baptism? No

1. Infant baptism is not an affirmation of faith and repentance

Catholicism teaches that baptism is the

2. Infant baptism is not the assumption of the NT, responding by faith is the assumption in the NT.

The NT passages where whole families were baptized, are also passages where the whole family heard the gospel and believed. The normal response of those who heard and believed was baptism throughout the ministry of the disciples and the early church. Those baptized in the families mentioned in the NT, were those who heard and believed, or those who are mentioned as serving as saints in the church. These are not traits and characteristics we would use to describe infants. The argument for believers baptism is strong because it resonates with the gospel that is being proclaimed.

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There isn't a message or moment in the NT that would make the faith on one person the basis for salvation in another person. And, this is what we are doing when we baptize infants. We are saying that because Dad (at least in Scripture) has believed the whole family is saved. But, we don't apply this to grown families, we don't apply this to spouses, and we shouldn't apply this to infants.

Baptism is a sign, like the sign of circumcision in the OT, but it is different. It is not a sign of hope or promise, instead it is a sign of fulfillment and transformation.

Using baptism the way the Israelites used circumcision is a misappropriation of the covenant. In the OT circumcision set people apart, but it anticipated a heart change that would come through the Spirit of God. In the NT baptism testifies to the heart change that comes through faith in Christ, rather than anticipates it.

3. Infant baptism is not by immersion, and therefore not a baptism that mimics the reality of salvation.

What does this mean for us?

1. Jesus sets sinners free

Your salvation is not based on the fact you were baptized as an infant, but on the grace of God by faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

God set the people of Israel free from Egypt. He broke their bonds and led through through the waters of the Red Sea and into the wilderness on the way to the promised land.

Through Jesus Christ God sets the sinner free from the bondage of sin, death, and hell. By believing in Jesus God redeems you, leads you out of your sin, through the waters of baptism, and into the world of living by faith in Him and fighting against temptation.

If you are hoping that your baptism saved you, come to faith in Christ and find true salvation and the forgiveness for your sins that water cannot give you. Come to the one who can give you living water and eternal life.

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If you are hoping that your works are good enough and your attendance to church activities is strong enough, let go of your accomplishments and be saved by faith in Christ. Attend worship because you love the Lord and can't help but praise His name. Participate in the life and ministry of the church because it is where you belong as a born again believer. Be saved and the baptized as the profession of your faith in Jesus your redeemer.

2. Be Baptized

Obey Jesus

Publicly tell of your salvation the way God has commanded you

Follow the example of Jesus

Identify with Jesus, mark yourself off from the world, and join the church to serve and grow alongside other believers.