

WHY WAS JESUS BAPTIZED?

Matthew 3:13-17 The Baptism of Jesus

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. ¹⁴ But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”

¹⁵ Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented.

¹⁶ As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

Message:

WHY DID JESUS NEED TO BE BAPTIZED BY JOHN? JOHN WAS PREACHING A BAPTISM OF REPENTANCE FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS. BUT JESUS HAD NO SINS. SO WHY DID HE NEED TO BE BAPTIZED?

JOHN HIMSELF WAS PUZZLED BY IT. HE SAID, “*I NEED TO BE BAPTIZED BY YOU, AND DO YOU COME TO ME?*” BUT JESUS’ REPLY IS ENIGMATIC: HE SAYS, “*LET IT BE SO NOW; IT IS PROPER FOR US TO DO THIS TO FULFILL ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS.*” BUT AS A FAMOUS BIBLICAL SCHOLAR ONCE WROTE: “*WHAT IN THE WORLD DOES THAT MEAN?*”

TO ANSWER BOTH QUESTIONS, WE NEED TO LOOK AT WHAT HAPPENED IMMEDIATELY AFTER JESUS WAS BAPTIZED. THEN, WE ARE TOLD, JESUS WAS LED BY THE SPIRIT INTO THE WILDERNESS TO BE TEMPTED BY THE DEVIL FOR FORTY DAYS AND FORTY NIGHTS.

BY ALLOWING HIMSELF TO BE TEMPTED IN THE WILDERNESS FOR FORTY DAYS AND NIGHTS, JESUS WAS REPLICATING THE FORTY YEARS THAT THE ISRAELITES WERE TEMPTED IN THE WILDERNESS OF SINAI AFTER THEY ESCAPED FROM EGYPT. THERE WAS ONE BIG DIFFERENCE: JESUS RESISTED TEMPTATION WHILE THE ISRAELITES SUCCUMBED TO IT TIME AND AGAIN.

GOD DELIVERED THEM OUT OF THE HANDS OF THEIR ENEMIES BY PARTING THE WATERS OF THE RED SEA AND THEY THANKED HIM BY BUILDING A GOLDEN CALF AND WORSHIPPING IT LIKE PAGANS. GOD FED THEM EVERY DAY WITH MANNA FROM HEAVEN AND THEY GRUMBLED AND DEMANDED THAT HE GIVE THEM QUAIL. HE GAVE THEM A LEADER—MOSES—AND THEY REPEATEDLY REBELLED AGAINST HIM.

THE ISRAELITES WERE A STIFF-NECKED, REBELLIOUS, UNGRATEFUL PEOPLE AND EVERY TIME THE DEVIL LAID A SNARE FOR THEM THEY WALKED RIGHT INTO

IT. BUT JESUS DIDN'T FALL FOR THE DEVIL'S TRICKS. THREE TIMES HE WAS TESTED BY SATAN AND THREE TIMES HE PASSED THE TEST.

JESUS CAME TO SUCCEED WHERE WE FAIL SO THAT HE COULD GIVE US CREDIT FOR HIS SUCCESS AND PAY THE PENALTY FOR OUR FAILURE.

HE LIVED A SINLESS LIFE, AND WITH HIS DYING BREATH FORGIVE OUR SINS. HE ENDURED THE AGONIES OF SCOURGING, CRUCIFIXION AND A LAKE OF FIRE SO THAT WE WOULDN'T HAVE TO. IN ISAIAH'S WORDS, "*HE WAS PIERCED FOR OUR TRANSGRESSIONS, HE WAS CRUSHED FOR OUR INIQUITIES; THE PUNISHMENT THAT BROUGHT US PEACE WAS UPON HIM AND BY HIS WOUNDS WE ARE HEALED.*"

JESUS CAME TO BE OUR SCAPEGOAT AND OUR BENEFACTOR. HE TOOK OUR PLACE AS A VICTIM SO THAT WE COULD TAKE HIS PLACE AS A VICTOR. HE TOOK OUR PLACE IN THE RIVER, OUR PLACE IN THE WILDERNESS, OUR PLACE ON THE CROSS, AND OUR PLACE IN HELL.

LUTHER DESCRIBED THIS AS A "GLORIOUS EXCHANGE": WE GAVE HIM OUR SINS AND HE GAVE US HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS. WE GAVE HIM OUR DEPRAVITY AND HE GAVE US HIS PURITY. WE GAVE HIM DEATH AND HE GAVE US LIFE.

AND THIS GLORIOUS EXCHANGE, THIS DIVINE SUBSTITUTIONARY JUSTICE, IS THE HEART AND SOUL OF OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH—THE TRUTH THAT SETS US FREE FROM SIN, DEATH AND HELL. AND SO PAUL WRITES, "*...THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS IS FOOLISHNESS TO THOSE WHO ARE PERISHING, BUT TO US WHO ARE BEING SAVED IT IS THE POWER OF GOD.*"

THE POWER OF GOD! POWER THAT NOT ONLY SAVES US FROM SIN, DEATH AND HELL, BUT POWER THAT IS AVAILABLE TO US FOR THE LIVING OF OUR CHRISTIAN LIVES. WE MUST ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT NOT ONLY DID JESUS DIE FOR OUR SINS—HE ALSO ROSE AGAIN TO GIVE US ETERNAL LIFE. AND ETERNAL LIFE IS NOT JUST SOMETHING THAT BEGINS AFTER WE DIE: ETERNAL LIFE BEGINS THE MOMENT WE ARE SAVED. AND JESUS CAN BRING THE POWER OF ETERNAL LIFE INTO OUR LIVES RIGHT NOW.

AS SOLOMON WROTE, "*TRUST IN THE LORD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND LEAN NOT ON YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING; IN ALL YOUR WAYS ACKNOWLEDGE HIM AND HE WILL MAKE YOUR PATHS STRAIGHT.*" JUST AS THERE IS POWER IN THE CROSS TO COVER OUR SINS, THERE IS POWER IN THE RESURRECTION FOR THE LIVING OF OUR LIVES.

AS PAUL WROTE IN ROMANS: "*...JUST AS CHRIST WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD THROUGH THE GLORY OF THE FATHER, WE TOO MAY WALK IN NEWNESS OF LIFE.*" NEWNESS OF LIFE! JESUS, OUR DIVINE SUBSTITUTE, OUR SCAPEGOAT WHO DIED AND WENT TO HELL FOR US IS ALSO OUR DIVINE BENEFACTOR WHO LIVES FOR US. MORE IMPORTANT, HE LIVES IN US. AS PAUL WROTE: "*...CHRIST*

LIVES IN ME,” AND, “I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST WHO STRENGTHENS ME.”

WE LUTHERANS HAVE A WAY OF FOCUSING MAINLY ON THE CROSS AND NOT SO MUCH ON THE RESURRECTION. WE KNOW THAT JESUS DIED FOR OUR SINS AND—OH YES, THEN THERE WAS THE RESURRECTION.

WE KNOW WHAT HIS DEATH MEANS FOR US—BUT WHAT MEANING DOES THE RESURRECTION HAVE FOR OUR LIVES HERE AND NOW? THE BEST EXPLANATION I’VE EVER HEARD IS THE STORY OF A LITTLE BOY AND HIS FATHER.

THERE WAS A MAN WHOSE HOBBY WAS BUILDING MODEL SHIPS INSIDE BOTTLES. HE HAD ONE PARTICULAR MODEL—THE LARGEST ONE HE HAD EVER ASSEMBLED—AND IT SAT IN A LARGE BOTTLE ON THE MANTEL IN HIS LIVING ROOM. ONE DAY WHILE HE WAS AT WORK, HIS 8 YEAR-OLD SON WAS PLAYING IN THE LIVING ROOM. HE WAS THROWING A RUBBER BALL AGAINST THE WALL ABOVE THE MANTLE. YOU GUESSED IT: THE BALL HIT THE BOTTLE AND KNOCKED IT OFF THE MANTEL AND IT BROKE INTO A HUNDRED PIECES. ALL DAY LONG THE BOY WAS TERRIFIED OF WHAT WOULD HAPPEN WHEN HIS DAD CAME HOME. WHEN HIS DAD DID ARRIVE, HE WALKED INTO THE LIVING ROOM AND SAW THE WRECKAGE OF HIS PRIZE MODEL SHIP AND THE BOTTLE IT SAT IN. HE ALSO SAW HIS SON COWERING IN A CHAIR WITH FEAR ON HIS FACE. HE TOOK A FEW BREATHS, SETTLED DOWN HIS ANGER AND SAID TO HIS SON, “IT’S OK, HONEY, IT’S OK. I FORGIVE YOU.”

THAT IS WHAT HAPPENED AT THE CROSS. GOD FORGAVE US FOR THE MESS WE HAD MADE OF HIS PERFECT CREATION.

THE LITTLE BOY WENT TO BED MUCH RELIEVED, YET STILL SAD OVER WHAT HE HAD DONE, WHICH HE KNEW HURT HIS FATHER A GREAT DEAL. HE DREAMED THAT NIGHT THAT THE SHIP WAS ALL PUT BACK TOGETHER, IN THE BOTTLE AND BACK ON THE MANTEL.

THAT’S WHAT HAPPENED AT THE RESURRECTION. GOD BEGAN TO RESTORE WHAT WE HAD DESTROYED: PERFECT CREATURES IN A PERFECT CREATION. GOD IS GRADUALLY PUTTING US—AND ALL CREATION— BACK TOGETHER.

AS PAUL WRITES, *“THOSE HE FORKNEW HE PREDESTINED TO BE CONFORMED TO THE LIKENESS OF HIS SON, THAT HE MIGHT BE THE FIRSTBORN AMONG MANY BROTHERS.” (ROMANS 8:29)* THE LITTLE BOY SAW IT IN HIS DREAM; WE SEE IT THROUGH OUR FAITH.

DO YOU RECALL WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT FAITH? HE COMPARED IT TO A MUSTARD SEED, WHICH IS THE SMALLEST OF ALL SEEDS BUT WHICH GROWS INTO A LARGE TREE AND PROVIDES A NESTING PLACE FOR THE BIRDS OF THE

AIR. LIKE A GROWING TREE, FAITH IS ORGANIC: IT BEGINS AS A SEED AND SLOWLY GROWS.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO ENCOURAGE A TREE TO GROW: IT JUST GROWS. YOU DON'T GO OUT IN YOUR YARD AND SHOUT, "COME ON, COME ON, YOU CAN DO IT, YOU CAN DO IT!" THE VERY THOUGHT IS RIDICULOUS . BUT WE OFTEN TRY TO DO THAT WITH OUR FAITH, REMONSTRATING WITH OURSELVES THAT WE NEED TO BELIEVE IN JESUS MORE AND TRUST HIM MORE THAN WE DO.

BUT NONE OF THIS SELF-ADMONITION DOES ANY GOOD, BECAUSE IT'S GOD WHO GROWS OUR FAITH, NOT US. HE PLANTED THE SEED IN US AT OUR BAPTISMS AND HE GROWS THE SEED AT HIS OWN PACE, NOT OURS. ALL WE NEED DO IS PUT OURSELVES IN CONDITIONS FAVORABLE TO GROWTH AND GOD WILL MANAGE THE GROWING.

AND WHAT ARE THE CONDITIONS FAVORABLE TO GROWTH? I THINK YOU ALREADY KNOW WHAT THEY ARE: WORSHIP, PRAYER, THE WORD, FELLOWSHIP WITH OTHER BELIEVERS, WITNESSING TO OTHERS, THE LORD'S SUPPER. ALL THESE ARE "MEANS OF GRACE"—CONDUITS OR CHANNELS THROUGH WHICH GOD "FERTILIZES AND WATERS THE GARDEN" AND NOURISHES OUR FAITH.

BUT CAN WE KNOW THAT OUR FAITH IS GROWING? CAN WE SEE RESULTS IN OUR DAILY LIVES OF A GROWING FAITH? I THINK SO.

FIRST OF ALL WE GRADUALLY ACQUIRE A DIVINE PERSPECTIVE: WE LEARN TO LOOK AT OURSELVES AND VIEW THE WORLD AROUND US THROUGH GOD'S EYES RATHER THAN OUR HUMAN EYES. LOOKING BACK ON OUR LIVES, WE COME TO SEE HOW GOD HAS BEEN AT WORK, SUSTAINING US DURING HARD TIMES, BLESSING US WITH GOOD TIMES AND GIVING US THE STRENGTH TO MEET EACH AND EVERY DAY.

WE BEGIN TO SEE HOW HE CAN WORK GOOD EVEN OUT OF THE BAD THINGS THAT HAPPEN TO US—HOW "GOD CAUSES ALL THINGS TO WORK TOGETHER FOR THE GOOD OF THOSE WHO LOVE HIM, WHO HAVE BEEN CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE." WE COME TO BE ASSURED THAT, "...THOSE WHOM GOD CHOSE, HE ALSO CALLED, AND THAT THOSE HE CALLED, HE ALSO JUSTIFIED, AND THAT THOSE HE JUSTIFIED HE ALSO GLORIFIED."

THIS, THEN, IS THE POWER OF GOD IN OUR LIVES—THAT JESUS, WHO CAME TO BE OUR DIVINE SUBSTITUTE, OUR SCAPEGOAT WHO SUFFERED AND DIED IN OUR PLACE, ALSO CAME TO BE OUR DIVINE TENANT, OUR GUEST, WHO LIVES AND WORKS IN US TO MAKE US MORE AND MORE LIKE HIM.

JESUS CAME TO FULFILL ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS **IN US**. WE COULDN'T MAKE OURSELVES RIGHTEOUS ANY MORE THAN A LOG EMBEDDED IN MUD AT THE BOTTOM OF A RIVER COULD FLOAT TO THE SURFACE. JESUS CAME TO GIVE

US HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS SO THAT WE WOULD BE PURE AND SPOTLESS IN GOD'S EYES.

SIX CENTURIES BEFORE JESUS' BIRTH THE PROPHET JEREMIAH WROTE: *"THE DAYS ARE COMING," DECLARES THE LORD, "WHEN I WILL RAISE UP FROM DAVID'S LINE A RIGHTEOUS BRANCH....THIS IS THE NAME BY WHICH HE WILL BE CALLED: THE LORD IS OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS."*

AMEN.

Isaiah 53:4-6, 10-12

⁴ Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. ⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ... ¹⁰ Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. ¹¹ After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. ¹² Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.