

Mark 1:9-11

January 10, 2021

“In those days,” our text begins, *“Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John.”* And already our minds fill up with questions. Why? Why was Jesus baptized? He had no sin. So why did He join all of those people coming for baptism confessing their sins?

Some have tried to explain it this way, that Jesus was baptized to be an example for us. But if we follow Jesus into the water of baptism simply because He is our example in this, then our baptism is without purpose and meaning. Just another law to obey. And then also, Jesus is not our Savior, just our example. As if we can save ourselves by following His example.

We need to keep reading our text to see that Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River. This is actually very significant. When God’s people wandered through the desert for forty years on their way to the Promised Land, the Jordan was the last barrier standing in their way. Once they crossed this river, they were delivered from the wilderness, entering into the land flowing with milk and honey.

Now God had commanded them to live faithfully in the land of promise. To wipe out all of God’s enemies. To not go after foreign gods. To live as His cherished people. But you know how grossly they disobeyed. They became idolaters, falling away from God. This hurt Him terribly. They were like a son to Him. Indeed, He called them His own Son in Egypt. *“Let My son go,”* He told Pharaoh, *“or I will kill (your) firstborn son.”*

So here we see a picture beginning to develop for us. Jesus goes to the very same waters through which God’s people Israel had crossed over centuries earlier. When they came up out of those waters, they proceeded to disobey God even though they were His own sons and daughters. When Jesus comes up out of those waters, He does obey God, perfectly. And God is pleased. His voice said from heaven, *“You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased.”*

This is why Jesus was baptized. He is the Son who takes the place of the son who disobeyed. The people of Israel failed as God’s people. So Jesus comes. Not to show them, and us, how to do it right. But to do it in our place.

Jesus is not baptized because He is a sinner. He is baptized because He becomes the sin-bearer. In the water He identifies Himself with sinners, all sinners. He takes on the identity of idolater, adulterer, thief, murderer, and so on. This is why Jesus promised eternal life to that thief on the cross. It’s why David was forgiven for his adultery and murdering. It’s why God forgives you for every sin no matter what it is. You see, Jesus is baptized, not to show you how to do anything. He is baptized for you. To be your Substitute, your Savior. To become sin, your sin, so that you are now called, in your baptism, God’s holy sons and daughters.

And then look at what Jesus does. The Israelites came out of the wilderness after forty years and crossed over the Jordan River. Jesus reverses this. He enters into the Jordan River and then He goes out into the wilderness where He is tempted by the devil for forty days.

Not only is Jesus baptized for us, He then enters the wilderness, our wilderness, and defeats all of our enemies: sin, death, and the devil. God's people did not, and could not, defeat their enemies. Jesus enters the wilderness, not to show them and us how to do it, but to defeat them for us.

Jesus is your complete Savior. He is all you need. He enters the waters of baptism to take your place as a sinner in the eyes of God, and He lives a holy life for you, overcoming every obstacle, every barrier, every foe that is against you.

And all this that He has done for you is yours freely not because you somehow claim it for yourself, but because you are baptized into Christ Jesus where He gives it to you by grace through faith.

King Louis IX understood this well. He once said, "I think more of the place where I was baptized than of the (place) where I was crowned (king). It is a greater thing, he said, to be a child of God than to be a ruler of a kingdom."

Where were you baptized? Not in the Jordan River I'm sure. Oh, there are some who do travel there to be baptized. And that's fine. But it is quite unnecessary. For the real question is not "Where were you baptized?" but "Where are you baptized?" Our Epistle in Romans 6 gives us the answer. You are baptized into Christ Jesus. He is the place of your baptism, whether the water that was used was the water here in this font, another font, or in a river halfway around the world. It matters not if you remember forever the exact latitude and longitude of your baptism. You are, and always are, baptized into Christ Jesus.

This means everything. You are God's dear child. Heaven is open to you. God is pleased with you. He does not look upon your sin. He sees Jesus when He sees you, for you are in Christ. Every sin of yours is forgiven. You, yes you, are forgiven. And this is yours every day, for your baptism never leaves you. Every day, for the rest of your life, you can say with joy, "I am baptized into Christ Jesus!" Amen.