

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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Why Was Jesus Baptized?

(Jerry Fite)

Jesus came out of Galilee to the Jordan River unto John *“to be baptized of him.”* (Matthew 3:13). John was apparently uncomfortable with the request because he *“would have hindered”* Jesus’ intent. The reason he gave Jesus was: *“I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me (Matthew 3:14)? We are not told why John felt the need to be baptized by Jesus, but we know why Jesus wanted to be baptized of John. Jesus said, “for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15).*

Righteousness emanates from God because He is righteous. Therefore, His ways are right and equitable. *“My little children, let no man lead you astray: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous (I Jn. 3:7).* As Christians, we manifest that we are *“begotten of God”* when we *“do righteousness” (I Jn. 2:29).*

Righteousness occurs most of the time in the New Testament denoting the *“condition”* or *“state of being righteous”* before God. For example, one is righteous before God through faith in Christ. *“For therein is revealed a righteousness of God from faith unto faith: as it is written, ‘But the righteous shall live by faith’” (Romans 1:17).* The righteous make it

a priority to always seek God’s rule and submit to God’s standard of righteousness. Addressing the spiritual part of man first, God promises to supply our physical needs (Matt. 6:33).

John, God’s preparatory voice for the ministry of Jesus, came in *“they way of righteousness.”* Jesus stresses this point to the unbelieving Jews saying, *“...for John came unto you in the way of righteousness; and ye believed him not” (Matt. 21:32).*

Submitting to his baptism or refusing to be baptized by him reflected sobering attitudes toward God. All the people, including the hated tax-collectors *“justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John” (Luke 7:29).* *“But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected for themselves the counsel of God, being not baptized of him” (Luke 7:30).* God does not have to be justified in order to stand just before man. But the people, being baptized by the one chosen of God to come in the way of righteousness, say in effect that we acknowledge God’s wisdom. The leaders of the Jews, in refusing to be baptized of John are rejecting God’s counsel.

It makes you think of the importance of John’s baptism in Jesus’ earthly ministry when you read where Luke placed the baptism of Jesus. He placed it after

the imprisonment of John, where he was beheaded (cf. Luke 3:21-22; 18-20). He placed it after John is fulfilling his ministry and right before Jesus begins His ministry (Luke 3:23-4:14).

At John’s baptism people would come *“confessing their sins” (Matt. 3:6).* His baptism was more than confessing; he *“preached a baptism of repentance” (Luke 3:3).* His preaching of repentance was not just demanding a change of mind toward sin, but a change of life: *“bringing forth fruits worthy of repentance” (Luke 3:8).*

While Jesus did not have any sin to confess, repent of or turn from, what would it mean if He were not baptized of John? Would not He be a stumbling block to the plan of God in preparing people for the coming spiritual kingdom of righteousness? By being baptized of John there is no glaring inconsistency between John’s ministry, which was ending, and Jesus’ ministry, which was beginning. He was *“justifying God,”* manifesting to all the wisdom of God’s *“counsel.”*

Fulfilling all righteousness was accomplished when John baptized Jesus, but John received confirming evidence that day that Jesus was the Son of God (John 1:33-34).