
No One Expects the Glory of Baptism! (Mark 1:4-11)
1/7/2018 Sermon by Pastor Jason Liebenow



If you went for a stroll through town in the middle of the day and found that no one was around, what do you imagine would have happened? What kind of event would get that many people excited enough to leave town to go see? A concert? A festival? Maybe a famous person's funeral? Hunting season? Our gospel tells us that people were leaving their towns and going out into the wilderness for something you wouldn't expect. They were going to be baptized.

All these people were going see this guy, John the Baptist. People were lining up to be baptized. Can you even imagine that today? That many people for baptism? But this happened! As we look at Mark chapter 1 today, we will find that baptism is not at all what people would expect.

First we hear about John's baptism. Now, John was a person that you wouldn't expect to be popular. People who are famous today are pretty. They wear nice clothes. They have nice sounding things to say. But John was not some rich guy giving financial advice. He was not some motivational speaker telling people what they could accomplish in their life if they could just reprogram their brains to always think positively. I've seen stadiums fill up for people like that.

But John the Baptist wasn't like that. Instead, John was a sort of hermit, living out in the wilderness, away from society. He lived off the land. The way he lived was a condemnation of the luxurious consumer lifestyle that so many people live in. His simple life showed that our continuous chase after the biggest and the best, is unneeded and often a waste of life.

And John's message was not about positivity or believing in yourself. His message was that sin is not just a couple bad things we do. Sin is who we are. No amount of self-improvement or being in the right environment or thinking the right things will fix that. He said that the way back to God was repentance. He said that we are so backward, so morally messed up, that the only way back to goodness is to completely turn away from everything we are. Even when John spoke to the morally upright people, whom most of us would look up to, John pointed out their hypocrisy. No one is good, John said, no matter how they may look on the outside.

And this is his message for us today. John calls us to turn away from our lives of sin. John condemns our continuous chasing after the best enjoyment this life can offer. He calls us to stop kidding ourselves into thinking that we are in control of our sin. He points us to the terror that our sin is leading us to. If we continue in our sins, we will go to hell. We fear death, but hell will be an eternal death, far worse than

leaving this world.

God wants us to completely turn away from who we are, our ways, our thoughts, our desires. That was John the Baptist's message. Why would people want to go see a guy like that and hear a message like that? It is not a message you would expect crowds of people to gather around, but it is the truth.

And after hearing that, I think it is easier for us to understand the jailor in our lesson from Acts 16, right? After seeing that earthquake, after seeing god himself against him, that man was in such despair that he was about to kill himself. With the jailor, now we too ask, "What must I do to be saved?" John answers that too. You see, his message was more than just our failings and our need. It was more than just turning away from ourselves. John tells us who to turn to. John tells us to repent because God is coming into your life. John told people that after him would come someone who was greater than he was; someone who was coming to turn us from our sin and bring us back to God; someone who would win forgiveness for us; someone who would give us a new life.

And then, while John's baptizing people for repentance for the forgiveness of sins, something happened that he didn't expect. Jesus, that someone greater, Jesus came to be baptized. Why would Jesus come to be baptized? He doesn't need to repent. He doesn't need forgiveness. He is holy! He is perfect! Why does He come to be baptized?

In Matthew chapter 3, Jesus tells John that he needs to be baptized to fulfill all righteousness. Jesus' baptism marked the beginning of his public ministry, and again, it's a ministry that we wouldn't expect. It's a mission that seems doomed to fail. Jesus travels around a small country with 12 disciples for just 3 years. People start to follow him for a while, and then many of them just fall away. Finally, all his work ends with him publicly disgraced and crucified. As we heard Jesus say in our Isaiah 49, "I said, 'I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing...'" It would seem that Jesus' baptism started off just a big failure. It would seem that Jesus' mission ends the same way all our attempts to be good enough end: complete and utter defeat.

But Jesus' work was not what we would expect. In that absolute weakness, Jesus shows us his unlimited strength! In that shameful defeat, Jesus shows his glorious victory! Because Jesus accomplished his mission. He fulfilled all righteousness. He completed goodness and perfection for all people. Jesus lived a life so perfect that God calls us perfect for Jesus' sake. In his death, Jesus paid for all of our sins so that we can say that our sins have been paid for. Jesus baptism was the beginning of that victory.

And that is why God shows his glory after Jesus' baptism. We see the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus like a dove. The Holy Spirit anoints Jesus with the power that he would show in weakness, rather than in strength. The Holy Spirit anoints Jesus with the glory that he would show by taking our shame.

Then we hear God the Father speak from heaven as Jesus begins this glorious mission. "This is my Son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased." Jesus is the One the Father is proud of. Jesus is the One whom the Father loves. This is the One who is greater than all.

But the One who is greater than all again does what we don't expect. He lives for us. He dies for us. He lives a perfect life, to please God for us. He dies the death that our sins require so that we do not have to pay the price of guilt, of shame, of death. And while the whole world doesn't believe this, doesn't see it, and refuses the blessings of it, God gives these blessings to us in a way that we would not expect: baptism.

That's it. A little water on us, some guy says a couple words from the Bible. That's all. For many of us this happened at a time we can't even remember. Really? We are trapped in our sin. It consumes us to the point that it affects our every thought, desire, emotion, and God is going to fix that with a little water and Word? God's going to change our lives, just like that? We just heard that we are so sinful that God can't stand who we are, and God's going to change that just with this little ritual? No angel appearing? Not even some great decision or effort on our part? And even now, I don't feel much different. I still sin. I can still feel the guilt and the shame. But God really does change us through simple water and the Word.

Through that baptism, God works a miracle in each of us! Baptism is the answer to that desperate question we heard from the jailor in our second lesson, "What must I do to be saved?" Again, the answer is something we don't expect: "nothing." Jesus has done it for you. Simply receive what God offers you in Jesus. In our baptism, we are intimately connected to Jesus. And forever after baptism, we are so connected with Jesus that when he lived his life perfectly, God says we did too. When Jesus died on that cross, God says we died on that cross too. When God looks at us, He doesn't see the unworthy sinner that we do, but he sees his perfect child.

Baptism puts the repentance John preached into our lives. Baptism does turn us away from our sinful selves and turns us to Jesus. So that our lives are no longer about making ourselves better, but how Jesus is better for us. Our lives are no longer about your best life now, but about your best life eternally with God in heaven. All our strivings and efforts to be right with God are done, because Jesus is more than

enough for us. Believe it. Put your hope in Jesus, because he truly makes you holy. Only God is good and he freely marked you as one of his in baptism.

At our baptisms, we are connected with Jesus in his baptism. At each of our baptisms, the Holy Spirit descended onto us. At that moment, we were made God's children, and the Holy Spirit made his home in our hearts, so that our lives of sin were ended, dead and buried with Jesus, and our lives of faith began, raised to life with Jesus from the grave.

This is what baptism means for us every day: that we continue to grow in grace and faith and understanding of our God. And He makes us holy, not in some long drawn out process that we get a little holier every day, but we were holy at that moment, we are holy now! 100%, because we are connected to Jesus. Even though we still struggle with sin and can see it in our lives, the Holy Spirit in our hearts makes us holy before God. He connects us to Jesus, who is our holiness, who makes us good. Through your baptism, God looks down on you and says, "You are my child, whom I love, with you I am well pleased."

It's not what you would expect. God gives us perfection, makes us right with him, pays for all our sins, and yet he gives it to us simply through baptism. Jesus starts his ministry that would change the whole world, make us holy, and destroy Satan and death forever, and he starts it simply with baptism. John draws huge crowds of people preaching repentance for the forgiveness of sins, and he does that simply with baptism. It's not what you would expect, but it's all the gifts God gives us, done once, but we keep those gifts for the rest of eternity. Amen.