



“Into What Were You Baptized?”

‘Jesus Saves’ Series

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We’re coming to the end of our series *Jesus Saves* where we’ve been looking at the various conversion accounts recorded in **the Book of Acts**. We began in **Acts 2** after the ascension of Christ, when the apostles began carrying out the great commission that Jesus left with them: to go, beginning there in Jerusalem, then, ultimately, into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. We have followed the apostles and other preachers from the first century Church as the gospel has spread from Jerusalem throughout the Roman Empire and into all the world.

Over the past few weeks, we’ve watched the message of Christ spread from Philippi and Athens, to Thessalonica and Berea, then to Corinth on Paul’s second missionary journey. Today, we go with Paul on his third missionary journey to the ancient city of Ephesus, where we find a somewhat unusual case: a group of people who had already been baptized, but were told by the apostle Paul that they needed to be baptized *again*. The method of their first baptism was not wrong, so why did Paul instruct them to be baptized a second time?

Acts 19:1-7 “And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” So they said to him, “We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.” And he said to them, “Into what then were you baptized?” So they said, “Into John’s baptism.” Then Paul said, “John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. “When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. Now the men were about twelve in all.”

The question posed to these disciples is an important question that we should ask of ourselves today as well. *Into what were you baptized?* Does it make any difference when, how, or why a person is immersed? This case proves that it does, and we'll explain why in our study today.

Paul had left his friends, Aquila and Priscilla, in Ephesus when he passed through on his second missionary journey. They eventually moved on to Rome. When Paul returns to Ephesus, he finds this group of twelve people whom the Bible calls *disciples*. That doesn't mean that these people were yet Christians, for while all Christians are disciples, not all disciples are Christians. The word *disciple* is a more generic word that simply means *learner*, implying that these men were learners or followers of some kind of teaching. When Paul meets them, he wants to know who had taught them and what did they know. He is about to find out by asking them this question.

Acts 19:2-3 "he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?" So they said, "Into John's baptism.""

This gives us some idea about the background of these people. They were disciples of someone, and here we learn that they had been baptized with the baptism of John. This tells us they had heard something about the coming of the Messiah, but they were not aware that the Holy Spirit had come. When they said, *We don't know if there is a Holy Spirit*, that doesn't mean they had never heard of the Holy Spirit or didn't know that the Holy Spirit existed. If they were familiar at all with any kind of Bible teaching, they would've been familiar with the existence of the Holy Spirit. Rather, the marginal reading has them saying, *we have not even heard whether the Holy Spirit is given*, and I think that better captures the idea here.

You see, when the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost, He took up His abode with the New Testament church and began working with the Church to reveal and confirm the truth of Christ. The coming of the Holy Spirit is synonymous with the coming of the kingdom of Christ and the commencement of Christ's reign. We've pointed that out already in our series of studies. So, what these people were revealing to Paul was that someone had come along and preached the baptism of John to them, and they had been immersed with John's baptism (not John personally, but someone who was teaching John's baptism). But in obeying that baptism, they were not aware that Christ had already come, that His reign had since commenced, and His Church had been established. It wasn't that they were not taught anything about the Messiah. It wasn't that they didn't believe in the Messiah. It was that they were still waiting for Him, not realizing that He had come and that all of these things had already been fulfilled. The fact that they did not know about the coming of the Holy Spirit and His work proved to Paul that they were behind the times, you might say. Their knowledge was incomplete and inadequate. He begins to explain to them.

Acts 19:4-5 "Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus." When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."

What was the problem with their baptism? Why did they need to be baptized again? Let's take a moment to consider what John's baptism was all about. Paul says that it was *a baptism of repentance* and that John told those whom he baptized *that they should believe on the Christ who would come after him*. That sums up the mission of John the baptist. John was an unusual, fiery preacher who started preaching in the Judean wilderness before the ministry of Christ began. He went through the country

along the Jordan announcing that the long-awaited Christ and His kingdom were *at hand* and about to come. The problem was that the people were not prepared to receive the Christ. Their hearts were in no condition to recognize or follow Christ when He would start His ministry, unfolding and developing His work.

It's like the field where you are going to plant seed. Before you plant, you need to get out and prepare the soil or you won't have much of a crop. You get out and hoe up the garden or plow up the field before planting seed. You get it ready. Another illustration would be building a road. You go out first and prepare the path, maybe cut down trees, perhaps carve out part of a hillside, fill in the low places and smooth out the high places. Then, when the way is prepared, you can proceed in building the road. That's what John's mission was really all about. Isaiah prophesied 600 years before Christ was born that one would come before the Christ and make things ready for Him.

Luke 3:3-6 "And he (Luke) went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough ways smooth; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

Luke is the one Isaiah was talking about. Notice that John would come to call the people to repentance because the Christ was about to appear. He told the people to turn from their sins and believe on the One who would come after him, Christ Jesus. He then baptized those people in the Jordan River for the remission or forgiveness of their sins.

There was nothing wrong with John's baptism. It was commissioned by God. He was baptizing by God's authority. He baptized people with God's approval and with the approval of Jesus Himself. Though He had no sin Himself, Jesus even submitted to John's baptism in order to set an example of obedience and fulfill all righteousness. Jesus and His disciples even went about the country preaching and administering John's baptism for a time (**John 3:22**). There wasn't anything wrong with John's baptism or with how John baptized.

The word *baptize* is a transliteration of the word *baptizo*, which means *to dip, submerge, or to plunge*. In other words, it was an immersion in water. John didn't sprinkle people with water; he immersed them in water. That's what the Bible teaches that baptism is—not sprinkling or pouring. That's why he was preaching near the Jordan River. He didn't need a cup of water to pour on people. He needed a pool of water immerse people in, and that's what he was doing. Not only was John's baptism correct in *how* it was being done. It was also correct in that it was predicated on faith and repentance. He told the people to believe on Him who would come after him. He told them to repent, just like the baptism that Jesus later commanded when He gave the great commission. The baptism of John was even for the same purpose, in that it was for the remission or forgiveness of sins.

Luke 3:3 "And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins,"

Acts 2:38 "Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

The same phrase is used when speaking of John's baptism and the baptism that Jesus commanded, *for the forgiveness of sins*. The difference is that when John's baptism was being preached and scripturally performed, Christ had not yet died for the remission of sins. So, the people who were being baptized by John were being forgiven, but on the basis of Christ's death which had not yet taken place. You might say they were being forgiven prospectively, much like the forgiveness that people received upon the sacrifice of animals under the old law. That forgiveness was predicated on the death of Jesus which would later take place. It looked forward to the cross. John's commission was limited to the short period of time immediately before the coming of the Christ and into the beginning of the ministry of Jesus. He came before Christ preaching a message of baptism that pointed forward to the Christ. But remember what John himself said as Jesus came on the scene.

John 3:30 "He must increase, but I must decrease."

In other words, as Jesus began His ministry, John's ministry was winding down. It fulfilled its purpose and Christ took over and began preaching His own message and kingdom after God anointed Him at His baptism as the Christ the Messiah. When Jesus died on the cross and established His long-awaited kingdom on the Day of Pentecost, there was certainly no remaining purpose for John's baptism. It had fulfilled its purpose. It was good for its time, but its purpose was now fulfilled and through. When Jesus died and then was resurrected, before going back to Glory, He told His disciples this:

Mark 16:15-16 "And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.'"

Not that Jesus *was* coming, but that He *HAD* come. Not that there was the forgiveness of sins that was about to be made available, but that the forgiveness of sins *IS NOW* a finished reality. Jesus was no longer commanding people to be baptized with the baptism of John, which pointed forward to the Christ. He was now commanding His own baptism—same in form, same in purpose, but which looks back to the Christ, who had already come.

So, what's going on here in **Acts 19**? Remember how we met Aquila and Priscilla in our study last week, that wonderful Christian couple who went together teaching people the truth. **Acts 18** ends telling us this:

Acts 18:24-25 "Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John."

It wasn't that he was branching out and teaching some foreign doctrine that he originated that was contrary to what the scriptures said and what the truth was. The problem was that his knowledge was inadequate. This man was behind. He was going about several years after Christ had come, died on the cross, resurrected, gave the great commission, went back to Heaven, and took up His kingdom reign. This man was--still in ignorance--going about preaching John's baptism, which had expired several years before.

Again, it wasn't that the baptism was wrong in and of itself. Get this now: it was motivated by the desire to obey God, it was preceded by a belief in the Messiah and repentance, it was for the forgiveness of

sins. But the passing of time had made that baptism no longer relevant to people. By this time, people should be learning that Christ had already come, had died for the sins of the world, had raised, now reigns, and His Church/His kingdom now exists. Upon that knowledge, Apollos should've been urging people to obey the baptism that Christ commanded when He gave the great commission before returning to Heaven. That baptism is still in effect, and it is commanded of all people who would place their faith in Christ and repent of their sins and who wish to enter into His now existing kingdom. So, if Apollos was going about preaching this in error, perhaps others were, too. Somewhere along the way, these twelve men at Ephesus had learned from somebody that they needed to be baptized by John's baptism. That simply wasn't right at the time they were given that instruction.

I don't know of anybody going about the country preaching the baptism of John today, but I do know of many people who don't understand what the new covenant teaches about baptism. Most preachers and most churches today, frankly, have abandoned the views held and practiced by the first-century church concerning baptism, which was that baptism is the point at which one is saved and enters the kingdom. Men today have long since redefined it as instead being a symbolic gesture, a church ordinance that new Christians should obey in order to outwardly demonstrate an inward grace already received. But that's not what the New Testament writers teach about baptism. Maybe some denominational creeds teach that, but not the New Testament. Peter taught that baptism is for the remission of sins.

Acts 2:38 "Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Ananias taught that it is the point at which our sins are washed away, and it is how we call upon the name of the Lord.

Acts 22:16 "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."

Paul taught that baptism is the step where we enter into Christ and the point of obedience where we die to sin and arise from that watery grave to walk in newness of life.

Galatians 3:27 "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

Romans 6:3-5 "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection,"

It is the point where, by the power of Christ, we are made free from sin.

Romans 6:17-18 "But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness."

It is the dividing line of salvation, the point of deliverance from the perishing world. It is the way we appeal to God for a clean conscience through the resurrection of Christ.

I Peter 3:20-21 “who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us--baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,”

Baptism adds us to the Church, the body of Christ.

Acts 2:41 “Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.”

I Corinthians 12:13 “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free--and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.”

You see, that’s not what most churches today are teaching about baptism. If someone said that you were saved before being baptized or without being baptized, the simple fact is they are teaching the creeds of men and not the truth taught by Christ and the apostles. Have you asked yourself, *into what then was I baptized?* Was your baptism for the purpose outlined in the New Testament or was it a baptism conceived and taught by men?

Many have also changed the very design of baptism. Instead of baptizing people as Christ commanded, which means to submerge or plunge, in the likeness of Christ’s death and resurrection, they instead sprinkle or pour water over one’s head. The Bible never indicates that such was practiced for baptism; rather, it was a burial or immersion. Were you sprinkled? Was your baptism scriptural? That’s an important question that you shouldn’t shrug off or take for granted, friend.

Then, some have changed the scope of baptism. The Bible shows that baptism is always preceded by belief and repentance. Babies and small children can’t do that. They don’t yet have the mental capacity to understand anything about that. Yet many religious organizations sprinkle infants. They pour water over babies and claim to be baptizing them. Jesus said, **“He who believes and is baptized shall be saved...”** He said that one is to be taught about Christ before being baptized (**Matthew 28:19**). Were you sprinkled as a baby or a young child? That’s not Bible baptism, but a doctrine of man. So, we ask today, with the apostle Paul, *into what were you baptized?* Because it makes a difference how, when, and why. Finally, the record tells us that after these twelve were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, Paul laid hands on them.

Acts 19:5-6 “When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.”

This takes us back to something we learned several weeks ago in our study of **Acts 8** and the conversion of Simon and the other people of Samaria. Remember, the apostles had to come to Samaria after their conversion to impart miraculous gifts of the Spirit to those new believers to equip and ground them in the absence of the completed revelation of the New Testament, like we now have. Here, we see that happen again. Paul was an apostle—just like Peter and John were—and these people in **Acts 19** received these miraculous powers, these gifts of the Spirit, by the laying on of Paul the apostles’ hands. That’s why miraculous gifts do not exist in the Church today: the apostles are no longer with us and those gifts have fulfilled their divine purpose with the passing of the apostolic era.

This brings us to the conclusion of our series of the conversion in **the Book of Acts**. I hope you've seen the pattern that is repeated over and over again, which is this: regardless of the individual circumstances leading up to people hearing the gospel, there were some things that always took place. Those things must take place today for people to be saved by Christ and added to His Church. In every case, every person heard the gospel preached. They believed the gospel when they heard it. They repented of their sins; that is, they turned away from their sins and turned to Christ for salvation. They were immediately baptized or immersed in water for the forgiveness of their sins.

That's the Bible pattern. That's how Christ saves today. Regardless of where you may be on the road of life, I want you to know that Jesus saves. He is interested in your soul and He wants you to be saved. He has moved Heaven and earth, working in cooperative concert with all of Heaven in order to make it possible for you to be saved. We want you to be saved. We offer to you today the same gospel message that was preached all throughout **the Book of Acts**. Now, it's up to you. If you've never obeyed these steps, you need to. You need to set about to do it today, and we're praying that you will.

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