

Text: Ac 19.3-5

Proposition: Christian Baptism testifies to your faith in the sin-bearing and Spirit-baptizing Messiah.

Today I want to take on a big topic that popped up in our look at the Acts narrative a couple of weeks ago. The topic doesn't seem that big when we read it in our text, but it really presents a puzzle that requires drawing a lot of threads from the Bible together so we might understand.

The topic is baptism,
specifically John's baptism vs. baptism in the name of Jesus.

As we noted, Paul somehow met these disciples of John as he showed up in Ephesus. As he spoke with them, it became apparent there was a deficiency in their spiritual understanding. They responded to Paul's exhortation, immediately believed in Jesus, and received baptism in the name of Jesus.

I've always taught there is a difference between John's baptism and Christian baptism. This passage by itself seems to agree with that point of view.

However, we mentioned some things two weeks ago that raise some questions for us. I have to admit, my initial interest is more like an intellectual puzzle — there is something *different* going on here and I would like to figure it out.

It is sort of a mental Rubik's cube!

I dug out some old notes on the topic, and I think that as we renew our understanding of baptism in the name of Jesus, it will deepen make a difference in our relationship with him.

Read Acts 19.1-5

Here are the puzzling things, some of which we mentioned last time:

- These disciples only knew the baptism of John and have a new baptism here.

The previous chapter describes Apollos as “acquainted only with the baptism of John” (18.27) while at the same time he “was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus.”

- Apollos, as far as we know, never received a new baptism.
- In addition, the twelve original apostles (including Matthias) also never received a new baptism, again, as far as we know.

- Quite clearly, the apostle Paul, on his conversion, was baptized in the name of Jesus.

Why were Paul and these twelve men baptized in the name of Jesus when Apollos and the twelve apostles were not?

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I. The teaching of John

A. The essential points of John's teaching

1. It isn't enough to be born a son of Abraham

John "rejected the notion that the Jew had a right to the Kingdom, *simply as a Jew*."¹

2. Everyone is personally accountable to God: this demands repentance from sin (and self)

"None but the repentant members of the covenant people would find acceptance with the Messiah."²

a. These concepts presupposed a dependence on the Messiah rather than on Jewish ritual

b. They also led to the next important point of John's teaching

3. The Messiah is coming: repentance means you turn from hoping in your works to hoping in him

4. The Messiah will come with the Spirit, baptizing you with the Spirit

a. The coming of Messiah means more than a new ritual

b. The coming of Messiah means a complete change on the inside

So, four main points:

- Dependence on Judaism not enough
- Repentance necessary, which points you to...
- The Messiah, he is coming, and...
- The Messiah brings the Spirit with Him

¹ George R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, reprint (Grand Rapids <Mich.>: Eerdmans, 1986), 33.

² Beasley-Murray, 33.

B. Selections of John's teaching from the Gospels

1. Matthew 3.1-3, 7-12
2. Mark 1.1-8
3. Luke 3.1-6, 15-17
4. John 1.15, 29-34

I left some of the record out in the interest of time. But you see the four elements of our summary in these passages.

- Dependence on Judaism not enough
- Repentance necessary, which points you to...
- The Messiah, he is coming, and...
- The Messiah brings the Spirit with Him

II. The transition to the Messiah's gospel (Ac 1.4-5)

Ac 1.4-5 Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," *He said*, "you heard of from Me;⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

A. Recalling the timeline

1. Here, the twelve (incl. Matthias) are on the Mount of Olives with Jesus
2. In Chapter 2, all twelve are in the upper room, awaiting the promised Spirit

B. The coming of the Spirit connected with the preaching of John

1. John pointed his disciples to:
 - a. The Messiah
 - b. The coming Spirit
2. All twelve of these men probably baptized by John
 - a. Certainly, Andrew and John were (John 1.40)

- b. Jesus may have baptized some of the rest
 - 1) He began preaching the same message as John
 - 2) His disciples engaged in baptisms at the same time as John and disciples did
- c. These baptisms required a profession of faith in:
 - 1) The call to repentance
 - 2) The acceptance of the coming Messiah (eventually including identification with Jesus)
 - 3) The hope of the coming Spirit through the Messiah

C. The transition from John's baptism to Christ's apostles

- 1. Effected by the baptism of the Holy Spirit
- 2. Not dependent on a new baptism

This is the critical point to understand in the transition phase.

III. The contrasts between Apollos and the Ephesian twelve

A. Apollos

- 1. Mighty in the Scriptures (18.24)
- 2. Instructed in the way of the Lord [*i.e.* knew who the Messiah was] (18.25)
- 3. Preaching accurately concerning Jesus (18.26)
- 4. But... only acquainted with the Baptism of John (18.26)

B. The Ephesian twelve

- 1. Had not heard of the Holy Spirit (19.2)
- 2. Had experience of John's baptism (19.3)
 - a. This presupposes an acceptance of repentance
 - b. And an expectation of the Messiah

However, their understanding was incomplete, their faith malformed, so to speak.

3. Paul points them to Jesus as Messiah and performs baptism in the name of Jesus (19.4-5)

C. The application for us

1. Not a concern about followers of John showing up with incomplete understanding!

2. However, there is a reality of malformed faith in “cultural Christianity”

a. Some people assume they are Christians for various reasons

... went to church as a kid, mother was an Anglican, like going to church sometimes... (lots of bad reasons)

b. Some people assume previous baptisms equal real baptism

1) Infant baptism

2) Adult baptism to join a church (as a social organization)

3) Confusion about the gospel

3. The reality of Christian conversion

a. If you recognize you are a sinner who cannot save yourself

b. If you recognize Jesus as the Messiah who came to save you from your sins

c. If you call to him to save you (even in a child-like way)

d. He baptizes you with the Holy Spirit immediately

Sometimes people with a sincere experience are plagued with doubts.

- Did I really believe the “right way”?
- Did I really repent?
- Was I just pleasing others who I love?

The real question is, who are you trusting? Are you trusting your own work of saying the sinner’s prayer the “right way”? Or are you trusting Jesus?

Conclusion:

Recall the proposition:

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Are you right now depending on that sin-bearing and Spirit-baptizing Messiah for your salvation?

You may have no need of another baptism – your salvation doesn't depend on how you feel today compared to how you felt before.

If your baptism testified to that Christian faith, then your baptism is a Christian baptism. Rest in Christ!

Now, if you never testified to Christ at all, and you know it, then, come and be baptized... when the province let's us meet inside again!

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