

## Make Sure (Part 1) – John 3:22-36

John 3:22-36. After a couple of amazing baptism services last weekend, we're back to our study of The Gospel of John. And in God's sovereignty, the first part of this passage is *about* baptism. The first of *five* topics we find here. With five principles that warrant our attention and response. Five truths to make sure we know and apply. The first comes from v22-24.

### Intro

[22] *After this* [John says; after Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus; in Jerusalem] *Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside* [the area around Jerusalem], *and he remained there with them and was baptizing.*

[23] *John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim.* Salim meaning peace, and Aenon meaning springs. Springs of Peace. (Map, ESV Study Bible, 2017) Where that is exactly, we don't know. Judea is down here, and Aenon is probably up here; somewhere along the Jordan River. Separated from Jesus by 40 or 50 miles.

The point being, Jesus was baptizing, and [23] *John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there* [indicating that the baptisms were by immersion, just like the word means; because you don't need plentiful water for sprinkling], *and people were coming and being baptized* [they were responding] [24] *(for John had not yet been put in prison).* (ESV)

V24 places everything in chapters 2-3, *after* his temptation in the wilderness, but *before* he began his 18-month ministry in Galilee. Because **Mt 4:12**, the verse immediately *following* his temptation, says – *Now when he* [Jesus] *heard that John had been arrested* [arrested and put in prison], *he withdrew into Galilee.* But according to v24, here in John 3, he first *went into the Judean countryside* and baptized people.

And I love that we're talking about it on the heels of *our* baptism services, because it emphasizes the importance of it even *more*, and connects it to what happened *then*.

Showing us that . . .

### **Baptism has always been important (v22-24)**

That's the first truth; the first principle we find here. Baptism isn't a new thing, and it wasn't invented by the church somewhere along the way. It was practiced by John the Baptist, it was practiced by Jesus, and it was practiced by the early church. It's *always* been a thing, and it's always been important.

Not only that, but we're *connected* to those baptisms. We stand in a long line of God-ordained immersion, going all the way back to John the Baptist and Jesus. How cool is that? How clear is that? It's important, and we're connected.

What's not so clear are the similarities and differences between the various baptisms. John's, Jesus's, and ours. Let's see if we can sort them out.

### **• John's baptism was an act of repentance and preparation**

To see that, turn with me to Acts 19:1-7 for a minute. Paul is on his **third missionary journey** at this point (ESV Study Bible, 2126), traveling through southern Galatia; modern-day Turkey. About 25 years after the events in John 3.

[1] *And it happened that while Apollos* [a co-laborer of Paul's] *was at Corinth* [across the Aegean Sea], *Paul passed through the inland country* [traveling west] *and came to Ephesus* [here on the coast]. *There he found some disciples.* In the generic sense. Religious followers, neither Jewish nor Christian as we'll see.

[2] *And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."* [3] *And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?"* [What belief were brought under? What truth were you immersed in?] *They said, "Into John's baptism."* John the Baptist's.

[4] *And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance* [there's the first part], *telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus."* And there's the second part. *"Prepare the way of the Lord,"* John said (Mt 3:3). "Believe in the one who's coming." It was a baptism of repentance and preparation.

[5] *On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.* They were brought under *his* influence. His work of salvation.

[6] *And when Paul had laid his hands on them* [conveying his approval and God's blessing], *the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying* [declaring the truth]. [7] *There were about twelve men in all.*

Just so you're not confused, tongues and prophecy were a unique manifestation of God's power and presence to accentuate and affirm the Gospel. And we know from the rest of the New Testament, that passages like this in Acts are not intended to be prescriptive, something *we* have to do, but descriptive. They're for our *information*, not our application.

Because the rest of the New Testament, after this, says that we receive the Holy Spirit when we *believe*. No hands necessary. And it says that sign gifts, like speaking in tongues, are apportioned by the Holy Spirit *as he wills* (1 Cor 12:11). So you don't have to speak in tongues to *show* you're saved, and you don't necessarily have the gift afterwards. Just so you're not confused.

But the point is that John's baptism, offered 25 years earlier, was an act of repentance and preparation. Repentance of sin, and preparation to receive the forgiveness and presence of Jesus. Quite different than ours, but similar to Jesus's.

### **• Jesus' baptism was an act of purification and belief**

Not his *personal* baptism, but the baptism he offered to others. His personal baptism was an act of declaring his righteousness (Mt 3:15) and revealing his identity. We saw that in chapter 1 (29-34).

But here in chapter 3, it says that Jesus was *baptizing*. Offering an act of purification and belief to those who followed him. Not that I can point to a chapter and verse on that, but that it seems to be the implication.

It doesn't seem to be a baptism of *preparation*, like John's, because Jesus was right in front of them. And had already revealed himself through signs, wonders, and authority. So they weren't getting baptized to *prepare* themselves for Jesus, because he was right there.

Rather, it seems they were getting baptized to *purify* themselves. Purify themselves for *him*. Wouldn't you? Wouldn't you want to be as clean as possible in his presence? Don't you now? So the implication is that it was a baptism of purification.

Plus, purification was one of the reasons for baptism in *Judaism*. Practiced for *centuries* in the temple. Just before entering the outer courts, people would walk through a **mikvah**; a ceremonial bath to ritually cleanse and *purify* themselves before approaching the presence of God. So purification had been a part of baptism for centuries.

What's more, John *alludes* to purification in the very next verse. V25 – *Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification*. I think that's where the emphasis lies. Indicating that purification was a part of *both* baptisms, John's and Jesus's. Questioned by the Jews, but no less true.

The *belief* part, on the other hand, stems from the fact that people were coming from all over to hear him and see him. Either believing in Jesus *before* they came, or after. And baptism would have been a natural way to express it. A familiar way.

Because once again, there was a centuries-long tradition of people getting baptized to convert to Judaism. Making it a culturally familiar way to convey belief. In this case, belief in Jesus.

And one more thing, Jesus didn't actually *do* any of the baptizing. John says in v22 that Jesus was *baptizing*, but he clarifies it in John 4:1-3. [1] *Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John* [2] *(although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples)*, [3] *he left Judea and departed again for Galilee*.

Can you imagine the elitism that would have arisen among those personally baptized by Jesus? Can you imagine the division it would have caused? Just being *taught* by different leaders divided the church. 1 Cor 1 (10-17). And for the same reason, Paul was glad *he* didn't baptize very many.

But the fact remains, Jesus was there, and offered a baptism of purification and belief, carried out by his disciples. Similar to John's baptism, but also different.

Which leaves our baptism. Believer's baptism. On *this* side of the cross. No longer in the transition and *overlap* between covenants, when *Jesus* walked the earth, but squarely under the *New* Covenant after he rose from the dead. Which means . . .

- **Our baptism is an act of proclamation and discipleship**

Like we saw last week. A proclamation of at *least* 10 things. Starting with the Gospel.

Our baptism is an act of proclaiming . . .

1. **The Gospel.** The good news of Jesus.
2. **Our salvation.** From death and eternal suffering.
3. **Our belief.** In Jesus and what he did.
4. **Our faith.** That we trust him as Lord and Savior.
5. **Our obedience.** To do what he says.
6. **Our death.** Our death to sin.

7. **Our new life.** Now *and* later.

8. **Our cleansing.** From sin and guilt.

9. **Our identity.** As a follower of Christ.

10. **Our allegiance.** To Christ alone.

Our baptism, is an act of proclamation. Not that some of those things weren't true of the baptism Jesus offered, but that their meaning now, is full and complete.

It's also an act of discipleship. An act of *following* Jesus; doing what he did and doing what he wants. An act of living for him and loving him. Walking with him and glorifying him. An act of devotion to him. No wonder Jesus said, "Go and make disciples, *baptizing* them. It conveys so much.

Like identifying us with the triune God. **Mt 28:19**. Go and make disciples [Jesus said] *baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*. "In the name of," meaning "identifying them with God." Go and make disciples, *identifying* them with God Almighty. Identifying them as one of his own.

So *our* baptism, believer's baptism, is not only an act of proclamation, but an act of *identification* and discipleship.

So whatever you do . . .

- **Make sure you've done it and honor it**

Make sure you've been baptized as a believer. Every one of you. That's what Peter said. *Repent and be baptized every one of you* (Acts 2:38). No exceptions. It's a command.

And, it's the *precedent* that followed. Like in Acts 2:41 – *Those who received [Peter's] word [believed the Gospel] were baptized*. Same for those who heard Philip a year or two later. **Acts 8:12** – *When they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women*. When they believed, they were baptized. All of them.

It's a command, and it's the precedent. Belief and baptism go hand-in-hand. *So* much so, that an *unbaptized* believer is a contradiction of terms.

So make sure you've done it; as soon as you understand what it means and what you're doing. As soon as you're able to give a believable profession of faith. *A biblical* profession of faith. "I got goose bumps," doesn't cut it. "I prayed a prayer," doesn't do it.

Does that mean you have to be a public speaker, or a polished orator? No. It just means you have to be compelled by the presence of God, and able to give expression to it. Expression in *the great congregation* as David says. (Ps 40:9-10)

If you've never done that, wait no more. Make sure you're in the next wave. Make sure you get the packet and get signed up.

And then, make sure you *honor* it. Make sure you *honor* your baptism. Whether you were baptized last week, last year, or 50 years ago, make sure you live accordingly. Honoring the significance and meaning and importance of it.

How, you might ask? 3 ways. First . . .

– **By living your life for Christ**

Don't just get *baptized* for Christ, *live* for Christ. The worst thing you can possibly do is get *baptized* for Jesus, and then ignore him. Get baptized, and live like the devil; think like the world. As if your baptism was meaningless. Fake.

Honor your *life* in Christ, shown and declared in the waters of baptism, by *living* for Christ; shown and declared on the shores of life. Follow through on what you've said and done, by what you say and do. Live your *life* for Christ.

Second, make sure you honor your baptism . . .

– **By always growing in Christ**

Growing to think like him more and more. Growing in your knowledge of him; who he is and what he's like. Growing in your love for him; your devotion. And growing in your relationship with him; a friend *closer than a brother* (Prov 18:24).

I love what we heard in that respect from one of those baptized *last* week. "I had a relationship with the *church*," she said, "but not with Jesus." So good. And you could substitute a myriad of words there. For those who've been baptized but aren't growing.

"I have a relationship with sports, but not Jesus. Work, but not Jesus. Education, but not Jesus. Social media, but not Jesus. Music, but not Jesus."

Make sure you honor your *baptism* for Christ, by always growing in your *connection* to Christ. Your *union* with him.

And last, make sure you honor your baptism . . .

– **By constantly proclaiming Christ**

Talking about him. Naming him. If one of the reasons you got baptized was to show and tell the world you're a Christian, why stop? You don't have to be wet. You don't have to be in church. You just have to make him the constant companion of your thoughts so he's always on the tip of your tongue.

Let the proclamation of Jesus in your baptism, be a springboard for more. *More* proclamation. *More* talking. *More* sharing.

It's the third way to make sure you honor your baptism. Because baptism is, and always has been, important.

Prayer – Lord, impress the significance of baptism on us, and never let us forget. Increase our devotion to all that it means. And most of all, help us live it out. Help us make much of it. For your glory.

**You Are Loved**