

Kirkwall Presbyterian Church
'Baptism of Children'
Matthew 18:1-14; 19:13-15
Deuteronomy 6:4-7
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By Keith Marcy

Two weeks ago, we became re-acquainted with John the Baptist, the one God prophesied through Isaiah who would prepare the way for the Messiah. How would John do that? By teaching the people who had grown discontented with organized religion. Thus, they walked about 25 miles out into the desert to hear John proclaim that the religion God wants is not external. He bellowed, *"the religious leaders have led you astray and they themselves are corrupt. God wants you to change – to turn away from inner sins like hatred, jealousy, lying, cheating and turn back to living for Him in honesty, self-denial, kindness, love, joy, peace, patience, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."*

When the people vowed to change, called repentance, John baptized them in the Jordan River as an outward sign there had been an inner change. Therefore, John's baptism was known as a *'baptism of repentance.'*

After Jesus came, His disciples also baptized, but with an added meaning. The element of repentance was still there, but belief was added. Do you believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God? And many believed and were baptized because they saw the great wonders He did.

After He was put to death, rose again and ascended back to His heavenly home, the Holy Spirit came upon the 11 disciples. The Spirit made them bold to proclaim, *"God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ!"* (Acts 2:36b) The people were devastated and asked, *"What shall we do?"* Peter answered, *"Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are afar off – for all whom the Lord our God will call."* (Acts 2:37-39)

Peter was not asking them to believe in a stranger, or an idol or an invention of his imagination. Jesus' miracles were widely known. No one needed a formal education to know who Jesus was.

Ask Jairus' 12-year-old daughter, does Jesus have power? And she would be able to tell you, *'I died and He gave me life.'*

Ask the centurion's servant, *'what did Jesus do for you?'* He could tell you, *'I grew sicker every day. I was near death. But my master found Jesus. He spoke the word and I was healed at that moment.'*

Ask an unnamed man of Gadara, *'Why do you believe?'* He would tell you what he told his family and anyone in the 10 cities who would stand still, *'My life was a mess. Satan and his demons rendered me insane. But Jesus came across the Lake of Galilee to see me. Just me! On seeing Him the demons shrieked in terror and left me. Jesus came and saved me; he restored me to my family! He IS more powerful than Satan and his host of demons!'*

We could go on and on. You can read many accounts in the Gospels. And when you come near the end, John tells you this: *'Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have eternal life in His Name!'* (John 21:25)

In Acts 2, we read that 3,000 believed on this Jesus. 3,000 souls committed their future into His hands. They were baptized into His Name. (Acts 2:41) Baptism is an outward picture that I believe in Jesus, the Son of God, who died for me; I trust in Him who was raised to life and is now waiting to present me before God's throne, without fault. That is why it is called *'believer's baptism.'*

What about children?

Our Scripture readings told us what Jesus thought about children.

The first is from Matthew 18:1-2.

Context – Jesus' disciples are playing an awful game. It's the *'I'm better than you'* game.

Jesus called a little child and had him stand among them.

Can you see him in your imagination? His hair is cut short and perfectly combed. His little black bow tie contrasts with his pressed white shirt. His creased black pants end at the top of his shiny leather shoes.

I don't think so!

His tousled hair has not seen a comb in a fortnight. His cheeks sport the remains of his last meal. He smells like he just bottle fed the orphan lamb, and his dirty bare feet confirm it. Jesus has him stand so all the disciples can see him. *"Never mind who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven, if you do not humble yourselves like a child, you will never see Heaven!"*

Verse 5: *"And whoever welcomes a little child like this in My Name, welcomes Me."*

Verse 6: Conversely, *"But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the sea."*

Verse 10: *"See to it that you do not look down on one of these little ones, for I tell you that their angels in Heaven always see the face of My Father in Heaven."*

Verse 14: *"In the same way your Father in Heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost."*

Read Matthew 19:13-15

The disciples saw in the children only bundles of disruption and inconvenience. *"Get them out of here."*

But Jesus saw little souls who needed Him! And as tired and worn out as He may have felt, He sat down. How far had the parents walked to have Jesus place His hands on their children? We do not know. They would not leave disappointed. *"And one by one He took the children on His knee and blessed them."* Then, and only then did He go on His way. (Matthew 19:15)

We see, as recorded in the writings of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, how important children were to Jesus. His sayings indicate that children can have faith in who He is and why He came.

If Jesus saw them in that way, how can we withhold baptism from them?

The Presbyterian Church recognizes that children need to be nurtured in their faith; they need to be taught what God's Word says and means. Parents or guardians are responsible for this. Therefore, we baptize children of parents who believe in Jesus to be their way to the Father and promise to faithfully teach their children to know Jesus as portrayed in the Scriptures. They also promise to regularly, as it is reasonably possible, to take their children to a Bible teaching church so that their teaching at home is reinforced by the Body of Christ. And, because our actions speak louder than words, we ask parents to promise to live a Christ-like lifestyle before their children.

The Church then expectantly awaits the day the child reaches maturity and asks to publicly declare that Jesus is their Lord and Savior!

What baptism is not:

It is not mystical. The water is ordinary water. We use it as a picture – as it cleans the outside of my body, so Christ cleanses me from inward filth, known as sin.

The baptism ceremony does not guarantee that a person, adult or child, will go to heaven. We are saved by faith in Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary's cross. Period!

Baptism is another picture – a picture that I have died to sin and been raised to new life – a life victorious over Satan.

Baptism is not necessary for salvation. The dying thief could not be baptized.

Baptism, when possible, is a declaration that I am Christ's and He is mine.

By **faith** I have committed my life to Him.

By **grace** He has received me.

Jesus said, *'If anyone causes one of these children who believe in me to sin it would be better...'* He did not expect children to prove themselves. He knew if they had faith. Simple faith warms the heart of Christ. Therefore, if children are precious to Jesus, who are we to refuse them baptism? That is why, next Sunday, if you come you will witness the baptism of a mother and her 3 children. I hope you come!