

THE COMMANDS OF JESUS - WEEK 2

Be Baptized: Matt. 28:19

Last week, we began our exploration of what it means to be a Christ-follower. We looked at our first command of Christ: **repent** and **believe**. But, what's next? Is repenting and believing all that's required to be a Christ-follower?

We at Redeemer Church believe that, yes, repenting and believing is all that is required for salvation. We also believe that while baptism is not required for salvation (see Luke 23:39-43), it is a necessary next step for one to truly live life as a Christ-follower. In fact, one of the last commands Christ gave his followers before ascending into heaven was, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, **baptizing them** in the of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . ." (Matt. 28:19 ESV). So why did Jesus command His followers to do this? Why is baptism so important?

Jewish Culture and the Example of Jesus:

One thing that we must always remember is that Christianity started as a movement among God's chosen people, the Jews. Jesus' entire earthly ministry was to the Jewish people, and we Gentiles have been grafted in by God's grace (see Rom. 11:13-24). So, to truly understand baptism and its importance, we must examine its Jewish roots. There were always two types of Jews: those who were the literal descendants of Israel and those who chose to convert to Judaism. For those who converted to Judaism, it was not enough to recognize Yahweh as the one true God and to follow the Law of Moses. A convert to Judaism would not be considered part of the "family" and allowed into the inner court of the temple until he was baptized by immersion in a mikveh. It was an outward sign reflecting an inward commitment—an outward purification reflecting the spiritual purification that had already taken place. The new convert was, for better or for worse, choosing to identify himself with God's people.

Understanding the cultural background of baptism makes the story of Jesus' baptism by John all the more special. Jesus didn't need to be saved or purified, so why would he get baptized? In baptism, Jesus was choosing to publicly identify with God's people. He was identifying with those who had come to repent and believe.

Christian Baptism:

Just as Christ chose to publicly identify with us, He has commanded that believers should also publicly identify with Him. Throughout the New Testament and the history of the Church, baptism has been an essential next step following a believer's profession of faith. While there is denominational debate about the means and significance of baptism, one thing is clear from Scripture—baptism imparts something special to a believer. In the waters of baptism we are buried together with Christ, and when we are raised up out of the waters, we are raised with Him, and we have a new life (Rom. 6:4). Who would want to miss out on that blessing?

Questions:

1. How does understanding Jewish tradition and culture impact our understanding of baptism?
2. Our current culture asserts that faith is a private thing best left at home. So, why is a public baptism important? Does publicly identifying with Christ really matter?
3. Have you been baptized? If not, why?