

“Am I Good Enough?”

The Rev. S. Shane Nanney – January 8, 2023

Matthew 3:13-17

Christ’s life was constantly arousing the curiosity of onlookers. Whether His followers or His enemies, people were so impressed with Him, or, in some cases, intimidated by Him, that they wanted to know how and why He had it all together - so they asked Him questions.

Jesus used these questions as great teaching opportunities from which we all benefit. From His answers we not only learn how to live our lives with a sense of purpose as He did, but we also realize how His life brings harmony and satisfaction to our human existence.

We investigate a question today that was asked by one of the most pivotal people in the Bible.

John the Baptist was the key figure connecting the dots between the Old and New Testaments. His message and His mission were clear and definite - to prepare the way for Jesus.

The setting for John’s question is notable in its importance. Christ’s baptism marked the beginning of His public ministry. The acknowledgement of Jesus by a respected prophet such as John provided an excellent launching pad for Christ’s introduction as the Son of God.

What happens when Jesus comes to be baptized by John is good for us all to witness.

John posed a question to Jesus: *"I AM THE ONE WHO NEEDS TO BE BAPTIZED BY YOU, SO WHY ARE YOU COMING TO ME?"* (Matthew 3:14)

Let us put ourselves in John’s sandals. How would we have felt? The same way - only perhaps our hesitancy would have been even greater - after all, John was one of the greatest men who ever lived.

If John hesitated to baptize Jesus because he felt unworthy, how much more should we sense our unworthiness to serve God? Yet Christ's answer to John's question gives us peace and hope.

Can God use us, imperfect humans, with all our warts and blemishes, with all our past sins and scars, with all our missteps and frailties? How can the imperfect be of service to the Perfect One?

Are we good enough? Can we measure up?

John's baptism was one of repentance, but Jesus had no sins from which to repent. He was sinless yet willing to identify with the sinner. Therein lies our answer of hope. Without Him we are not good enough, with Him we are!

Steve Brown, Key Life Radio host and Bible teacher makes some excellent points to ponder on this subject.

"Jesus reached out to some very surprising people. He showed up in some very surprising places and He said some very surprising things. Unlike Him, we generally do what is expected of 'religious' people. Being a 'good citizen' is not the same thing as being a Christian, but in our society, goodness and Christian are used interchangeably.

"So, church becomes the place where a nice, pleasant, bland person stands in front of other nice, pleasant, bland people urging them to be nicer, more pleasant and blander. Jesus did not die to create nice, pleasant, bland people. He died so that sinners would find grace and forgiveness, and, in the joy and exuberance of their discovery, would find it impossible to keep quiet about it.

"It's worth noting that Jesus didn't condemn bad people. He condemned stiff people. We condemn the bad ones and affirm the stiff ones. Whether it was a prostitute or a tax collector or an outcast, Jesus reached out to them. It was a motley crew of riffraff that followed Him around, and it never embarrassed Him or made Him feel uncomfortable. It still does not. But He is still angry at the stiff ones.

"One of the most radical statements Jesus ever made is found in Matthew 9:12-13 - *'IT IS NOT THE HEALTHY WHO NEED A DOCTOR, BUT THE SICK. BUT GO AND LEARN WHAT THIS MEANS: "I DESIRE MERCY AND NOT SACRIFICE." FOR I HAVE NOT COME TO CALL THE RIGHTEOUS, BUT SINNERS.'*

"The difference between Jesus and us is that He didn't condemn the bad people - He loved them and understood them even though He would have been perfectly justified in condemning them. We, on the other hand, cannot condemn the bad people because we are them. Therefore, our only alternative is to tell them, as fellow beggars, where we found bread.

"I believe that one of the reasons the world isn't attracted to our religion and to our churches is because they think what we have is only for good people.

"Therefore, they think, it isn't for them. We have done a poor job informing the world that Christians are not perfect, just forgiven and accepted and slowly getting better. Jesus said, *'BUT I, WHEN I AM LIFTED UP FROM THE EARTH, WILL DRAW ALL PEOPLE TO MYSELF.'* (John 12:32)

"If that isn't happening, maybe it's because we have been lifting up ourselves instead of Him. Maybe it is because we are giving the false impression that we are good people, and that Jesus only loves good people. Maybe it's because we're flying under false colors - ours rather than His."

Jesus let John baptize Him, not because He needed to repent, but rather because He wanted us to know that through Him, we can become good enough to serve God.

John grew to understand this. *"HE MUST BECOME GREATER, I MUST BECOME LESS", HE SAID. (John 3:30)* John knew he was the best man, not the bride groom. (John 2:29)

Like John, we are here to advance Christ's cause, not take His place.

Our responsibility is to change our minds about God. That is the literal meaning of the word "repent" which John and Jesus both preached. (Matthew 3:2; 4:17)

Christians are not people who are better than other people, they are people who have changed their minds about God and spiritual things.

Two groups of people showed up at Christ's baptism that illustrate the need for a change in our thinking - The Pharisees and the Sadducees. (*Matthew 3:7*) John challenged them to "*PRODUCE FRUIT IN KEEPING WITH REPENTANCE.*" (*Matthew 3:8*) When we change our minds about Christ our lifestyles will change also. (If someone's way of life has not changed its certain they haven't changed their mind.)

"THE PHARISEE WAS A RITUALIST; THE SADDUCEE A RATIONALIST."

The Pharisees were always hung up on their traditions. Their chief obstacle in coming to Christ was their belief that their outward works and their connection to their ancestry could earn a right standing with God.

The Sadducees, who doubted and cast aspersions at anything supernatural. They did not believe in angels, spirits, or the resurrection from the dead. (*Matthew 22:23; Acts 23:8*)

We all need to change from the inside-out. Water baptism is an outward experience. The work of the Holy Spirit is an inward work. His fire alone can cleanse us within.

DO YOU SENSE THE WORK OF HIS HOLY SPIRIT WITHIN? DO YOU HEAR HIS GENTLE WHISPER? (*1 Kings 19:12*) He is there because He wants you to come to Christ. The Holy Spirit and the church both want you to know the wonderful purposeful life Jesus brings.

Revelation 22:17 - "...WHOEVER IS THIRSTY, LET HIM COME; AND WHOEVER WISHES, LET HIM TAKE THE FREE GIFT OF THE WATER OF LIFE."

The answer to the question is "Yes! We are good enough in Christ to serve God!" Come to Him today! Amen.