

Baptism– What’s the point?

Sermon 6– Baptism and the Kingdom of God

Passage: Matthew 28:16–20

To which Kingdom do you belong?

To which Kingdom do you pledge your allegiance?

I know these questions are not very commonly asked these days. But they were common questions for people who lived during the times of the New Testament! After all, kings and kingdoms existed. And people were always being asked to declare their loyalty to one king or another...often under the threat of death.

If you lived during the days of Jesus, you would have known that the land of northern Israel (known as **Galilee**– where Jesus grew up) was ruled by a king named Herod Antipas. He also ruled the land that extended to the south, running along the **Jordan River valley**. This was Herod’s kingdom!

You would have also known that Herod was a jealous king—he refused to share his authority with anyone! This meant that the people of this region had to be loyal to Herod. They had to honour him when he came into their towns; they had to pay taxes to him whenever he sent his tax collectors to their door; they had to obey his commands, like when he told everyone that they had to go back to their home towns for a census.

Herod was the king. He had all the authority. He was ruler of his kingdom.

And that’s exactly why John the Baptist eventually got beheaded by Herod. You see, John the Baptist was baptising people in the Jordan River. But the river flowed through Herod’s Kingdom, so Herod kept a watchful eye on what went on. He heard that John was directly challenging his rule by telling people to repent and believe in another Kingdom—the Kingdom of Heaven.

John said, “Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is near.” Why did he say this? Because John wanted people to see that, in the end, Herod wasn’t the real king. No, there was another king and another kingdom more powerful than Herod’s, and this heavenly Kingdom would soon be here. Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is near!”

And that’s why John baptised people. You see, to get yourself baptised was equivalent to saying, “I know in which Kingdom I belong! I belong to God’s Kingdom. He alone has all authority. He alone deserves my loyalty and trust.” In the end, **baptism is an act of submission to God, the King!**

And that’s why Herod threw John the Baptist into prison. Herod hated the fact that John was turning people against him. As people went to be baptised in the Jordan River, they were repenting of their loyalty to Herod and declaring, instead, their loyalty to God. Through baptism, they were renouncing **the Kingdom of Herod** and were returning to **the Kingdom of Heaven!** Luke tells us that even some of Herod’s soldiers and tax collectors got themselves baptised! That would have been treason!

It’s no wonder why Herod gave in so easily to the request of his step-daughter who asked that the head of John the Baptist be brought to her on a platter!

Now, with all that in mind, let’s go back to my opening questions: To which kingdom do you belong? To which Kingdom do you pledge your allegiance? As I said, these aren’t questions we hear people asking today, but maybe we should! Why? Because, today, there are still plenty of kings and kingdoms to which we can easily pledge our loyalty.

For example,

- There’s the kingdom of **nationalism**—when we unquestioningly believe that our country is always ‘right’ or ‘better’, or that our cultural values are the best.

- There's the kingdom of the **workplace**—It's easy to let your life be ruled by the treadmill of overtime as you climb the corporate ladder.
- There's also the kingdom of your **home**—you can be ruled by your mortgage, endless renovations, never satisfied with what you can afford.
- There's the kingdom of **money** as you chase the mighty dollar.
- There's also the kingdom of **self and selfish pursuits**, where your time gets ruled by the fantasies in your head.

The fact is, there are many kingdoms in this world that want to rule us. We must all decide which Kingdom we want to belong to...and which king will rule over us. **And that is why baptism is still important today!** As it was in the days of John the Baptist, **baptism is a public step of submission to the Kingdom of heaven.** It's a public act of saying, "I want God to be my King! I want to be immersed in His Kingdom! I want Him to set me free from all other rulers!"

Of course, in the end, there is only one true King, **Jesus Christ!** In Matthew 28, He tells us: "**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.**"

Jesus is saying that all the other so-called kings are really just imposters! All the other kings, like King Herod, are only destined to fade away. Be cause all authority has been given to Jesus! He is seated at God's right hand! So, be baptised in submission to His rule!

Indeed, Jesus instructs His disciples to go out and call people to the submission of baptism and obedience to His Kingship: **"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.**

In other words, Jesus is telling His disciples, "Let the world know who I am. Let the world come to me and discover my Father and

the Spirit, and be immersed in our love. Go! Help the world to see that there is only one true King who has only good things in store for all who submit their lives to us!”

Baptism is saying ‘yes’ to Jesus’ lordship in your life. And it’s not a difficult or heavy burden, either. In fact, Jesus concludes: **“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”** I walk with you to make your discipleship sweet. I walk with you to make your baptism the best decision you’ve ever made! I am with you always.

Let’s pray.