

“The Great Exchange” – Pr Jim Sprengle – The Baptism of Our Lord January 8, 2023

- I. **Matthew 3:14-15** – ¹⁴ John would have prevented Him, saying, “I need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?” ¹⁵ But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented.
- II. **Most of us exchange gifts for Christmas...**
 - a. As tradition would have it, we purchase or make gifts to give as a sign of our affection, our friendship, and our love for people around us.
 - b. The gifts we purchase usually indicate the type of person receiving them...
 - i. There’s the \$5 Starbucks gift card – an acquaintance or friend
 - ii. As the gifts get larger or more expensive, usually that means someone very close –
 1. Before getting into the ministry, I surprised Michele with a trip to Cancun... another time I gave her a Ferrari (just kidding)
 2. Sometimes we give our loved ones jewelry, electronics, or other expensive gifts that would be strange to give to our coworkers or casual friends.
 - c. Again, most of the time when we receive a gift from someone, we reciprocate and give something back if possible.
 - i. Not always, but the idea is to exchange gifts –
 1. Sometimes the exchange comes with each person buying a similar gift (like your typical gift exchange party)
 2. Sometimes the exchange comes from family members – like my family in Colorado limits their gift amount so everyone purchases things in a similar range.
 - ii. Other times, the exchange is not about giving a gift in return...
 1. If a gift is given in appreciation for the person and their work – no gift is expected in return, because the gift is for appreciation of what’s already been done.
 2. For example, it would seem a little silly to take our staff gift and purchase each one of you a gift with that money – because it was given in appreciation of the staff and work done in the prior year.
 - d. We can all look back with thanks to God over the past couple of weeks, remembering the gifts we received and gave away, along with the love and appreciation shown by us and to us.
 - e. Gifts are a way to show love and appreciation.
- III. **Have you ever received** a gift that was bigger than you could ever give back?
 - a. Maybe you were put in someone’s will unexpectedly and you received a large amount of money or real estate (in your dreams right?)

- b. Or maybe someone paid off a large medical bill or debt that was hanging over your head.
- c. Not long ago, anonymous donors covered my airfare to see my new grandsons – and be there for their baptisms!
 - i. No way I could ever pay that back or exchange it for anything of equal value – because as certain credit card commercials used to say, “it was priceless”
- d. For some of us, when we receive a gift that cannot be repaid, or we can’t possibly give back something at least of similar “value” – we feel bad or guilty.
 - i. I suppose it’s pride, because most of us don’t like the idea that we receive things without some kind of payment or reciprocation.
 - ii. In fact, I know some people who tally up the times they pay for meals or drinks for their friends, just so they can stay ahead of them and not feel bad about never getting the check.
- e. Many times, a gift given creates a feeling of obligation to the receiver, and a desire to return or exchange a gift in kind.

IV. **In our Gospel lesson, Jesus is baptized** – as a gift for us.

- a. Although it doesn’t seem like there’s a lot to this passage in Matthew, for hundreds of years scholars have written about it, pondering what it truly means.
- b. For starters, we understand baptism to be God’s way of forgiving us by using simple water, but as it is combined with the power of His Word, the water delivers God’s grace to the person receiving it.
- c. Is Jesus perfect and without sin? Yes, so why would He need baptism or the forgiveness it offers?
 - i. Jesus did not, and does not need forgiveness because He is the perfect image of His Father – the only one who lived a life free from sin...
 - ii. Yet, Jesus did choose to receive our sins, to take them upon Himself as a way to pay for them.
 - iii. So, as John the Baptist protests that Jesus should be baptizing him... Jesus says that this is to fulfill all righteousness.
- d. To fulfill all righteousness isn’t all that clear – I guess you could say it simply means “it’s good to do for God”
 - i. However, my Seminary professor, Jeff Gibbs, would point out:
 - 1. First to fulfill means fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies of God’s work to save humanity –
 - 2. Second, the word righteousness is often the same as God’s saving acts.
 - ii. So, Jesus consents to be baptized like any other sinner in order to complete His plan of salvation...

1. It was an anointing, or a pointing to Jesus as the one who would complete the plan God was working on for thousands of years... by taking the sins of humanity upon Himself.
- e. It was almost as if Jesus said, "I don't need the gift, but I will pay for it so that everyone can have it one day."
- f. I don't need the gift of forgiveness, but I will take the sins of the people upon myself to pay the debt...

V. **When did you receive the gift that Jesus won?**

- a. Some of you may have gotten the question – "When did you get saved?"
 - i. This usually means, "When did you make a decision to believe in and follow Jesus?"
 - ii. I really think we all should make a conscious decision to follow Jesus – but I will be very clear – we cannot make the decision to believe.
- b. The Holy Spirit comes to us by the power of the Word of God – and even though we were completely dead (and unable to make any spiritual decision) God came to us and opened our eyes of faith.
- c. It can (for most of us here) be traced back to the baptismal font – as we were brought here as little babies.
 - i. Can infants make a decision to believe? No, and that's the point, we received a gift from God that wasn't our choice, but a gift nonetheless
 - ii. Just as I said last week with the circumcision of Jesus, that the people of Israel were to bring infants 8 days old to be circumcised, so they could be a part of the family and called God's people.
- d. Some of you were baptized when you were older – that still blesses you with the gift of forgiveness and connection to Jesus as it says in Romans 6 today – but it is more than likely that you had faith given to you long before by the power of God's Word.
- e. The point of all this is to say that we don't have anything to bring to God in order to receive the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation.
- f. Martin Luther supposedly said on his death bed that, "We are beggars. This is true." – which means that we have nothing and can only receive God's good gifts.
- g. The truth is that Jesus paid a debt that could never be paid by our own works or help – and the great exchange is that Jesus took our sins – from His baptism all the way to the cross – and He gave us the gift of forgiveness and eternal life.
 - i. He died to pay for our sins and rose again to call us forgiven (Romans 4:25) – and there is no way to pay that back – we simply live in His grace and love
- h. Do we feel a desire to respond to that grace and love?
 - i. Certainly, and we live our lives for Jesus as His followers –

- ii. But the Great Exchange means that Jesus got our sins and we got forgiven
- iii. This gift of grace is priceless... we cannot repay it... and that is fine because we are beggars. This is true. Amen.