

The Twelve Disciples of John

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[0 : 0 0] Welcome here for this Sunday, September 7th. My name is Kent Dixon, and it's my joy to be the pastor here. So this morning we're continuing in this Acts to all the world sermon series! Because we're in the New Testament book of Acts.

So far in our study in the book of Acts, we've considered many examples of conversion. And I've kind of summarized and highlighted these before, but I want to do it again. 3,000 people at Pentecost were mentioned in Acts 2, verses 1 to 41.

There were 2,000 people at Solomon's porch that were mentioned in Acts 3, 1 to 4. The Samaritans, a large group of them, mentioned in Acts 8, verses 4 to 25.

The Ethiopian eunuch mentioned in Acts 8, 26 to 40. Saul of Tarsus, mentioned in Acts 9, Acts 22, Acts 26.

Cornelius and his household, mentioned in Acts 10 and Acts 11. Lydia of Thyatira, who's mentioned in Acts 16. The Philippian jailer, mentioned in Acts 16, 25 to 34.

[1 : 1 1] A large group of people in Athens, mentioned in Acts 17. And a large group of people in Corinth, mentioned in Acts 18.

Through these examples of conversion, we can recognize that the gospel message that people heard was focused on Jesus Christ. And we hear that over and over in these accounts.

Jesus, who died for our sins, who was raised from the dead, who is both Lord and Christ, and who will return again one day to judge the world.

There's your gospel message for this morning. The response, then, that was expected or recognized in the people that heard and received this message involved a demonstration of faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

And it included confessing that faith. And then also repentance from sin. We recognize that. So this morning we have yet another case of conversion.

[2 : 1 3] And in fact, it's the last detailed example of conversion in the book of Acts. It's also a unique conversion account for several reasons. And one particularly unique aspect is that it features re-baptism of a sort.

So our passage for this morning is found in Acts 19, verse 1 to 7. I heard some Bible pages flipping already. So feel free to grab a Bible from the pew in front of you or open yours if you have it with you.

I'll also give you the audio book version. So you can turn to Acts 19, verses 1 to 7 or listen. While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus.

There he found some disciples and asked them, Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? They answered, No, we've not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.

So Paul asked them, Then what baptism did you receive? John's baptism, they replied. Paul said John's baptism was a baptism of repentance.

[3 : 2 0] He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus. On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

There are about 12 men in all. Our sermon this morning is titled, The Twelve Disciples of John. And as we look at this together, I want to dig into some of these events.

So first of all, we recognize that Paul arrives in Ephesus. If you remember, we learned in Acts 18, 22 to 23. You may not remember that this was the passage where you heard it, but you'll probably remember these events.

Paul had just started his third missionary journey. And remember, I said at that time, when we looked at that passage, Luke finishes his account of talking about the second missionary journey.

And then in Acts 18, 23, he goes, And immediately they started on number three. And it's like, Whoa, Luke, slow down. But remember, I was saying that Luke just wants the facts, right? [4 : 27] So he goes for the facts and begins to automatically start talking about that third journey. But just before that, Paul had made a quick stop in the city of Ephesus.

And remember, the people there wanted him to stay. They wanted to learn more from him. They wanted to hear more from him. And to remember, he turned them down. But he also promised that if it was God's will, he would come back. And so as we've just heard from this passage this morning, Paul was true to his word, and he returned to Ephesus. He came back. Paul meets 12 disciples. We just heard that in our account this morning. Shortly after he arrived, this passage tells us he found some disciples. And our passage eventually lets us know at the end of the passage from this morning that there were 12, right? He met some disciples, and by the end of this passage, we learn there were 12 of them.

[5 : 28] Paul also learns that these disciples had been followers of John the Baptist. There's a connection there. We could probably correctly assume that there was a bit more small talk, right?

A bit more getting to know each other. But we don't get a sense of that. Again, I think it's Luke cutting to the chase, right? He's trimming the fat of this interaction a bit. Because he only gives us the essential facts here.

From this account, Paul wastes no time in asking them if they received the Holy Spirit. It's a fair question. To which they answer, not only did they not receive the Holy Spirit, a bit of a head-scratcher, they hadn't even heard about there being a Holy Spirit.

Interesting, right? So our text this morning makes it seem like Paul isn't necessarily that great of a conversationalist. I'd like to, when I meet him one day, I'm looking forward to interacting with him and getting a sense of what his personality is like.

But in this passage, he jumps immediately to asking about their knowledge of the Spirit. Did you receive the Spirit? No. Do you know about him? And then he goes from there to how they were baptized.

[6 : 39] Right? Paul is obviously questioning his mind. If you were baptized, how do you not know about the Holy Spirit? Right? It's fair.

And their seeming lack of knowledge may have concerned him. It's fair that it might have. Especially because they seem to be lacking knowledge of what we would consider to be essential things.

We know from John the Baptist's words in Matthew 3.11, he, John, was knowledgeable about the Holy Spirit. So maybe, I mean, school has just started again.

Maybe these guys just didn't pay attention in class. Right? Maybe they just missed that part. But we also know that the baptism that Jesus modeled for us, for his disciples at the time, and right down to today, was to be in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

We also learn that in Matthew, right? So these disciples seem to not have been properly baptized into Christ, as we would understand that. We can see then why Paul would have been a bit concerned.

[7 : 49] Why he would have dug a little deeper and asked for more information about this. And Paul learns that it was ultimately John's baptism, John the Baptist, his baptism that these people received.

And as we've talked about before, mentioned it a bit again this morning, the focus of John's baptism was on individual repentance. Right?

It was on the recognition of a sinful nature that needed to be repented from. And not necessarily at that time on a full understanding of the gospel.

So some scholars have suggested that these disciples, these 12 people, may have even been converted by Apollos. And remember, we talked about Apollos last week.

And may have been converted by him before Apollos himself had learned the truth. Remember, we explored that Apollos, Aquila and Priscilla, had taught Apollos more.

[8 : 48] Filled in some gaps for him. So that would certainly fit that this could have happened that way. So these 12, we learn, are re-baptized.

So pause for a second. Does anybody gasp at that? I'll get there in a minute. I was trying to figure out where to put in this little story of mine.

But so I went to Concordia College at the time. It's right across the river from us, right? That's where I got my undergrad degree in history and English.

So I attended that college. And it is Lutheran by nature, right? So I had friends who are, by the way, now Lutheran pastors, Lutheran ministers in congregations.

So they came from a Lutheran background. I came from a Baptist background. So we would tease each other often about baptism. So I would say, they would say to me, well, I think Baptist baptism, believer's baptism, is overkill.

[9 : 52] And I said, interesting. I said, I think infant baptism is indecision. And so we teased each other and joked about it, recognizing the importance of all of these traditions and the intention of following Christ in them.

So Paul explains that while John taught a baptism of repentance, he also very clearly directed people to believe in Jesus, right?

John the Baptist was very clear that Jesus was coming. The Messiah was coming and that don't follow me, look for him and follow him. So we learn that upon hearing this, that the 12 disciples were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

That's what our passage says. Which was, as I just mentioned a moment ago, exactly what Jesus commanded his disciples to do, his followers to do, right?

To be baptized in the name of Jesus. So following their baptism, we read that Paul laid hands on them and he blessed them. And the Spirit then gave them gifts of tongues and prophecy.

[11 : 01] So these events mark the beginning of a very successful time for Paul's ministry in Ephesus. And again, we see this normal response of one who wished to become a disciple of Jesus, declaring faith in Jesus, and then being baptized.

Those pieces, bang, bang, in order. So the example of the 12 disciples of John raises an interesting question. And this is kind of the core of what I wanted to get at this morning.

It's the question about the idea of someone being re-baptized. So let's give this some thought together. They had previously, these 12 disciples, been baptized.

But as we've recognized already, their baptism was identified by Paul as lacking in some way. So even though their baptism was by immersion, even though their baptism seemed to have been included a declaration of faith, we've noted, though, that their baptism wasn't in Jesus' name, wasn't by Jesus' authority, as it's modeled even earlier in Acts, right?

This has been modeled for us over and over in Acts. And as we've already talked about, the model for baptism would have been a baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit as Jesus commanded for his disciples.

[12 : 32] So we see that because the original baptism of these 12 disciples was lacking in some way, a re-baptism was necessary. Now, I have lots of friends and even family members who were baptized as infants.

So I've had lots of conversations with people saying, ooh, should I get baptized again? Does my infant baptism not count? All of those questions, right? Or someone who is baptized as a young person, then coming back and saying, I want to rededicate my life to Jesus.

I want to get baptized again. And I feel that call on my life. Is that wrong? No, it's not wrong. So those are conversations to have, right? I would not as a pastor ever say to someone that their infant baptism didn't count.

I would, however, encourage and help to understand why believer's baptism is what we see modeled in Scripture, adult baptism. So let's take a closer look at biblical baptism.

So there's four essential elements. And this sounds super technical, but I'm going to make it hopefully accessible. Four essential elements that I've learned from some scholars.

[13 : 50] The proper mode of baptism, which is essentially a burial by immersion. And that's modeled in Romans 6, Colossians 2. The proper authority, which we've talked about and made clear, is in the name of Christ, right?

In Jesus' name. Acts 19 talks about that. The proper purpose. A public declaration of someone's faith in Jesus Christ. An identification with Christ's death and resurrection.

That's the purpose. And then a proper subject, right? You need someone to be baptized. A penitent believer, right? Someone who recognizes their need for a Savior.

Their sinful nature can be redeemed in Christ. Acts 2 talks about that. Acts 8, Mark 16 talks about that. So in the case of the baptism we're looking at specifically today, what was lacking?

Any thoughts? Authority. Nice. Everybody catch that? The authority? Do you agree? Do you remember when we used to give out gold stars for people answering questions?

[15:01] Yeah, I won't do that today. Although. So in the case of this baptism, right, we recognize that it was indeed the authority that was lacking. So even though their previous baptism had the correct mode, right?

Believers' baptism by immersion. The correct purpose. And the correct subject. The example that we see here, it was missing the authority, right?

That was the peace that was lacking. So the example of the 12 disciples of John certainly illustrates that one can be religious, right? I hate to even use that word.

To be religious. To have undergone some kind of baptismal experience. And yet still not be a true disciple of Jesus. If their baptism didn't follow the guidelines that we've talked about.

Remember, I can't stress this enough. It is not baptism that saves. It is Jesus that saves. Faith in Christ is what will save you.

[16:06] Someone can rest assured that they're a true disciple of Jesus. When their baptism has the correct mode. For us, that means believer's baptism by immersion. Other traditions, as I said, have different views of baptism.

But for us as Baptists, it's believer's baptism by immersion that we recognize. And not in our own authority, but that's what we see modeled in Scripture.

The correct authority to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. The correct purpose to publicly declare our faith in Jesus. And the correct subject to be a truly penitent believer.

So if we desire to be disciples of Jesus Christ, then let's be sure that we proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ as preached by the apostles in the first century.

We've personally responded to that gospel. That's essential for us. In the same manner that those who heard it preached in its purity and simplicity all those centuries ago, also responded.

[17:16] I think it's at times like this when we talk about baptism. And people are probably thinking I'm flogging baptism. You're not wrong. I think it's important.

Very important. But it's at times like this when we talk about it. Reflect on your own baptism. If you've been baptized. Do you remember it?

Can you picture the setting? Who was there? I think I've told you this before. I was baptized by one of my uncles in a rusty old tank.

Didn't get lockjaw. But it was cool, right? I remember that little church. I remember the experience with my uncle baptizing me. It's memorable to me and it's vivid in my memory.

Was your baptism, if you've been baptized, was it meaningful to you? What did it mean to you at the time? How has your understanding of baptism deepened or grown since then?

[18:17] If you have any questions about the details surrounding your baptism, I'd be happy to talk more with you about that. I've had lots of baptism conversations.

Happy to have lots more. Friends, may the Lord guide and direct each of us as we seek to learn and grow in our knowledge and relationship with him.

Amen.