**Mark 1:4-11 4John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him. They were baptized by him in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins. 6John was clothed in camel’s hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey. 7He preached, “One more powerful than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of his sandals! 8I baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” 9In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10Just as Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with you.”**

There’s something exciting about talking to a new friend about their faith. As you talk, it becomes clear that you share a lot in common. You are both Christians. It’s amazing how even though you have different church backgrounds, you share many of the same values. You agree the Bible is God’s Word. You both trust Jesus is your Savior. You both hold to a high standard of morality that is defined by God. You recognize God is the one in control and blesses you in many ways.

But then you come to a subject that reveals some differences between you. The subject is Baptism. Baptism is one of the teaching of the Bible that most clearly reveals that not all Christians and not all churches are the same. Your friend views Baptism as something a person does that shows they believe in Jesus. They will have themselves or even their children baptized as a symbol of repentance. In other words, after a person repents and believes in Jesus, then he is baptized. This point of view sees Baptism as only our act of obedience to Jesus’ command in the Great Commission: *go and gather disciples from all nations by baptizing them* (Matthew 28:19). It is something people do to show they are followers of the Lord.

Does that line up with what you believe? It’s wouldn’t surprise me is you easily say yes. It’s easy to think of Baptism as something that is done to show the faith within. Yet that actually is not what Baptism is. Today, we will look at the events of Jesus’ own Baptism to review God is the one acting through Baptism to bring us forgiveness and to assure us of salvation.

**John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.** Bam! In the Gospel of Mark, John the Baptist appears as suddenly as angels on Christmas. He dresses like an Old Testament prophet. He does his work out in the country by the Jordan River. He spends all of his time in that wilderness preaching to the people. All those people just keep coming. One after another after another. A steady flow of individuals going down into the river with John. He baptizes them one at a time. What does it mean? God is taking action. The time has come for God’s last prophet to do what the Lord had planned: the way prepared for the Lord. The promised Savior was about to be revealed.

All those people were coming out to John. That shows God was also at work in the hearts of the people. This great multitude of people emphasizes God had given powerful tools to John. **The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him. They were baptized by him in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins.**The first tool was God’s Word. Second, Baptism. This large crowd reveals God was at work.

All those baptisms done by John was not a symbol of what the people were doing. This Baptism was what is called a Means of Grace. The great multitude coming out to John were not there to show their faith and demonstrate that they already had the forgiveness of sins. They went out to hear God’s Word and turn to him in repentance to receive the forgiveness they needed.

John’s Baptism was of repentance. These people had been struck by God’s law to see they needed forgiveness. They knew they needed to change their mind about their sin. It will not bring them satisfaction or fulfillment just to change their mind. With every temptation to sin, there is always the deception it will bring something good, some benefit, some fulness to us. But when sin is present, the opposite is true. Guilt, emptiness, and shame surface.

Change your mind about sin! Just think about what happens in your mind when someone cheats you or you cheat someone. You can try to move on and let things be like they were before, but in the back of your mind the guilt is still there. There resides a leeriness of when will be the opportunity to bring the sin back up. When will they use their upper hand from where you have sinned against them.

Change your mind about sin! It only leads to pain and ultimately death! At the same time, in repentance, we change our mind about God. He gives us his Law to help, protect, and bless us. He forbids sin not because he is trying to kill our pleasure but to keep us from harm. Change your mind about God. He loves you even though you’ve sinned and he offers you forgiveness.

John’s Baptism was of repentance for the forgiveness of sin. The purpose of the baptism was to bring forgiveness. John’s was a Baptism leading to the forgiveness of sins. All those people who went out to John, responding to his preaching, were being baptized for the forgiveness of sins. Through that baptism, God was giving them grace, the forgiveness of their sins.

Point to consider as an individual or with a small group:

* How is it true to say, “if Baptism doesn’t bring the forgiveness of sin, there is still a disconnect between God and people”?

But there was an exception. **In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.** Jesus was the only one among all the multitude of people who came to John for Baptism that brought some to be about what he did. Jesus is the only one who ever lived who didn’t need to repent. Instead of taking something from Baptism for Jesus, God did something different to Baptism in Jesus. God added to Baptism. The Baptism of Jesus revealed he was true god who had come to enact our rescue. **“You are my Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with you.”** The Father’s voice from heaven confirms this addition. Jesus’ Baptism reveals God had acted to keep his promise of sending the Savior.

The Baptism of Jesus marks the beginning of his public ministry for our salvation. At his Baptism, Jesus identifies with sinners and was anointed to bring good news to all. While sinful human beings receive Baptism for the forgiveness of sins, the only sinless human who is also God received Baptism as the one who would take all sins upon himself. Already what would be happening to Jesus a few years later in the Garden of Gethsemane was being set up. There Jesus expressed what he had been baptized to add, *My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow, even to the point of death.* In this expression of agony, our Lord was already feeling the weight of sin with its guilt and shame. Soon, our Savior would be nailed to the cross, carrying the load of the world’s sins, and would receive not the commendation of the Father, but his rejection and punishment. At that moment, the Father was not well pleased with his Son!

Because Jesus acted to bear out sins in his body and took our place under God’s judgment, we have grace and mercy. We are blessed with the gift of forgiveness. When we were baptized, God was acting to do amazing things. *do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him by this baptism into his death, so that just as he was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too would also walk in a new life. For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be united with him in the likeness of his resurrection.* (Romans 6:3-5). In our Baptism, God acted to unite us with Christ in his death and resurrection. What a powerful acts of God! God acts in our Baptism to save us. God acts in our Baptism to regenerate us, to make us new people as believers in his Son, Jesus Christ, the one who saves us. Our Baptism reveals that’s the kind of God we have, one who is always in actions for us.

That makes Baptism quite different from only being a symbol of repentance. What you’ve learned from God’s Word is that in Baptism, God is the actor, not people. Baptism is not a law or a demand, but a gift of God to bring us into his family. It is a Gospel. We hold that Baptism is more than a symbol of repentance but Means of Grace. That is, God brings us forgiveness of sins and eternal life through Baptism. In Baptism, the Holy Spirit comes down on a person, on us, to bring faith and to strengthen faith.

Point to consider as an individual or with a small group:

* Define: Means of Grace.
* Why is Baptism correctly a Means of Grace?
* Explain the dangers if Baptism is incorrectly viewed as only a symbol of personal repentance.
* Therefore, why does God give the command to baptize?

We weren’t the ones acting in our Baptism; God was. In our Baptism, God acted to make us his beloved sons and daughters, with whom he is well pleased. Amen.