

Text: Matthew 3:13-17

Title: Introduction of Jesus Christ

Truth: Jesus is introduced at His baptism, in which he identifies with sinners.

Date/Location: Wednesday February 3, 2021 at FBC

Introduction

Earlier in chapter 3, John has introduced us to the message of repentance and person of Jesus Christ. Now Jesus appears.

I. Jesus is Baptized by John, 3:13-15

- A. Matthew reports that Jesus came from His home region in Galilee to be baptized by John at the Jordan. This was the plan and it had to happen. It was not just happenstance that Jesus came along and saw John baptizing people while preaching a message of repentance, and decided that He would like to be baptized as well. This was a 70-mile journey undertaken for the purpose—just like in John chapter 4 Jesus “had” to go through Samaria, to see the Samaritan woman and to preach the good news to the people of the town of Sychar. Jesus was the one for Whom John “was making straight paths” (3:3). Jesus’s coming associated him with the message of repentance that John preached.
- B. John hesitated to baptize Jesus. And why shouldn’t he hesitate? Wouldn’t you? Jesus had no need of repentance. John knew that this Jesus was the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world (John 1:29) and as such he could not be sinful. He was not confessing His sins in the Jordan River. John recognized that *he* needed something from the Messiah, not the other way around! In fact, “hesitate” is too weak. He *tried to prevent* Jesus from being baptized! John needed the baptism of the Spirit (not the fire baptism), far more, he thought, than Jesus needed the water baptism of John.
- C. Jesus insists based on the need to fulfill all righteousness. He told John to stop trying to prevent Him, and instead to permit Him to partake of John’s baptism. On initial reading, this might make you

think that there was something wrong or sinful that needed to be corrected. But that is not the case.

Remember this general truth: righteousness has positive demands that must be fulfilled. The fact that you have not yet done those required things does not mean you are necessarily unrighteous. It may simply mean that you have not come to the time or place that the opportunity was available or need demanded the action to be done yet. Of course, if you have passed that stage and are recalcitrant in doing the right thing, then *that* is sinful.

The time has come that Jesus must be baptized to fulfill all righteousness. What precisely does this mean? What was the righteous requirement that had to be accomplished? Three interconnected things came up in my study:

1. First, Jesus is identified with John's *message*—not as one who needs to level his hilly ground or straighten his crooked conduct, but as the One who will make it possible for sins to be washed away. He was the one for Whom the paths were being made straight.
2. Further, Jesus had to be identified with sinful human beings. He was going to be their high priest—touched by their infirmities—and became as closely associated with them as possible for a sinless person to be. So, Jesus was identifying with John's *people*. See Heb. 5:1-6 and 4:15. "Identification" is what baptism signifies.

Jesus is identifying with John's message and John's "people," but in a different sense than those "normal people" who were identifying by saying "I am a sinner." Jesus was identifying by saying "I am the savior of these sinners, and I am the one to Whom John has been pointing and for Whom John has been blazing a pathway of righteousness."

So Jesus exhibits in this baptism a solidarity with John's message as well as solidarity with John's people. But there is one other aspect to explore.

3. Third and finally, Jesus is identifying with all sinners, particularly in this point, *future* sinners who will become Christ's people.

This is not only true for those people present in John's day. It has an application to the present day for you as well. If we are in Christ, He stands in our place, so that in Him we are connected back to the ministry of John. We too, in our position in Christ, are saying that we repent and confess our sins and identify with John's message. We cannot physically get John to baptize us, of course, because of the distance of time that has intervened.

But we can—in Christ—say today that we have a unified solidarity with John the Baptist in his message of repentance. He preached it, and we acknowledge in Christ that we believe it too. Christ was baptized for us in that baptism because we cannot be. Yet, just like those who went out from Jerusalem and Judea and the regions around the Jordan, we too are saying we repent, we confess, we want to humble ourselves and be “well prepared terrain” for the Lord to come. Our lofty self-view (the mountain) is thus brought low by our confession and we can consider ourselves through Jesus to have solidarity with John's message. That is righteousness, and that is what Jesus did for us, so that we could ‘do the same’ in Him.

4. MacArthur writes, “This act of baptism was a necessary part of the righteousness He secured for sinners.” He is reflecting the view of active obedience, that the baptism is a part of that obedience. R. C. Sproul was even more pointed in teaching that Jesus was baptized in order to accomplish the active obedience of Christ.

But was I ever required by God to be baptized by John in order to be saved? That was not part of any law. So I doubt that this approach is quite right. I *am* required to repent of sin, and confession is how I show that. But I am not required to take John's baptism.

5. The fulfillment of righteousness has not to do with Jesus Himself, but with those Jesus represents. He was baptized with John's baptism so they could, in connection with Him, themselves be connected with John's message of preparation for the Messiah. I don't think we should go to the extent that MacArthur and Sproul do to suggest that His act is imputed to

them. After all the believer himself really does express confession and repentance over sin. That He is connected to Jesus in Spirit baptism means that he also is connected to John's preparatory message. Jesus did not confess for me; I confessed myself. Of course, I was gifted that mindset by God, and I was convinced by His Spirit that this was the only sensible course of action—so salvation is entirely “of the Lord.” But I did exercise repentant faith and demonstrated the fruit of that repentance in confession. It is necessary that I, as part of true righteousness, confess my sin and repent, because of the coming Kingdom of Christ. In Christ, I can be associated with John's baptism even though it is not offered any longer.

6. But note that “only” being baptized with John's baptism was not enough. Nor is it enough to be associated with that baptism through some distant means. There is more to Christian gospel than that. See Acts 19:3-4.

D. The symbolism of baptism is important as well. Jesus is pre-enacting a picture of his death, burial and resurrection. He is providing a picture of what Christian baptism will look like—not exactly what it will be, but it will be similar.

E. Upon Jesus's statement, John understood now what was happening, and he baptized Jesus.

II. Jesus is Affirmed by God, 3:16-17

A. The Spirit of God came down upon Jesus out of heaven. This is one of the very rare times that heaven is “opened” and is somehow visible to people.

1. Stephen experienced this according to Acts 7:55-56.

2. Paul experienced something like it as recorded in 2 Cor. 12:2.

3. The disciples would see this kind of thing at some point, according to John 1:51. That evokes Genesis 28:12, where Jacob saw a ladder set on the earth with its top in heaven and the angels of God were ascending and descending upon it. It appeared to him to be the gateway to heaven.

4. Peter saw heaven opened, another indication of an important revelation from God (Acts 10:11).
 5. John saw heaven opened (Rev. 4:1).
 6. Jesus will return from an opened heaven (Rev. 19:11).
 7. This is not the same as when the “windows” of heaven are opened in the Old Testament, a figure speaking of the atmospheric heavens, or blessing from God.
 8. But Ezekiel did see the heavens opened and saw a vision of God.
 9. Isaiah seems to see into heaven in Isaiah 6:1-5 but this does not use the same phrasing.
- B. Heaven opened and the Spirit of God descended upon Jesus—not to indicate the first time that the Spirit ever interacted with Jesus, but to show others that Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit already, and perhaps in fresh power and glory now that His public ministry was beginning.
1. If John the Baptist himself was filled with the Spirit from conception (Luke 1:15), then by an argument of lesser to greater, it is certainly the case that Jesus was filled with the Spirit His entire life as well.
 2. He was a man “in favor with God” (Luke 2:52) and that would not be possible without the presence of the Holy Spirit.
 3. The Spirit was active in the conception of Jesus (Matthew 1:18, 20) so was already present in His life.
 4. Beyond all this, Jesus was the fulfillment of prophecies in Isaiah that spoke of the Spirit upon Him (Isaiah 11:2, 42:1, 61:1; more remotely Isaiah 48:16).
 5. Jesus offered Himself through the Spirit (Heb. 9:14).
 6. Jesus sent the Spirit to the first disciples and to the church (John 15:26).

The dove figure does not have a clear tie to anything from the prophets or writings of OT Scripture. Some tie this in with the dove of Genesis 8:8, but that is very indirect and, in my view, a suspect

method of interpretation. It is akin to saying that birds in parables always represent the devil (Matt. 13:4+19, 13:32).

- C. Luke 4:21-22 adds that Jesus was praying as heaven was opened and the dove then descended. The dove was the identifying mark by which John the Baptist could be sure that Jesus, his cousin, was truly the Messiah (John 1:32-34).
- D. God the Father indicated His pleasure in Jesus with the words “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Nothing else in the world was “very good” at that time (like Genesis 1:31 was of the pre-fall earth). But Jesus was very good and perfectly pleasing to the Father because He was without sin. So, His personal relationship with God was unmarred.

We hope to receive a similar (though lesser) commendation from our God like in Luke 19:17, Matthew 25:21).
- E. The Trinity is very clear here. Jesus, the Son of God is present. The Spirit of God is present. The voice of the Father comes from Heaven. This is one of several texts where the Trinity is present “side by side.” For others, consider Matthew 28:18-20 and 2 Corinthians 13:13.
- F. The declaration by God about being well pleased in Jesus is a fulfillment of prophecy (Matt. 12:18, see Isaiah 42:1), and is repeated with an augmentation by the Father from Heaven some months later, on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:5). This connects Jesus to the “servant” prophecies of Isaiah and begins to show the people how He would become the offering for their sins.
- G. Does the “well pleased” declaration have anything to do with “fulfilling all righteousness?” I would think so, since it comes immediately on the heels of that great event. Jesus obeyed the requirement to become associated with John’s message and penitent sinners, and this was pleasing to the Father.
- H. Jesus will go on in chapter 4 and following to demonstrate that indeed He is the well-pleasing Son of God. He will do so by the fruit of His actions.

Conclusion

In this way, Matthew describes the introduction of John and Jesus, and their message, to the Jewish people and in turn to the world.

What is the point of all this? Our Savior identified with John's message of repentance, so that we in Him could be identified with that same message. We are repenters just like the people who came to the Jordan River to be baptized by John the Baptist. Our hearts have been prepared to receive Him like in the song *Joy to the World*: "Let every heart prepare Him room" and "Let earth receive her King."

Also, with God's declaration at the baptism, we know that Jesus is well pleasing to the Father. Thus, we too are graced with salvation in the Beloved Son and are accepted before God (Eph. 1:6). Think for a while on this idea that you, a sinful person, are accepted by God because you are in Christ, because of Christ's sacrificial work on your behalf, because of God's love and grace toward you, and because of the Lord's mercy. It is a thought beyond measure!

Historically, John's baptism of Jesus is the public inauguration of Christ Jesus in His ministry, and that by which we know that God is well pleased with Him. By His declaration we also know that Jesus is the Son of God. There is no other person or being who can be called this anywhere. Jesus *is* the Son of the Father (2 John 3).

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