

Jesus Baptized for Us

Matthew 3:13-17

This morning as we prepare for our service of believers' baptism we are going to study Jesus' baptism as recorded in Matthew 3. We aren't going to conclude that believers' baptism today is just like Jesus' baptism; His baptism was unique and specific to His role as the Messiah. Rather, we are going to see that **Jesus' baptism reveals the breadth and depth of His mission**. Jesus' baptism revealed the breadth of Jesus' mission: He came as a light to all the nations of the earth (not merely Israel). And Jesus' baptism revealed the depth of Jesus' mission: He came to pour out the Holy Spirit upon all who believe, resulting in life and wholeness that is unavailable anywhere else.

Those who are being baptized today are experiencing the breadth and depth of Jesus revealed at His baptism. But I trust that every one of us will be instructed by what we see in Matthew 3. Sometimes when I talk with people about Christ, I get the impression that they think following Christ is a huge drain of time, energy, and (sometimes) money. About a year ago I asked one young man if he were interested in learning more about Jesus. His answer was, "I don't really have time for that now; I first need to get my life together and figure out what I'm going to do career-wise." He was basically saying that he can't afford to follow Christ now.

The baptism of Jesus suggests that we can't afford **not** to follow Jesus in all of life. I trust that our time in Matthew 3 will help us understand this.

Context. To set the context, I'll just point out that the NT stresses how John the Baptist was crystal clear about the superiority of Jesus. For example, we read in Luke 1 that John's mother, Elizabeth, had a younger "relative" named Mary. These two were opposites in many ways: Elizabeth was older and unable to conceive; Mary was quite young and conceived while still a virgin. By the grace of God, Elizabeth conceived "in her old age." And six months later, Mary learned that the Holy Spirit would overshadow her and that the resulting offspring would be called "the Son of God."

While they were both pregnant that Mary went to visit Elizabeth. We read in Luke 1 that when Elizabeth heard the voice of Mary that the baby within her "leaped for joy." Before he was even born John somehow recognized that he was in the presence of One greater than himself. No doubt John grew up knowing Jesus and hearing about Jesus.

When John was a young man he understood that he was not the Messiah; he was the forerunner of the the Messiah (see Luke 3:4-6; Isaiah 40:3-5), the one who would prepare people to receive the Messiah, Jesus. To prepare people for the message of Jesus, John went out into the wilderness of Judea (around Jerusalem) preaching a simple message: "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." We discussed last week how this would also be the foundational message on Jesus' lips. Since God is on the verge of establishing His kingdom, repent (turn away from yourself and your sin and turn to God in faith).

Significantly, people expressed their repentance by being baptized. We read this in Matthew 3:5-6.

5 Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan; 6 and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins.

As evidence of their repentance, people were baptized in the waters of the Jordan River. This symbolized their death to the old way of life and their commitment to living under God's reign in the Kingdom. I you got baptized, everybody knew you were making a clean break with your old way of life.

As dramatic and decisive as this baptism for repentance was, John made it very clear that Someone more powerful and worthy would soon be baptizing with "the Holy Spirit and fire." Notice how John expresses himself to the crowds in Matthew 3:11-12:

11 "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

John is referring to one thing, not two, when he says that Jesus would "baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (he uses one preposition to govern both terms). Jesus' baptism would involve the purifying work of the Holy Spirit. John baptized people in water as an expression of repentance to prepare them for Jesus' baptism with the Holy Spirit who would purify/refine them. This would have been heard as the fulfillment of OT prophecies that promised that God would one day pour out His Spirit on all of humanity (see Ezek. 36:25-27).

The One who baptized with the Holy Spirit would also separate the wheat and the chaff.

12 "His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Throughout Scripture we are told that one day God will gather and dwell among those who have repented and believed. He will also judge those who refuse to turn from sin and self and to Him. Everyone will spend eternity somewhere. Those who hate God and don't want to be in His presence **won't** be in His presence when the new heaven and earth are established. But John explained that those who turn back to God in repentance **will** spend eternity with God.

Given John's understanding of his own role as the forerunner of Jesus and his conviction that Jesus was superior to Him in power and in person, notice how he responded when Jesus showed up at the Jordan River.

13 Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. 14 But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?"

The fact that "John tried to prevent" Jesus from being baptized makes perfect sense. John was thinking, "Jesus, this is a baptism **for repentance**. You don't need to go under the water with all these sinners. You don't need to make a clean break with the past and reorient your life around God's kingdom because You've always been committed to the will of Your Father in heaven. I've got an idea. . . how about **You** baptize **me** instead of me baptizing You!?!?" Since we know Jesus was sinless we fully agree with John: Jesus didn't need to express His repentance by being baptized. He already loved God with all His heart, soul, and might. He already loved His neighbor as Himself. So what was Jesus thinking?

15 But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted Him.

When Jesus said that "it is fitting for **us** to fulfill all righteousness," He was referring both to Himself and to John the Baptist. If John baptized Jesus **at that time** in the history of redemption, they together would **fulfill all righteousness**. In other words, the fullest expression of what was "right" was for Jesus to submit to John's baptism of repentance.

But why was that the case? Since Jesus wasn't repenting for His own sins, we have to conclude that He was repenting for the sins of others: your sins and my sins. Just as Jesus (being sinless) didn't die on the cross for His own sins, He wasn't baptized as an expression of repentance for His own sins. This is one more example of how fully Jesus identified with humanity. He took on flesh and blood and identified with us to the point of being baptized as an expression of repentance for our sins.

Consider the pronouncement made after Jesus' baptism.

16 After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he [John] saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, 17 and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

Notice the Trinity here: the **Father** spoke out of the heavens and the **Spirit** descended as a dove when the **Son** was baptized. The triune God was present and engaged at Jesus' baptism.

What we're told here in verses 16 and 17 echo the words of Isaiah 42:1. In describing the "Servant" He would send to bring justice to the nations (not just Israel), God declares:

1 "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold;
My chosen one in whom My soul delights.
I have put My Spirit upon Him;

He will bring forth justice to the nations.”

Echoing how His “soul delights” in this Servant, God declared at Jesus’ baptism that He was “well-pleased” with His beloved Son. Just as God promised to put His “Spirit upon Him,” the Spirit of God descended as a dove upon Jesus. We will learn in Isaiah 49:6 that this Servant would be a light for the nations, not merely Israel. In Isaiah 53 we learn that this Servant would be a “man of sorrows” who would bear the sins of the people. At His baptism God declared that Jesus is this very Servant. This speaks to the breadth and depth of Jesus’ ministry.

We’ve seen here today that the baptism of Jesus tells us at least three foundational things about His mission.

Jesus is the Suffering Servant who is bringing salvation to the ends of the earth. (Isaiah 42:1, 49:6, 52:13-53:12)

Among other things, this means that nobody is beyond the salvation that Jesus offers. In Jesus’ day the Jews assumed that the Gentiles were so sinful, so cut off from God that they would not and could not know God. But since He was the Suffering Servant described in Isaiah, Jesus would bring salvation to the ends of the earth. To the people living in Israel in Jesus’ day, we here in Manhattan, Kansas would definitely be considered “the ends of the earth” (Google tells me we’re over 6600 miles from Jerusalem!)

Some of you grew up in Christ-centered homes where you learned to love Jesus from an early age. Those of you who didn’t might feel like you’re on the outside looking in. Please know that Jesus is the Suffering Servant who offers salvation to you. Nobody is too sinful or too far gone. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

Jesus knows our condition and our lives exhaustively. (Hebrews 2:14-18, 4:14-16)

The fact that Jesus was baptized **for us** should remind us that He identifies with us in a radical, comprehensive way. Hebrews 2 tells us that Jesus “**had** to be made like [us] in every respect” so that He could die as our substitute and become a merciful high priest. Jesus lived with the weaknesses and limitations that you and I have; Jesus was tempted in all the ways that we are tempted (yet without sin). Having identified with us exhaustively, He died in our place.

What is your greatest weakness or your greatest temptation or your greatest sorrow? Let the fact that Jesus was baptized for you remind you that He understands you better than you understand yourself. Sometimes the tendency is to pull away from God when we feel guilty or tempted or sorrowful. Instead, we should draw near with confidence, knowing that Jesus knows our condition and our lives exhaustively. This means that He is willing and able to come to our rescue.

Jesus is refining us through the promised Holy Spirit. (Matthew 3:11-12, John 16:7-15)

Jesus’ baptism confirmed that He was indeed the One who would “baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.” If you are a follower of Jesus, you should expect and welcome this refining work in your life; the Spirit is committed to the ongoing process of refining and

purifying you. Just as we were created in the image of God, the Spirit is committed to conforming us into the image of Christ, undoing the effects of the fall.

Those who are being baptized this morning have each put their faith in Jesus Christ. By being baptized, they are publicly declaring that they receive everything that Jesus came to give them.

- * They are saying that the Suffering Servant died for me, even though I live at “the ends of the earth.” Jesus sought me and found me when I was far from God.
- * They are saying that Jesus is their high priest who understands them comprehensively. Therefore they draw near to God through Jesus for mercy and grace in their time of need.
- * They each welcome the refining ministry of the Holy Spirit. In this way they will learn to learning to observe all that Jesus commanded them.

This past week we recorded the testimony of each of those being baptized. We are going to play brief portions of each person’s story. Afterwards we will baptize (in this service):

8:00 Service - Savanna DeWolf, Justin Klozenbucher, Seth Bovee

9:30 Service - Justin Schmutz, Keziah Thompson, Talitha Peverill, Jacob Mason

11:00 Service - Katherine Escobar