

Matthew 3:13-17 – “The Baptism of Jesus”

We move from the baptism of the Jews in Matthew 3:1-12, to look now at the baptism of Jesus in the remainder of the chapter. It poses some interesting questions for us, the main one being, why did Jesus even need to be baptized? We'll look to answer that in our study today.

3:13 - *Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him.*

Jesus comes down out of Nazareth. It's about a 60 mile walk from Nazareth to where John was baptizing in the Jordan. Jesus comes to where everybody is gathered and repenting of their sin and Jesus takes His place among sinful men. It's quite amazing and almost strange for us to imagine.

But understand, Jesus' baptism is to identify with humanity, and as He comes, He truly comes in significant insignificance. He doesn't come out of wealth or royalty. He's not riding in on a stallion with some army. He's not acting like some dignitary. No, His arrival (like His birth) is rather unspectacular.

He comes from Nazareth. Remember Nathanael asked, *'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?'* (John 1:46). This was the perception of this day. It wasn't the kind of town that you boasted in being from. Nazareth is in the region of Galilee. Again, this was the stereotypical uneducated hick region. It was just an average place, outside of the spiritual hub of Jerusalem. And now He comes to the desert to be baptized in the Jordan, which in many places is nothing more than a ditch. Jesus wasn't looking for special privileges or for a show.

Jesus came to identify with us, and He truly could identify with us.

And I can imagine Him just coming down and getting in line with the others waiting to be baptized. I wonder how many people standing down by the water recognized that the Messiah was among them. You never know who you're in line with. Don't forget how God wants to be (and is with you) in each situation of your life.

Now as John is baptizing the various people, suddenly he comes to Jesus. Remember, they know each other. They're cousins. We don't know how long it's been since they've seen each other, but John knows who Jesus is. Now John doesn't as of yet know Jesus' full mission, or that He is the Messiah (more on that later). But John knew that Jesus was a special person. A person that only revealed his own sin all the more. Which is why we read in vs. 14...

3:14 - *And John tried to prevent Him, saying, “I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?”*

John knew the righteousness of Jesus; that He was upright, wise, without sin. And because of that, he saw his own unworthiness. The more we draw closer to Jesus and grow in God, the more we'll become aware of our own sinfulness and unworthiness.

- When Peter was told to let down his net in the Sea of Galilee, he questioned Jesus saying we've been at it all night and have caught nothing. Yet at Jesus' word Peter decided to act. And the haul was so large he couldn't even bring in the net. And Peter's response was to say, *“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!”* (Luke 5:8).
- I say that to say, the more we look to Jesus, the more we're surrendered to Jesus, the greater we become aware of our smallness and His greatness. Growing in the Lord should never cause us to be more confident in self, or proud, or feeling worthy. It's the opposite. But receive this goodness of Jesus by His grace.

I wonder how quick we are to oppose the things that God wants to do because they don't make sense to us.

- John is perplexed over the notion of him baptizing the very son of God. How can this be? We can often think our way of doing things is much better. Yet we need to accept and follow the way of God. And we need to be ready to accept things that don't always seem reasonable and right. God works in ways that aren't always going to be understood at first, but we can trust that it will be for our good.
- Think about Peter when Jesus said He must go to Jerusalem and suffer and die. Peter responded by saying no way! Yet Jesus had to say, get behind me Satan. Not a high point in Peter's life. We need to be careful and recognize that there are things that God will do that don't always make sense in the natural or make sense with our timeline of things. But understand that He's working things according to His purposes that are always for the best outcome.

So Jesus responds to John to correct his way of thinking and to accept this from God.

3:15 - *But Jesus answered and said to him, “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he allowed Him.*

Again, John was shocked to see Jesus coming to be baptized. And I'm sure we can all be shocked and question why He needed to be baptized.

Did Jesus need to repent of something? No, the reason Jesus gives is **to fulfill all righteousness**. But what does that mean?

This word **fitting** means to 'stand out; to be conspicuous'. This was an act that was to be a visible manifestation of the righteousness being demonstrated.

But how was this righteousness being demonstrated or seen?

- It was demonstrated by Jesus walking in obedience to the will of the Father. Just as Jesus would eventually go to the cross submitting to the will of the Father and saying, *"Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done"* (**Luke 2:42**).
- Matthew is using this word righteousness in a way to speak of conduct which is right in God's eyes. It's not about a right standing with God, but rather living in harmony with the will of God. Just as Paul would say of his former life that according to the law he was righteous. Yet he came to know that he was not in a righteous standing before God unto salvation.

So this really explains the first reason why Jesus was baptized.

Warren Wiersbe suggests 6 reasons why Jesus was baptized. ¹

1. **Obligation** – as we've just discussed (to fulfill all righteousness).
2. **Consecration** – the Old Testament priests were washed and consecrated into service at 30 years of age as well (Leviticus 8:6). Jesus too has passed through the waters as our High Priest to represent us to God.
3. **Commendation** – Jesus validated John's ministry by being baptized by him. He was the voice of one calling in the wilderness that people should indeed listen and respond to. Later the religious leaders would reject John's work (Matthew 21:23-27).
4. **Proclamation** – John was able to make it known that Jesus is the long awaited for Messiah. **John 1:31**, *"I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water."* This was also confirmed by God's approving voice from heaven.
5. **Identification** – Jesus came to identify with sinful humanity. Though He was without sin, He took His place among sinful humanity to do a work for us.

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). *Wiersbe's expository outlines on the New Testament* (p. 20). Victor Books.

He identified with us in His baptism, and we identify with Him in our baptism.

Many see the word baptism as more fully meaning identification.

His baptism then identified our need, and His provision.

“He who was to take the sinner’s place came to be baptized of John, that He might thereby be identified with sinners for whom He was to lay down his life.”^{8 2}

6. **Anticipation** – this baptism of Jesus would look ahead to what Jesus would go through on the cross. **Luke 12:50**, *"But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished!"*

Jesus would take the wrath of God upon Himself, would die a brutal death, but would be raised to life 3 days later. Jesus’ baptism would foreshadow the work He ultimately came to do in His crucifixion and resurrection. And now our baptism is a picture of our being united into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Romans 6:3–6, *"³ Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, ⁶ knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin."*

As Jesus was baptized, so too are we to follow in obedience to baptism. This was the instruction Jesus left to His disciples.

Matthew 28:18–20, *"And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen."*

We must always keep before us that baptism does not save us. We do it because Jesus did it and commanded us to follow in that.

Here’s what baptism does for us:

⁸ Ironside, *Expository Notes on the Gospel of Matthew*, 29.

² Boice, J. M. (2001). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 51). Baker Books.

1. It pleases the Father.
2. It preaches our funeral.
3. It publicizes our faith.

3:16-17 - *When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. ¹⁷ And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*

So as Jesus comes up out of the water – and notice that this was by full immersion and no mere sprinkling – but as Jesus comes up the Spirit of God comes down like a dove upon Him. We have a significant scene in these last two verses for we have the Trinity all active at the onset of Jesus’ public ministry. Just as the Trinity was active in creation.

Now what is the significance of a dove? Was it an allusion to Genesis 1:2 when it says *the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters*? Was it an allusion to the dove that was sent out by Noah and brought the olive branch back?

Interestingly Jonah’s name means dove. He too experienced a bit of a baptism of sorts. Jesus would use the story of Jonah as a picture of His own death, burial, and resurrection (Matthew 12:38–40).

We’re not sure what the significance is, but John only describes this tangible moving of the Spirit as being *like* a dove.

- “Doves are gentle, non- threatening birds, they do not resist, they do not fight back. It represents the gentle, faithful work of the Holy Spirit.” (Guzik)

The bottom line is that this was the moment that the Holy Spirit was empowering Jesus for ministry, and this was the time that John had confirmed to him that Jesus is the Messiah.

John said in **John 1:32–34**, *“And John bore witness, saying, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. ³³ I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ ³⁴ And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.”*”

This was the confirmation for John that Jesus is more than a good man, He is indeed the Son of God, the promised Messiah.

Now, is this the moment that the Holy Spirit was filling Jesus? No, there was never a time when the Holy Spirit was not filling Him. Never a time where He ceased being God. But this was a time for the Holy Spirit to anoint Him for His public ministry and endue Him with power to carry out the work of the Father.

- And this is pretty amazing, because though Jesus was God, we see that in His public ministry the amazing things done was an outflow of the Holy Spirit. Jesus remained dependent on prayer and communion with the Father, He was led by the Spirit and empowered through the Spirit.
- If Jesus exhibited the necessity of these relationships and dependency on them for life and ministry, how much more must we?

And as Jesus is brought up from the water, it says ***the heavens were opened***. It's as though the Lord was breaking into human history once again after being silent for hundreds of years. A monumental moment for the nation of Israel and the entire human race for that matter!

And what sweet words come out of heaven. Words that Jews would have been familiar with for they echoed what was written in two Old Testament passages: **Psalm 2:7**, *"I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You."*

Isaiah 42:1, *"Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles."*

God delighted to see Jesus coming to ultimately reconcile the world to Him through faith in Jesus.

Notice when God says, ***in whom I am well pleased***, had Jesus done any miracles up until now? Had He healed anyone, delivered anyone from sickness or demon possession, has He preached a sermon yet? As far as we know, He hasn't. Those things are all coming. Yet God is pleased with Him. You see, Jesus lived a life of obedience, surrender, and availability to God. For that, the Father was well pleased.

- We often think that we have to be on the front lines of ministry to be recognized or endorsed by God. Yet, it's in your everyday life, your workplace, the way you conduct yourself that the Father is looking at. And if you're living faithful to God in whatever you do – He is pleased!

So we have the Trinity together at this most significant of events. The Father is endorsing the work of the Son, and the Holy Spirit is anointing Him for the ministry ahead.

The Trinity is a confusing subject, and a hotly debated one. There have been teachings passed down that say Jesus only is God. This is known as Modalism and it's heresy. Some still teach this today. That to be baptized you must be baptized only in the name of Jesus. They believe that in the O.T. God showed Himself as the Father, in the time of Jesus, God showed Himself as the Son, and in the time of the Church, He showed Himself as the H.S. One God, shown in 3 different roles.

But the Bible teaches that there is One God revealed through 3 different persons. They are co-equal, co-eternal, yet separate from each other, and they together make up the Godhead. Again, it's imperative that we do not see this as 3 'Gods', but one God (as the Word teaches) revealed in 3 distinct persons.

- The word Trinity is not in the Bible, but the concept is certainly seen there.
- In this passage we see the Godhead all coming together at one time and revealing themselves as 3 distinct persons. And in Scripture we see:
 1. The Father as God: **Romans 1:7**, *"To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."*
 2. The Son as God: **Romans 9:5**, *"of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen."*
Hebrews 1:8, *"But to the Son He says: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom."*
 See also John 1:1, 14
 3. The H.S. as God: **Acts 5:3–4**, *"But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? ⁴ While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.""*

As God said, *This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*, the question for you today is, are you pleased in the Son? Do you love Him today? Have you found your rest, righteousness and life in Him? If the Father is pleased with Him, then I suggest that we most certainly should be as well.

And if that be the case, have you identified your life with His through waters of baptism? He's come and identified with us and taken our place, but have you taken your place in repentance and obedience to follow Him in this way?