

TO FULFILL ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS

Would you turn to Matthew 3 with me? Let's ask the Lord's blessing on our time in His Word.

JESUS COMES FOR BAPTISM

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. (Matthew 3:13, ESV)

Jesus did not simply happen across John at the Jordan; He traveled from Galilee looking for John, with the purpose of being baptized by Him.

As a reminder, in Matthew 3:11 John says to the people, **I baptize you with water for repentance**. John preached that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand. The only right response to this truth was repentance, turning away from sin and toward God. John baptized those who repented as an outward sign of the inward work of God in their hearts. Baptism itself was not repentance, but a person's public testimony that they were abandoning their sin and entrusting themselves to their Creator for forgiveness and restoration.

John's baptism was not Christian baptism. Christian baptism is a sign that a sinner has put their faith in Jesus Christ, and therefore has died with Him on His cross, been buried with Him in His grave, and raised with Him in resurrection. In John's baptism the person was saying, "I want to repent before God." In Christian baptism the person is saying, "Jesus Christ has saved me from my sins and I have been eternally joined to Him in His death and resurrection." John's baptism was all about the sinner's intention. Christian baptism is all about God's saving work in the sinner.

TRANSITION: John had other ideas.

JOHN OBJECTS

14 John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” (Matthew 3:14, ESV)

The sense here is that John was arguing with Jesus, refusing to baptize Him. Another way to translate the phrase would be, “John was preventing Him.” Why? I think we can say John had two reasons.

First, Jesus’ baptism was infinitely greater than John’s. John baptized people with water as a sign that they intended to repent. Jesus was coming to baptize in the Holy Spirit and fire. Some would be baptized in the Holy Spirit to bring them into the new covenant: to give them new birth, transforming them and converting them from sinners to saints, from children of wrath to children of God. Others would be baptized in fire, in eternal judgment, facing the just penalty for their sins and rebellion. John wanted Jesus to baptize him in the Holy Spirit, and grant him the fulness of the new covenant of forgiveness and righteousness and new life.

Second, Jesus Himself was infinitely greater than John. John said in Matthew 3:11 that Jesus Himself was greater than he was; John humbly acknowledged that he was not worthy to even carry Jesus’ sandals. That is, John considered himself unworthy to be even the lowest slave in Christ’s house. This isn’t false humility on John’s part. He had spent his entire life preparing for the arrival of the Messiah. His ministry was all about preparing the people to receive and follow the Savior. John was completely prepared to bow himself before the Lord; he was not at all prepared for the Lord to bow before him.

TRANSITION: John was passionate about being receiving Jesus’ baptism – the very language tells us that he argued his point for a length of time – but he failed to change the Lord’s mind.

JESUS INSISTS

15 But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. (Matthew 3:15, ESV)

Let it be so now is not an invitation, but a command. If John is saying, “No, I need to be baptized by You,” then Jesus finally responds, “Enough argument! You must baptize Me,” and He explains why: **it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness**. Jesus is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the earth, the promised Lord and Savior. John was the promised forerunner who would announce the Lord’s arrival and command all people to prepare themselves to worship Him.

Fulfilling all righteousness obviously did not mean that Jesus was repenting of sin. He was and is without sin (Hebrews 4:15). He was and is holy, innocent, unstained, and separate from sinners (Hebrews 7:26). Jesus Christ is He who is without sin (Second Corinthians 5:21). He committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth (First Peter 2:22). He appeared to take away sins, and in Him there is no sin (First John 3:5). He is the Holy One of God. Jesus did not need to repent of sin, because He never committed even one sin, not even the smallest possible sin. But Jesus did give public testimony to His faithful obedience to the Father. He was not saying, “I have sinned, and I turn from sin in order to obey God.” In His baptism He was saying, “I have always been righteous, I am righteous, and I shall continue without fail to be righteous.”

What’s more, Jesus came to save sinners, and to save them by identifying with them as a man, and taking their sins upon Himself. In Isaiah we read that the sins Jesus bore on the cross were not His own, but those of His people:

4 Surely He has borne **our griefs** and carried **our sorrows**; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. **5** But He was pierced for **our transgressions**; He was crushed for **our iniquities**; upon Him was the chastisement that **brought us peace**, and with His wounds **we are healed**. (Isaiah 53:4–5, ESV)

This same truth continues in the New Testament:

11 For He who sanctifies [Jesus] and those who are sanctified [elect sinners] all have one source. That is why He [Jesus] is not ashamed to call them [elect sinners] brothers (Hebrews 2:11, ESV)

The sinless One was baptized alongside sinners. The righteous One was baptized alongside the unrighteous. Jesus could have reasonably stood next to John calling on sinners to repent; instead, He calls those sinners His brothers and sisters, and joins them in humility before God in a public declaration of His loyalty and obedience to the Father.

TRANSITION: How does the Father respond to this?

TRIUNE WITNESS TO THE SAVIOR

16 And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; **17** and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:16–17, ESV)

What we see here is an emphasis on the Triune nature of God. God the Son is baptized; God the Spirit commissions God the Son for the work of redemption; God the Father speaks His approval of God the Son from heaven. We don't know how many people stood watching from the riverbank; perhaps a large crowd; perhaps just a handful, or even no one. But we do know that the Godhead witnessed Jesus' baptism. At the very moment Jesus' baptism was completed, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him, and the Father spoke from heaven.

The opening of heaven is often a picture of God's Word being given. Ezekiel 1:1 says,

1 In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the Chebar canal, **the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God.** (Ezekiel 1:1, ESV)

Here the heavens open so that the world may know that God has given particular testimony to the baptism and righteousness of His Son. The Bible tells us that in order for a matter to be established, there must be two or three witnesses. The Law requires two or three witnesses in order to convict someone of murder. Paul said that elders can only be charged with wrongdoing if there are two or three witnesses. Jesus Himself said that when dealing with sinning Christians, we must establish the matter through two or three witnesses. The heavens opened at Jesus' baptism so that the world may know that the Father and the Spirit are witnesses of the righteousness and holiness of the Son.

God the Father spoke verbally from heaven, announcing that Jesus of Nazareth was His own beloved Son, in whom He was utterly delighted. What I find to be so interesting is that the Father quotes from Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1:

7 I will tell of the decree:
The Lord said to Me,
"You are my Son;
today I have begotten You. (Psalm 2:7, ESV)

1 Behold My servant, whom I uphold,
My chosen, **in whom My soul delights;**
I have put My Spirit upon Him;
He will bring forth justice to the nations. (Isaiah 42:1, ESV)

Do you want to know God's attitude toward the Bible? Here it is. He quotes from it when bearing witness of His love for His Son, Jesus Christ, the Chosen One.

What is the point of this testimony from the Father?

We will see these very words again in John 17, when Jesus is transfigured, and show in His glorified state.

1 And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. **2** And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. **3** And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. **4** And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." [Peter thought he understood what was happening. Here are the three key figures in Israel's spiritual history, Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. Peter thought they were equal in importance and authority, but he was very, very mistaken.] **5** He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them [The glory of God Himself. When Jesus was baptized, the heavens were opened, and the Father spoke from heaven. Now the Father comes down to that mountain top, and makes His point crystal clear.], and a voice from the cloud said, "This *One* [The Father was VERY emphatic, pointing to Jesus alone] is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased [That statement cannot be applied to either Moses or Elijah; it can only refer to Jesus.]; listen to Him." [Moses and Elijah – the Law and the Prophets – are important parts of God's revelation. But God's revelation came in perfection with Jesus Christ.] **6** When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. [Good for them; they had the wisdom to be terrified by the glory of God and the voice of the Father. I bet James and John were wishing that Peter wouldn't feel it was necessary to say everything that he thought!] **7** But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." **8** And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. [Who is the Lord? Jesus. Who has the right to command us? Jesus. Who must we obey? Jesus. Who speaks with the full authority of the Godhead? Jesus.] (Matthew 17:1-8, ESV)

And with the Father's affirmation, Jesus Christ has been presented to Israel and the world as Lord and Savior in perfect holiness and righteousness.

TRANSITION: Let's bring this home.

BRINGING IT HOME

The people of the world are without excuse. Those who put their faith in Jesus are blessed eternally. Those who doubt Him do so at their own peril. Those who reject Him will face the eternal consequences of their unbelief. Those who argue against Him and rebel against Him prove themselves to be His enemies. The baptism of Jesus, quiet as it was, ordinary as it was, marked the beginning of His public ministry. It obviously escaped the notice of the majority of the people of Israel; certainly no one else in the world had any idea that it had taken place. But from the viewpoint of heaven, looking down at the entirety of human history, the public presentation of Jesus Christ was momentous, filled with eternal meaning.

There is much that can be said about being in Christ. Christians have been redemption from the wrath of God, and have received eternal life. The sins of Christians are forgiven, completely and utterly. Christians are filled with the Holy Spirit, and steadily grow in holiness. Christians have a new loyalty, a new allegiance, to a King who is God Himself, and whose Kingdom is unshakeable and glorious. With the exception of those who are alive when Jesus returns, all Christians die physically, but at the moment of death are immediately with Jesus in the spirit. In the fullness of time their bodies will be resurrected; not new, unrecognizable bodies, but the very same bodies that they had on earth, which will be raised in new life and made imperishable. Christians experience the peace that passes all understanding, a peace that only grows as time passes. All Christians are members of the body of Christ, His church invisible, and are forever family to one another. Christians are the only human beings on earth who can say that they have a right relationship with their Creator, who is Lord and Savior. None of this is deserved; every bit of it is a gift of the grace of God.

And more than these blessings, and the numerous blessings I did not mention, is that only Christians can rightly worship God. Only Christians can call upon the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the full confidence that they are heard. Only Christians can sing **O that with yonder sacred throng we at His feet may fall; we'll join the everlasting song and crown Him Lord of all!** Only Christians can sing **Be this while life is mine, my sacred song divine - may Jesus Christ be praised! Be this the eternal song through all the ages long - may Jesus Christ be praised!** Only Christians can live their lives for the glory and pleasure of the One True God.

We worship Him by hearing and studying and believing and obeying His Word. We worship Him by remembering, often, His cross and resurrection. We worship Him by proclaiming the Gospel which promises forgiveness to those who believe, and warns of judgment for those who remain in their sins. We worship Him by raising our children in a home lit by the light of Christ. We worship Him by confessing our sin and longing for His holiness. We worship Him by setting our minds on things above, where Christ is. We worship Him by longing for His return.