

The Baptism of the King
Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC
Dr. H. Powell Dew, Jr.
March 7, 2021

Diaspora LI – The Church Scattered, Fifty-first Sunday

Text: Matthew 3:13-17

Purpose: Jesus begins his public ministry by being baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. God the Father, along with the Holy Spirit affirm Jesus as the one in whom God is well pleased. We as parents can affirm our children and model a life worthy of following.

One afternoon, Sue was in the backyard hanging the laundry when an old, tired-looking dog wandered into the yard.

Sue could tell from his collar and well-fed belly that he had a home. But when she walked into the house, he followed her, sauntered down the hall and fell asleep in a corner.

An hour later, the dog went to the door, and Sue let him out. The next day he was back. He resumed his position in the hallway and slept for an hour. This continued every day for several weeks.



Curious, Sue pinned a note to his collar: "Every afternoon your dog comes to my house for a nap."

The next day the dog arrives with a different note pinned to his collar: "He lives in a home with eight children. He's just trying to catch up on his sleep."¹

Maybe you live in a home filled with activity and this is the first time all week you have sat still over 30 minutes. Maybe your work week has been so stress filled with every moment; every second filled with important tasks and today is one of your days of rest. So, if you happen to go to sleep today, we promise not to wake you, unless you begin to snore!



I heard of a preacher this week that began a mid week prayer service. Instead of it being the usual organ recital – that is you share how other people’s organs are doing – heart, lung, kidney, etc. – he decided to actually use their one hour in individual prayer. Much to his surprise almost one-third of the individuals went to sleep. It could be we are way too busy to listen and pray or we simply don’t observe our work and rest times too well.

This morning, I want us to go back to the passage of scripture I read in Matthew concerning the baptism of Jesus. Over the years, this passage of scripture has caused a tremendous amount of debate among students of the Bible. All four of the gospels include the baptism of Jesus.

- Matthew presents Jesus coming to be baptized by John at the Jordan River.

- Mark begins his account of the life of Jesus by starting with John the Baptist and then Jesus’ baptism.
- After Luke concludes the birth narratives of Jesus, he reports that John the Baptist baptizes Jesus.
- The Apostle John mentions Jesus’ baptism in the context of Jesus being the Logos, the Word that has come in the flesh.

As you read the various accounts of Jesus’ baptism, you see Matthew is the only one that takes the time to expound upon the relationship between John and Jesus. Matthew is the only one that deals with the tension between a holy Savior coming to seek baptism and John the Baptist crying out in the wilderness, calling sinners to repentance.



The overarching question when we get serious about Jesus’ baptism is “Why?” Why would the Son of God, the Hoped for one of Israel, Immanuel, God with us, come to the river of Jordan to be baptized? After all, Jesus was sinless. He didn’t need to come and identify with the sinfulness of humanity. He didn’t need to come and repent of anything since he was sinless. Why would Jesus submit himself to this baptism?

Through the years there have been several possible responses to this question.

¹ Mikey’s Funnies, February 3, 2011 – A Sleep Funny

I. Renouncing Prior Home Life and Embracing the Call of the Priesthood

The first could be that Jesus was renouncing, not his guiltiness, but rather his previous sheltered home life. He was stepping out of His comfortable place and moving forward to be commissioned for the upcoming tasks. He was leaving His mother, his brothers, his extended family and neighbors and stepping out to fulfill what God had planned for Him.



He was to begin to preach and teach about the Kingdom of God. This path laid out for Him by God would involve calling disciples, teaching thousands, healing the multitudes, and eventually it would lead to Calvary to literally become our sacrificial Lamb of God. This first possible explanation as to “Why” Jesus sought baptism could explain why, on several occasions, Jesus said he had nowhere to lay his head – no place to call home.

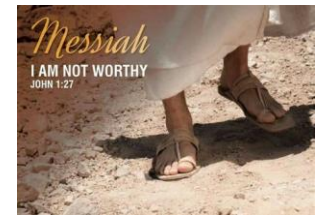
In Luke 3:23a, we read, “*Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age.*” That may, by today’s standards, seem like Jesus got a late start in ministry. You often hear of many individuals that hear the call of God early in life and begin to preach as a teenager or young adult. Many students at Campbell University Divinity School are in their early twenties. Some of my fellow ministers that are my age have been preaching for as many as twenty or thirty years.

Count All The Men From
Thirty To Fifty Years Of
Age Who Come To Serve
In The Work In The Tent
Of Meeting.
Numbers 4:3
BibleWordings.com

If you go back to Numbers 4:3, you will find those that assumed the priesthood duties began at the age of thirty and continued until they were fifty years of age. This age was probably chosen because it is the “prime of life.” Most of your work years, family development, and strength are in this period of time in life. Jesus was now moving into the time when as a man, He was no longer a child, no longer a teenager, no longer a young adult, He had moved into full adulthood. Now Jesus was ready, in the fullness of time, to accomplish what His Father intended.

II. Identification with Sinners and Act of Obedience

A second thought as to why Jesus may have been baptized is found in the dialogue between John the Baptist and Jesus. Over and over in the Gospels, we see John the Baptist saying that there is one coming behind him that he is not even worthy of untying His sandals. During Jesus’ day, a slave did almost everything for his master. John was saying the one that was coming behind him was so important, and John was so insignificant, that he was not even worthy of untying his shoes.



John even went so far as to say, that he needed to be baptized by Jesus. Jesus’ response was simply, “*Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.*” (3:15) That phrase “*to fulfill all righteousness*” gives us a clue as to why Jesus was seeking to be baptized by John. This act of obedience on Jesus’ part was a part of God’s plan.

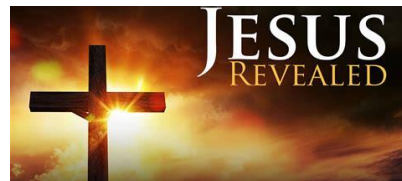


Jesus needed to be identified with those He came to save. On some level, this allowed Jesus to be identified with the sin of man, in order to “*fulfill all righteousness.*” Jesus came into the world to redeem sinners. He came to take on the sinfulness of humanity as our substitutionary atonement at Calvary. He who knew no sin, became sin for us so that we might become children of God. It was an identification with sin, not a transfer of sinfulness.

Some Bible scholars have focused upon the word “*fulfill*” while others may focus on “*all righteousness.*” Jesus said on more than one occasion, He came to fulfill all scripture. That means all that was foretold in the Old Testament, was completed by Jesus. This special baptism of Jesus was unique. His was not a baptism of repentance like the one that John was calling people to. His was not a Christian baptism like the ones we do today as believers in Jesus Christ. His was one of identification and obedience. It was necessary for Jesus to begin His ministry in this fashion. Jesus’ ministry would not have been complete if He skipped this step.

III. Fulfilling Destiny and Calling

A third possible explanation as to why Jesus sought baptism was due to that deep sense of destiny and calling God had upon His life.



One of the sermons I read on this passage of scripture reminded me how dangerous being baptized can be. Jesus was coming out of a stable community. Every year His family would go to Jerusalem to observe Passover.

Probably through the years, Jesus took up the family business of carpentry. He was known by those there. It was safe there. He could have continued the remainder of His life there – safe and stable.

Jesus was “coming out.” His true identity was about to be revealed. He was taking on the priestly role assigned to Him by God. Yes, Jesus was born as King. But He also became our High Priest. He would go throughout the area preaching. He would call twelve disciples away from their families to follow Him. He would stir up the status quo and upset his family, excite surrounding communities, and anger the leading priests and governing officials. His hand would touch and heal thousands. His words would draw people closer to God or drive them clearly away. It would be dangerous to live the life God called.

IV. A Dangerous Calling

In many places in the world, it is okay for you to attend a Bible study. It may be acceptable for you to attend a church service or two. But once you step down into the baptismal waters and completely identify with Jesus Christ, you become hated, an outcast, one marked for death. Becoming a follower of Jesus is an important step, a necessary step if we are to become a part of the Kingdom of God. Baptism marks you as God’s. If you are sincere about your commitment to Jesus Christ, it may become dangerous for you to live out the call God has on your life.



I have a friend who heard the call of God on her life. She grew up right here in North Carolina in a small town called Roper. She grew up hearing the missionary stories from the WMU. She was active in GA's all her life. She went to Campbell and received her Master of Divinity degree. She is now serving as a Southern Baptist Missionary in a very dangerous location in the world. So much so, that I cannot mention the name of the country. Serving as a missionary there is dangerous. She has been, and still is, under the close watchful eye of the government. She has lost her home and her business several times due to governmental action. She has been sick to the point of death due to dengue fever. Today that country is under military rule and she is uncertain how long she can continue there. But she is called to serve the people there and will not relent. Over the past 20 years, she has been faithful to her call.

Jesus understood His call and ministry and was ready to *“fulfill all righteousness.”*

V. A Case for Immersion Baptism

John the Baptist may have had some idea that Jesus was the one Israel was waiting for, but once Jesus came up out of the water, it was confirmed. As you read this passage of scripture, one notices Jesus *“came up out of the water.”* That means he was down under the water first and then came up. This passage of scripture clearly teaches baptism is not simply a small sprinkle of water on the head; it is a full immersion into the water. That is why Baptists are so insistent about immersion as the appropriate means of baptism.



VI. Affirmation of Jesus by God and the Holy Spirit

The moment Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens opened and in ...

- Matthew says, *“He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him.”*
- Mark says, *“The Spirit descending upon Him like a dove.”*
- Luke says, *“The Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him.”*
- John says, *“I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him.”*



All four of these confirm the same thing; the Holy Spirit was there in the likeness of a dove and rested upon Jesus.

The symbol of a dove has been identified with baptism. Many churches will have a dove in their stained-glass windows. In many paintings you will see this symbol of a dove used at Jesus' baptism. Isaiah 11:2 says, *“The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, and the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.”* In Jesus' case, the Spirit as represented by a dove, literally came and rested upon Jesus.

This Spirit hovering over Jesus reminds me of Genesis 1:2 where the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters.

As the Spirit was there, resting upon Jesus, a voice called out from heaven. *“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”* Abba Father was proud of His Son Jesus and wanted everyone to know. He was not ashamed of Jesus. This is an echo of Isaiah 42:1 which says, *“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.”*



In that moment of time, at the Jordan River, God the Father was present as He spoke, God the Son was obedient there in the water, and God the Holy Spirit was there as depicted by a dove. All three members of the Trinity are present. God was well pleased with His One and Only Son.

Jesus was consecrating Himself to the task ahead. Jesus received divine empowerment conferred through the visible Holy Spirit. When Jesus came up out of the water, His Father was there cheering Him on. Many of us have experienced a time when a family member, a father or mother was there cheering us forward in life.

To me this shows just a brief glimpse of the relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is an emotional, relational aspect of the Godhead we often forget. I am sure Jesus needed to hear this from His Father. Those gathered there needed to hear that this was One that was God’s Beloved Son. God was well pleased with Jesus.

VII. A Model for Earthly Fathers

This passage of scripture would make a great Father’s Day message. For just a moment, I want to point out a few items to our fathers today. Maybe you can take that with you and apply them to your children.

The first thing I see is God the Father is **not ashamed** of His Son Jesus Christ.



Children need to know that their earthly father loves them unconditionally. Our children may do some very foolish things in life, they may disappoint us by what they say or do, but you need to communicate over and over, that your love for your child will not end. That love will enable them to mature, accept responsibility for themselves and their families later on, and will enable them to love their spouses and children just as you loved them. Children need to receive affirmation from their parents. When you set the bar high, they will usually live up to it. Be quick to let them know you are proud of them.

A second thing I see happening between God the Father and Jesus is the Father’s **adoration** of the Son. Children can live without many things. They can make it without toys, without money, without new clothes, without a lot of food in the home. But they cannot make it without love.

Perhaps the greatest gift you can give your children, besides the knowledge of the Lord, is the knowledge they are loved unconditionally and adored. Many kids today do not know their parents love them.



I know, sometimes it is difficult to love unconditionally and adore your children. But loving unconditionally is the best way we can demonstrate the way God loves us to our children. When there is a rift, we should be quick to find out what has caused it and make amends quickly. Genuine love finds ways to express it to those we love. Don't be afraid to say, "I love you." Almost every conversation between me and my family ends with an "I love you."

A third thing I see between God the Father and His Son is **Acceptance**.

When God spoke at Jesus' baptism, He communicated acceptance and affirmation. God was well pleased with what Jesus was doing and was going to do. As parents, we are called to accept our children – warts and all. As children grow up, they may make decisions, or choose paths we may not approve of. But if your children are doing the best they can to live as God would have them, and are living out a Godly life, you can accept and affirm them.



I do have a word for children this morning. If you are going to live like the devil, don't expect your parents to give you a blanket seal of approval. A godly parent cannot approve unrighteous behavior. If a parent condones sin and blesses disobedience, they are only hurting you, not helping. Yes, parents should love you no matter what, but realize sometimes for love to be genuine, it may be tough love.

The last thing I notice in this dynamic interaction between God the Father and His Son, is God **apprentices** His Son.

Over and over in Jesus' life, Jesus reiterated that what He has seen and heard from His Father, He has shared. All that Jesus did was directed and led by God. A godly father and mother take time to model appropriate behavior before them. Our children model our behavior at a very early age. Make sure you are doing what you want your children to do.



If you want your children to be responsible with money, you demonstrate responsible use of money. If you want your children to be honest, you demonstrate honesty. If you want your children to live righteously and godly, then you need to live righteously and godly.

I have lived long enough to know that there are no perfect parents. We fail to live up to God's high standard. I also know there are no perfect children; we all have failed at one point or another. But we do have a perfect Savior, and that is Jesus Christ.

VIII. Conclusion and Invitation

Jesus came to redeem us from our sinfulness. He came as our King, Judge, Ruler, Example, Guide, Healer, Sustainer, but most of all, our Savior.

Oh, what a Savior is Jesus My Lord. He has provided abundant grace when we have been so unworthy. He has given forgiveness when we chose our own way. He has been light to us when we were lost in darkness.



I have a richer appreciation of the ministry of Jesus because He was obedient to the Father's will for His life. As Jesus lived out His obedience, He did it for you and for me. As Jesus lived it out, over and over, Father God affirmed Jesus' every step. You can have grace abundant and assurance complete if you come to Jesus and receive Him as Your Savior.

Maybe you have never taken that step of faith and received Him. Today can be your day of trusting Him. If you have never taken the step of obedience in baptism, then maybe today you can plan your outward obedience to the Lord by being obedient in baptism as well.

Salvation is not obtained by baptism. That comes by faith. Jesus was still the Son of God before He was baptized. But Jesus was obedient and was baptized. We that identify with Jesus should not be ashamed to enter the baptismal waters. We should be willing to let all know we belong to the Lord.

If you have been baptized before and would like to join our church by way of transfer of letter or statement of faith, we will be glad to receive that as well today.



LET US PRAY