

The Baptism of the King

Matthew 3:1-17

June 18th, 2017

Big idea: Jesus identifies with sinners to fulfill all righteousness as a substitute.

Intro –

Imagine God sending prophet after prophet to the people of Israel and then silence. Now, after 400 silent years, God is speaking again through a prophet in the mold of the OT prophets.

Malachi 3:1 "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me.

Malachi 4:5 "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.

OT ends on a message of hope.

His clothing even reflects his message and mission – simple, set apart, not flashy

Morris – He was to do his work by preaching effectively, not by sartorial splendor.

Intentionally highlights similarity to Elijah

When the silence is finally broken, what does He say?

1. John's message: "**Repent**, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (1:1-6)
 - a. Repent
 - i. Fundamental turning around from sin to God
 1. It involves sorrow for sin because that is part of seeing sin for what it is. But it is more than feeling sad about sin and certainly more than just trying to avoid the consequences of sin.
 2. It results in the "fruit of repentance" as mentioned in v. 8
 - ii. It's the first word in Jesus' preaching in Matthew
 1. **Matthew 4:17** From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."
 - iii. It's at the core of the message of the disciples when they are sent out to preach
 1. **Mark 6:12** They went out and preached that *men* should repent.
 - iv. It was the disciples message in Acts
 1. **Acts 26:20** but *kept* declaring both to those of Damascus first, and *also* at Jerusalem and *then* throughout all the region of Judea, and *even* to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.
 - v. Russian church example
 - b. The kingdom of heaven is at hand
 - i. The second aspect of John's message and a prominent theme in the gospel of Matthew.

1. Part of the recurring melodic line of the authority of Christ. The king is here so the kingdom as at hand, near, imminent
 2. Kingdom of God/heaven used interchangeably, although Matthew typically uses heaven, probably out sensitivity to his Jewish audience that avoided referring to God so directly.
- ii. The kingdom refers to God's **people**, in God's **place**, under God's **rule**.
 1. What does a king have? People, place, rule
 - iii. The kingdom is a **present**, spiritual reality with an **eventual**, literal fulfillment.
 1. There is a spiritual rule over the hearts of believers today.
 - a. **Colossians 1:13-14** For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.
 2. King Jesus will set up a literal reign on earth in the millennial kingdom
 - a. **Luke 21:31** "So you also, when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near.
 - b. **Acts 1:6b-8** "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; ⁸ but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."
- c. In fulfillment of Isaiah 40, John is preparing the way for the Messiah. (v. 3)
 - d. Many people were coming to hear his message and be baptized as they confessed their sins. (vv. 5-6)
 - i. The Jews of this day had a type of baptism that was for Gentile converts in order to symbolically wash away their sins as they joined with God's covenant people. Came up during the intertestamental period.
 - ii. Now John is saying to them, "you are the ones who need to be baptized!"
 1. Would have been shocking, yet many responded.
 2. In true repentance they were willing to identify themselves as needing forgiveness and willingly confessed their sins.
 - a. **Proverbs 28:13** He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes *them* will find compassion.
2. The religious leaders' delusion: "**Abraham** is our father so we have no need of repentance." (1:7-12)
 - a. Who are the Pharisees and Sadducees?
 - i. Pharisees – Jewish religious party, name has to do with "separation" – see themselves as God's separated ones. Studied the law carefully and made a determined attempt to put it into practice. Paid close attention to a multitude of rules (tradition of elders) meant to help people avoid breaking any command of God. Tended to see selves as a cut above other people. Paid so much attention to outward minutia that they sometimes lost sight of weightier matters. (Morris)

- ii. Sadducees – member of the high priestly party. Rejected the oral tradition that the Pharisees valued so highly. Only accepted written scripture. Aristocratic and contemptuous of movements like John’s and Jesus’ more for political reasons because they were concerned it would stir up their Roman occupiers. (Morris)
- b. Why are they coming for baptism?
 - i. Apparently not for the right reasons according to John’s response.
 - ii. Perhaps following the fad or popular movement without a genuine heart of repentance in themselves
 - iii. Perhaps to be seen as spiritual and thus retain their authority
 - iv. Carson – could be that they were coming with the same ostentatiousness that they approached prayer, etc. and were merely trying to show how ready they were for the messiah while not being repentant themselves.
- c. John confronts their hypocrisy
 - i. Showing up at a religious ritual was not enough.
 - 1. They prided themselves on their heritage in Abraham. He said they are not the offspring of a saint but of a snake!
 - 2. Implication is they were coming not out of a desire to repent but perhaps only to escape divine wrath.
 - ii. Mere words were not enough
 - 1. Bear fruit in keeping with repentance – not simply words but fruit that befits it.
 - 2. Fruit is singular – not saying “pile up good works” – but let there be a genuine change in orientation of the whole life that results in fruitful living. (adapted from Morris)
 - iii. Spiritual heritage was not enough
 - 1. This must be at the heart of their problem, as if their mere lineage would be sufficient for them to be in right standing with God
 - 2. “In the hereafter Abraham will sit at the entrance to Gehenna, and permit no circumcised Israelite to descend therein.” From Genesis Rabba, a Jewish commentary on the book of Genesis from just after the time of Christ.
 - 3. Morris – no place of privilege counts in the face of the demands of an all-holy and all-powerful God
 - 4. Melinsky “God, he says, is not interested in family-trees which bear no fruit in changed lives.”
 - 5. God could raise up descendants of Abraham from the rocks!
 - iv. Application point for those at UBC
 - 1. Showing up at a religious service is not enough, nor is a ritual like communion or baptism.

2. Merely “praying a sinner’s prayer” is not enough, if you are trusting in the words as a magical formula
3. Trusting in your parent’s faith is not enough.
 - a. True cliché – God has no grandchildren
- d. John points ahead to Christ
 - i. I baptize with water for repentance, He will baptize with the Holy Spirit
 1. He will bring the Spirit who indwells and purifies (fire)
 - ii. I’m not even worthy to be his lowest slave holding his sandals. Even his sandals are too holy for my dirty hands.
 - iii. He will come to gather and to judge
 1. Explain winnowing and threshing the grain to separate the wheat from the chaff
 2. Primary purpose of a farmer is not to burn the chaff but gather in the grain. It is only secondary that the chaff is destroyed.
 3. Likewise the primary purpose will be to gather His people, but secondarily those who reject Him will experience God’s just wrath.
 4. This section is weighty. Highlights the good news that follows. Jesus is here. And He is here to identify with sinners to fulfill all righteousness. The righteousness that they cannot fulfill on their own.
3. Jesus’ surprising request: “**Baptize Me** to fulfill all righteousness.” (1:13-15)
 - a. Moves from “He’s coming!” to “He’s arrived!”
 - b. Why would Jesus need to be baptized if John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance?
 - i. That’s John’s question as well! Clearly not for his own sin, not to indicate his own turning to God because he has always been God-ward in his orientation.
 - ii. He willingly baptizes the first group, confronts the second group, and now is shocked by Jesus.
 - iii. John says this should be reversed – Jesus should baptize him!
 - iv. **Step off stage to illustrate Jesus stepping down to be baptized.**
 - c. Jesus answer shows that His baptism is necessary, but not for the same reasons as the others who came
 - i. It was necessary to fulfill all righteousness – but not His righteousness. Our righteousness.
 1. He was already perfectly righteous
 2. The plan – come, identify with sinners, but not Himself sin.
 3. **Matthew 20:28** just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."
 - ii. In His baptism He identified Himself with sinners as the one who would obey in their place and die as their substitute.

1. **Isaiah 53:12** Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, **And was numbered with the transgressors**; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.
 2. **Galatians 3:13-14** ¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE “-- ¹⁴ in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.
 3. **2 Corinthians 5:21** ²¹ He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.
 4. Mathew pictures Jesus as dedicating himself to the task of making sinners righteous, an appropriate beginning of his public ministry. (Morris)
4. The Father’s affirmation: “This is My **beloved Son**, in whom I am well-pleased.” (1:16-17)
- a. The Holy Spirit come upon Him, empowering His earthly ministry to come
 - b. The Father gave His clear verbal affirmation of His Son for all present to hear
 - i. Charles Spurgeon named his sermon on this verse: “The greatest sermon by the greatest preacher.”
 - ii. **Isaiah 42:1** 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.
 1. Added with “You are My Son” of Psalm 2
 - c. Odonnell – Jesus has sufficient character-reference—the greatest man on earth (John) and two members of the Holy Trinity (the Father and the Spirit).
 - d. When we trust in Christ we are united with Christ. God can therefore say of you, “this is my beloved son/daughter, in whom I am well-pleased”
5. Key Truths
- a. God is unimpressed with **superficial** religious rituals.
 - i. **Matthew 15:7-9** "You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: ⁸ 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. ⁹ 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'"
 - ii. That doesn’t mean you have to manufacture feelings that aren’t there. That would also be superficial. But don’t play games with God. Be honest about your sin and struggle and doubt.
 - b. We can find **rest** for our souls in our union with Christ.
 - i. He willingly identified with us, sinners, in His baptism so that when we trust in Him we are united with Him. He takes our sin; we receive His righteousness.
 - ii. Romans 6:3-7
 - iii. Jesus fully identifies with sinners. Next week in Matt 4, we’ll see that He perfectly resisted sin.



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