

Matthew 3:13-17 Jan.12, 2014

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. ¹⁴ But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" ¹⁵ Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. ¹⁶ As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Gathered here, we last saw little Jesus receiving worship from the Magi, then dramatically being whisked to Egypt when Herod's soldiers conducted their murderous sweep through Bethlehem. We learned that after living in Egypt for a time, Jesus' family moved back to Nazareth, in Galilee, because jealous Herod was dead.

Now, prepared to "launch" into his public ministry, we see Jesus entering the Jordan River with John, his cousin. Two questions immediately come to mind:

- Why does Jesus come to John to be baptized?
- What happened in the 20 some, almost 30 years leading up to this?

The answer, in part, to both questions is: Jesus was fulfilling all righteousness.

What does that mean?

We do ourselves a huge disservice if we give little time to the perfect obedience of Jesus.

Do you ever wonder what Jesus, the kid, was like? Jesus, the teen? Jesus, the young adult? We should think about it. Because as a kid, as a teen, as a young adult ~ Jesus had each one of you in mind. He was living *for* you ~ obeying perfectly, loving perfectly ~ because he knew you and I would fail. And the consequence for our failure would mean eternal separation from Him and all his blessings. He couldn't bear to leave us at that. So, he stepped in:

That means that as a boy moving from Egypt to Israel, Jesus never grumbled about the difficulties of being relocated. He never whined about the long journey back to Israel. He moved content in God the Father's care.

In his years growing up in Nazareth, he never seized revenge if people made fun of him. He never got envious because someone else was better at whatever game or skill all the kids were trying. He never tried to draw attention to himself by making fun of the mistakes and flaws of the other kids.

You can read an account of one event in his growing up years. At age 12, he journeyed to Jerusalem, where he was very interested in learning everything he could of God's Word being taught at the Temple.

After that, no specific events in Jesus' life are told us again, until his history before us today, which would place him at age 30. But, continue for a moment to apply what Jesus did up to this point. Give time for the perfect obedience of Jesus. What would that mean for his teens? and young adult years?

As you get older, kids, you know your body goes through changes. His body did too. So think of the temptations he faced. He was tempted to look lustfully at the girl with the brown hair that seemed to wrap around every boy's attention.

He was tempted to think only of himself - to ignore someone in need . . . even if that someone was a little brother, sister, or cousin who was guilty of pestering him.

He was tempted to "go off" on someone behind their back, or to argue with his imperfect parents (whom God the Father had given him).

He was tempted to take the easy way out of situations, when sticking to God's will would bring with it painful mockery or attack.

Each and every time he was pressured, he pushed temptation away – he escaped the traps set for him. Jesus lived in perfect obedience - fulfilling all righteousness.

So then: we wonder along with John. "You're not the sinful one. I am! Why are you coming to be baptized?" Jesus explains: "*This is fitting to fulfill all righteousness.*" That tells you: His baptism is in line with God's will for his life. It was in the Plan. We can even hear reference to it in prophecy, as we heard in Isaiah 42: "*I will put my Spirit on him, my chosen one*" (see also Isaiah 11:1f). And in Isaiah 61, in the Savior's own words foretold, we hear: "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me...*", and it goes on to describe the works of the Savior. Jesus was certainly not without the Holy Spirit before this day of his baptism. But now, as he launches into his public ministry, the Holy Spirit would lead him & encourage him along as he carried out his work. God had that purpose for this event for Jesus.

In addition to that, what takes place at Jesus' baptism was hugely significant for the people of that day, as well as for us today. How do we know? The importance is highlighted by another "*Wow! Look at that!*" indicator, which - like in our Gospel last Sunday - gets lost in translation. Actually, there are two of these "*exclamation marks*" in the verses today. Do you remember the drill? When I raise my hands, you say, "*Wow! Look at that!*"

¹⁶ As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. And – [raise arms] "Wow! Look at that!" – at that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and remaining on him. ¹⁷ And – [raise arms] "Wow! Look at that!" – a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

So God has called our attention now. And we should carefully note the reason. What do the Spirit's presence and the Father's voice announce to the world?

Kids, help us remember: did you catch what the Father's voice identified about Jesus? Jesus is – in God the Father's words: "*my Son.*" He is God the Son.

As for the Holy Spirit's presence, over in the Gospel of John we hear about the significance. John the Baptizer let the people of his day know, and we are given the testimony through the written Word: "*I - [John] - saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him [Jesus]. I would not have known him, except the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'the man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he... I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.'*" (John 1:32-34)

And so, at Jesus' baptism, the truth of "who Jesus is" is verified and proclaimed.

And not only the question of "who he is" is made clear, we also receive confirmation of the quality of his life. Hear the Father's declaration from heaven: "*with him I am well pleased.*"

Do you remember another time – you have to go way back in time – when God gave the declaration "*It is good – I'm well pleased with this*"? Go back to creation, when everything was perfect.

The Father's declaration from heaven on this day tells us: Jesus lived up to God's perfect standard. He receives the verdict, "*I am well pleased.*" He truly did fulfill all righteousness.

And so we see... Jesus' baptism was so different from ours. Mark this point: Jesus' baptism is different than ours because... whether carried in a parent's arms or walking up to the font ourselves, we come with a record that in no way could be called "good." God does not declare about us: "I am well pleased with what you have to offer me here."

It's the opposite! We come loaded with our sin. We come to baptism for forgiveness of our sins. And here, our God gives us His Word: I wash your sins away. I gift you Jesus' righteousness. I have made you my own child.

God gives us his Word: "*He saved us, not because of righteous things we have done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit...*" (Titus3:4-5)

"...to make us holy, cleansing us by the washing with water through the word..." (Ephesians 5:26)

Think of what this means for us!

God does not turn to me and say: "Live like Jesus, and then I'll be well-pleased with you too." Imagine that for a moment. **[pause]** Impossible! But if I thought I could, I'd be in the grips of one of the most dangerous temptations of all – to think I could be my own savior. (Whether in part or in full, that is impossible!)

Instead... Hebrews 10:8-10 explains: No other sacrifice would work. No other offering would do. So Jesus said, "*Here am I – I have come to do your will.*" And listen to this outcome: "*we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*"

That's pure gospel. Nothing is earned by us. That is God acting in our behalf. There is no news of a commitment we must make, or a level of righteousness we must meet, in order to receive his blessing. Jesus lived up to God's expectations & gifts us the results.

Romans 3 explains it in these words: "*a righteousness that is from God – completely apart from anything we do – comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.*"

And even that faith is gifted to us through Baptism and the Word.

That pure gospel is what gives us the heart to fight our battle – to daily drown our sinful self and our sinful desires & to live for God. With hearts set on doing God's will, gladly speak up to defend and encourage those whom you hear torn down. Lovingly lend a hand to your brother or sister or friend, who could use the help you have to offer. Patiently listen to your spouse, stand with one another, and offer your unconditional love. Graciously forgive those that have wronged you.

I mentioned a couple times already “pure gospel.” I want to close by returning to that thought. Have you heard it said: “Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are pure gospel”? They are. For in them our God comes to us, giving his blessings: faith, forgiveness, life and salvation. Since we are especially talking baptism today, I want to close with a most comforting quote:

The way to regard and use Baptism rightly is to draw strength and comfort from it when our sins or consciences trouble us. We then must say, ‘See here, I am baptized. And since I am baptized, I have the assurance that I shall be saved in soul and body and have eternal life. ... Thus we see how splendid a thing Baptism is. It snatches us out of the devil’s jaws, makes God our own, defeats and puts away sin, daily strengthens the new man in us, keeps functioning, and remains with us until we leave our present troubles to enter glory everlasting. [Luther’s Large Catechism, p.104,109, CPH]

May God – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit – strengthen you in your baptismal grace all the days of your life. Peace be with you. Amen.